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## Alternative livelihood programs in Africa: A substitute or an added portfolio?

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### ABSTRACT

Alternative livelihoods are often promoted by conservation organizations or governments to reduce rural people's reliance on, or use of natural resources, or to compensate them for loss of access. The effectiveness of such interventions has, however, been limited over the years. It is no news that the greatest challenges facing humankind are the alleviation of poverty and the conservation of biological diversity. Yet, rather than being perceived as separate issues, these two challenges are often closely linked. In order to find solutions to these challenges, both non-Governmental and Governmental Organizations have been put in place of diverse alternative projects. Unfortunately, such endeavours have met with little or no successful outcome. This, therefore, leads to the question of whether an alternative livelihood program is really a substitute or an added portfolio to the existing activities of rural people. This paper critically examines alternative livelihood projects on the basis that these are either the former or the latter. The data were obtained through the use of various search engines and also from a direct observation. The study discovered that, while different alternative livelihood projects have been employed with various objectives across Africa, most of the reviewed projects have had little or no success owing to the management issues within the NGOs or GOs, and, most especially, due to the actual condition of local people. Thus, 'alternative livelihoods' tend to be an added portfolio of other activities rather than a substitute for current reality.

**Keywords:** alternative livelihoods, Governmental Organization, NGOs, GOs

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Alternative livelihoods are often promoted by conservation organisations to reduce people's reliance on or use of natural resources, or to compensate them for loss of access, but the effectiveness of such interventions have been limited. In Africa, unsustainable hunting of wild game, 'bushmeat', is not only a major threat to biodiversity but also impacts the people whose livelihoods depend upon these resources (Milner-Gulland *et al.*, 2003; de Merode *et al.*, 2004; Brown, 2003). Vira and Kontoleon, (2010) also added that the greatest challenges facing humankind are the alleviation of poverty and the conservation of biological diversity. Rather than being perceived as separate issues, these two challenges are often closely linked. Poor people in rural areas of developing countries are often highly dependent on biodiversity to meet their day-to-day livelihood needs.

According to Sunderland *et al.* (2008), most practitioners now agree that landscape and ecosystem approaches provide the best way forward in reconciling the often-conflicting goals of biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation. Louise *et al.* (2010) also stated that the alleviation of human poverty and biodiversity conservation are two of the most serious and intractable global issues facing civil society. Thus, the need to promote poverty alleviation efforts has become an increasingly common theme in the conservation sector.

Community conservation emerged from the recognition that strictly protected areas often failed to consider the interests of local communities, reducing their willingness to support or abide by conservation regulations (Pimbert and Pretty, 1997; Kiss, 2004). Robbins *et al.* (2006) also affirms this by stating that in some areas, strict protection resulted in active hostility between conservation authorities and local communities. Community conservation aims to provide an incentive for the sustainable management of biodiversity resources, by linking their maintenance with poverty alleviation or livelihoods benefits for the people living in their vicinity (Salafsky and Wollenberg, 2000).

There is a growing recognition of the importance of protecting forests for their biodiversity, ecosystem services, and mitigation against climate change, as well as an ever-increasing rate of global deforestation (UNEP, 2009), and the protection of forests has been the focus of global conservation targets since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Since the first established national park in 1864, the Yellowstone National Park in the USA, the protection of land has often involved the displacement of rural people (McShane, 2003) – sometimes many thousands (Brockington, 2002) – and the banning of access to resources (Colchester, 2004). Furthermore, alternative livelihoods' (any project introduced to rural people to divert their attention from something in other to ensure sustainability, posterity or conservation) that are often introduced without a thorough understanding of the drivers of unsustainable resource, use so their introduction, and therefore doing nothing to improve sustainability (Fauna and Flora International, 2013).

This is probably because monitoring the impact of community-based approaches to the management of biological resources is rare; and despite of many calls from conservationists over the past decade (Croze, 1982; Thorsell, 1982; Kremen *et al.*, 1994; Pullin and Knight, 2001; Brooks *et al.*, 2006; Sutherland *et al.*, 2009), a little progress has been made toward the inclusion of scientific evaluation and monitoring as an essential element of conservation initiatives (Ferraro and Pattanayak, 2006). Apart from the fact that Livelihood programs are not adequately monitored, the question is 'can alternative livelihood program really solve the problems and needs of the rural people who solely depend on the forest for their livelihood or

are alternative livelihood programs just an additional means of livelihood and not really a substitute as many conservationist would say?”. This study therefore bridged this gap by reviewing projects on alternative livelihood and also used a direct observation.

## **2. REPORTS FROM SOME ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD PROJECTS**

Most alternative livelihood projects introduced in any parts of the world today is either a failure or has a limited impact from the onset objectives. It is also a fact that most NGOs or GOs who report a hundred percent success story either are the initiator of such project or the impact assessment was carried out by the same organization; thus, the outcome must be a good story to get more grants from external donors. According to a report by Flora and Fauna International (2009) in Guinea, the Nimba project so far confirmed what has proven true in other sites from around the world: successful initiatives are those that take into consideration the views and interests of the local partners and communities of which they are one in a million project. They reported that if in a context where the few interventions that have taken place to date in the region have had limited or no impacts on the livelihoods of local communities, broadening the intervention strategy to a conservation and community development agenda can make all the difference. And also, working from a clearly defined, transparent and well communicated agenda that reflects the main priorities of all partners is also the key to making progress. Wicander and Coad (2014) in their study reviewed alternative project in Central Africa; 64 alternative projects and also Preston (2012) carried out similar study. The study discovered that a range of different livelihood alternatives (for both, protein and income) as seen in **Table 1** below is currently being offered. A high proportion of projects are being run by national NGOs, and the majority of projects showed a desire to involve communities in the design, implementation, and management of these projects. Both suggest a high level of localism in the project management and design, which may have a positive effect on the project sustainability. However, they reported that many projects are funded through small, short-term grants, and are struggling to meet their objectives with the available time, funding, and capacity. In addition, only a handful of projects are monitoring their impacts, making adaptive management almost impossible. Few projects implement conditionalities and sanctions, which may lead to the alternatives offered, becoming additional activities rather than substitutional activities. Also, Preston (2012), who carried out a study on success or failure assessment on small scale alternative to Bushmeat, from her report, she confirmed that livelihood and protein alternatives to bushmeat do exist, and can be implemented in a variety of ways with significant difficulties associated with the approach, which was reported to occur at a project level, particularly around the incorporation of conditionality in the project design, baseline monitoring, and funding.

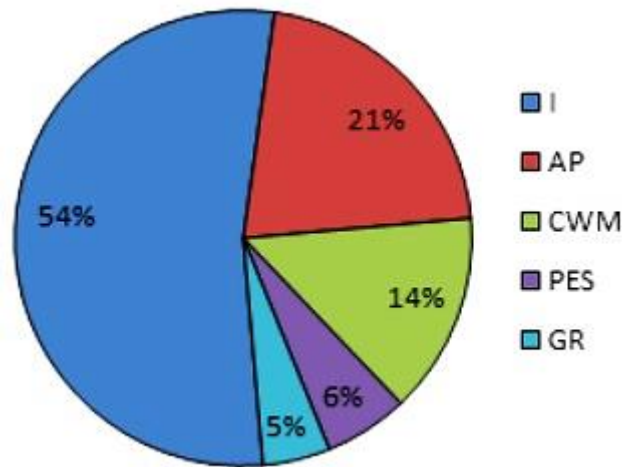
Preston (2012) opined that more fundamental barriers to success occur in the form of macro-level pressures on wildlife (**Figure 1**). For instance, in many cases the economic efficiency of bushmeat income, combined with its enduring cultural significance, renders it superior to alternatives in the eyes of those who consume it. Adding that, the value system, maintained by a lack of political will to change it, creates an encumbrance on wildlife that cannot be eased with the simple provision of a substitute. It was however concluded by Preston (2012) that the provision of small-scale alternatives to the unsustainable use of bushmeat is unlikely to resolve the issue.

Lateef *et al.* (2015) also reported a study on the evaluation of alternative livelihood project introduced to the community at Afi-Mbe and Okwangwo division in Nigeria with the aim to provide a substitute for bushmeat hunting. The project covered 35 communities in Cross River state. However, the outcome as regards project theory for change revealed that at Mbe, 47.7% of the hunters trained in the alternative livelihood program are still hunting after being trained on the alternative livelihood project, 47.6% of the hunters trained still hunt and at the Okwango division, 58.8% of hunters trained reported that they still hunt. It was then concluded that aside all other factors, a salary based alternative might be better off which in most cases is not feasible to employ all drivers( particularly human) to natural resource use. It was therefore concluded that the alternative livelihood program is more like an added activity rather than a substitute because only less than, or equal to 25% success story was recorded.

**Table 1.** Distribution of project types by country.

<b>TYPES OF PROJECTS</b>					
COUNTRY	INCOME (I)	ALTERNATIVE PROTEIN (AP)	COMMUNITY WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT (CWM)	PAYMENT FOR ECOSYSTEMS SERVICES (PES)	GAME RANCHING (GR)
<b>Cameroun</b>	8	1	2		
<b>Ghana</b>	5		4		
<b>Kenya</b>	5	3		1	
<b>Liberia</b>	5	4			
<b>Madagascar</b>	1				
<b>Namibia</b>	1		1		1
<b>Nigeria</b>	2	1			
<b>Rwanda</b>	1	1			
<b>Sierra leone</b>	1				
<b>South Africa</b>			1	1	
<b>Sudan</b>	2	1			
<b>Tanzania</b>	6	3	2		
<b>Uganda</b>	4	2	2	1	
<b>Zambia</b>	1			1	
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	3	2		1	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	45	18	12	5	4

Source: Adapted from Preston, (2012)



**Figure 1.** Pie chart showing percentage distribution of projects by type.  
Source: Preston, (2012)

### 3. UNDERSTANDING EXISTING LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY

People living in a poverty may be unable to involve themselves in new and un-tested livelihood activities or methods of income generation due to the high risk involved in doing so. Moving to completely new activities is extremely high risk for poor women and men. Households may seek to reduce a risk through diversification of livelihoods and thus 'alternative livelihoods' tend to be added to a portfolio of other activities rather than substituting them. For example if chicken farming is introduced as an alternative to hunting, people may farm chickens and continue to hunt, particularly where there is under-utilized labour within a household (Fauna and Flora International, 2013).

Consideration thus needs to be given onto how any introduced livelihood activity will fit into existing livelihood strategies, and how it will be reconciled with other livelihood activities. Introduced activities are likely to be more successful if they provide lower levels of risk, equal or higher profits, and have similar or more favourable characteristics to existing activities, including level of investment required, ease of storage, transport and marketing, and so on (Fauna and Flora International, 2013).

Increasing the positive effects of conservation on local people through introducing new livelihood activities does not mean that the negative effects of conservation are automatically reduced. For example, introducing beekeeping or chicken farming may not adequately offset the costs of reduced access to a resource. The effectiveness of any introduced activities may thus be limited. Poor people require options for diversifying away from resources of concern to be developed before their access to those resources is reduced. However, 'alternative livelihoods' tend to be introduced at the same time or after changes in the resource management have already been implemented, when people are already struggling to adapt to reduced resource access (Fauna and Flora International, 2013).

#### **4. MAJOR REASON WHY ALTERNATIVE LIVELIHOOD PROJECT FAIL**

Based on their study, Lateef *et al.*, (2011) classified reasons why most alternative livelihood project/program failed:

- 1) Inadequate Staff: Most alternative livelihood projects were carried out in villages having their location far apart with just one or few coordinators directly involved. Consequently, there will be a problem of supervision.
- 2) No or Poor Supervision: Any program that lacks supervision and monitoring is not likely to be sustainable. This was observed in some villages which were last visited two to three years ago after the hunters were trained.
- 3) Number of project benefactor: For example, the number of hunters trained per village was too little for the impact to be effective, and this could make other hunters to intensify their hunting, as some of the hunters interviewed during the study already testified that the program was one-sided (Persha *et al.*, 2011).
- 4) Politics: Unseriousness on the part of the benefactors: Even after giving some hunters the complete materials for snail farming and Beekeeping, nothing was done. Some of them went back to their normal hunting routine the next day.
- 5) Clarity of Report: Project coordinator may not have reported the project outcome as it was on the field.
- 6) Alternative Provided: The alternative provided for the target group may not substitute what they get from the forest on their own irrespective of whether it is right or wrong. For example, in Afi-Mbe and Okwango division, where Lateef *et al.*, (2015) did their study, it was discovered that the average mean income from the alternative provided is N15,307 while the mean income from hunting is N79,964. From this, there is a significant difference between the two values, which will by all means force the local people to continue their usual routine of hunting. And also, for beekeeping, the income is not monthly. After harvesting the first time, it takes about three months or two weeks before the hives are colonized depending on how lucky the hunters are and from each harvest, the income made is N14,000, that is, 20 litres. As a result, in a year harvest is made just twice; this is, however, a glaring drawback to success.
- 7) Another major drawback is that, most of the local people does not know what they can do other than hunting or logging as the case may be. This could be a big problem for the success of any alternative livelihood program.

#### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Alternative livelihoods are often promoted by conservation organisations to reduce people's reliance on, or use of natural resources, or to compensate them for loss of access, but the effectiveness of such interventions have been limited. The study discovered that different alternative livelihood project have been employed with various objectives across Africa. Most of these projects are focused on the poor rural people whose livelihood depends on the natural resource. Most of the project reviewed has little or no success owing to management issues

form the NGOs or GOs; and most especially the condition of local people; poor people living in poverty according to Fauna and Flora International, (2013) may be unable to involve themselves in new and un-tested livelihood activities or methods of income generation due to the high risk involved in doing so. Adding that, for them to be able to move to completely new activities, is extremely high risk for poor women and men. Households may seek to reduce risk through diversification of livelihoods and thus 'alternative livelihoods' tend to be added to a portfolio of other activities rather than substituting them.

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