

EDITORIAL

Merging Traditional and Introduced Wildlife Conservation Systems: An Example from Ghana

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Historically, traditional African societies had operated complex religious and cultural belief systems using traditional norms, folklore, myths, and taboos to conserve critical natural resources (Ntiama-Baidu, 1995; Attuquayefio and Fobil, 2005). Such belief systems were thought to be primarily effective because local people feared incurring the wrath of divine deities or ancestral spirits, rather than their positive influence on natural resource management (Gyasi, 1997). The introduction of nationally-managed introduced wildlife conservation systems (protected area) in Africa often resulted in conflicts between government officials and local rural communities, because the latter felt largely ignored or displaced by governments and often encroached into such protected areas to indulge in illegal hunting, farming and other sustainable activities. The indigenous people felt deprived of their inalienable rights to their livelihoods (Corbin, 1999).

Increasing non-adherence to long-held traditional beliefs, a consequence of the introduced 'western' technology, influence of foreign religious beliefs and lax enforcement of traditional edicts (Ntiama-Baidu, 1995), resulted in the aggravation of the threats of deforestation, natural resource over-exploitation, pollution, introduction of exotic species, population increase, poverty, urbanization, and weak legislative/institutional structures (Attuquayefio and Fobil, 2005). Foreign-introduced *in situ* conservation approaches were thus largely ineffective (Hanson and Tchamba, 1993).

In the Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana, West Africa, an originally traditionally-managed wildlife conservation area, the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BMFS) harboured two threatened monkey species, the black-and-white colobus (*Colobus vellerosus*), and mona monkey (*Cercopithecus campbelli*). These monkeys co-existed with the inhabitants of the twin villages of Boabeng and Fiema (Densu, 2003) being protected by traditional taboos which prevented their killing under any circumstances. Over many generations the monkeys had enjoyed a harmonious relationship with the human inhabitants to the extent that dead monkeys were buried in special cemeteries with elaborate rituals akin to those of humans (Densu, 2003; Pleydell and Nuhu, 2005).

The harmonious human-monkey co-existence became threatened in the early 1970s, when members of

a zealous religious sect settled in the area and began disregarding the age-old taboos by killing the monkeys indiscriminately (Fargey, 1991). The resulting drastic reduction of the monkey population led to calls for the intervention of the Ghana Department of Game and Wildlife (now Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission) to designate the area as a nationally-protected Wildlife Sanctuary (Akowuah *et al.*, 1975; Fargey, 1991). A Community Management Committee of traditional authorities and wildlife staff was thus established, with the traditional authorities elders retaining ownership and management of the Sanctuary and the government, through the Wildlife Division, assuming supervisory and advisory roles. The BMFS thus became a model for blending traditional or indigenous African wildlife conservation with introduced foreign *in situ* conservation (Fargey, 1991; Densu, 2003).

A study by Attuquayefio and Gyampo (2010) found that the dual management system currently in operation has been largely successful, as the inhabitants appear to support the mechanisms put in place to manage the Sanctuary. This is evidenced by a steady increase in *C. vellerosus* populations from 128 individuals to about 241 individuals within the 15 year-period from 1991 to 2006 (Wong and Sicotte, 2006). It is clear that the continued existence of BMFS as a protected area has been largely the result of the integration of the introduced "western" approach into the indigenous or traditional biodiversity conservation approach. Currently, Ghana is considered an important global partner in primate conservation, because the country is home to locally- and globally-endangered primates like the olive colobus (*Procolobus verus*), white-naped mangabey, diana monkey (*Cercopithecus diana*), chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*), and the suspected extinct Miss Waldron's red colobus (*Piliocolobus badius waldroni*) (Oates *et al.*, 2000). The BMFS is playing no small part in the global effort to save endangered primates, with the full co-operation of the indigenous local community.

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