



Tropentag, October 5-7, 2011, Bonn

“Development on the margin”

Protected Area Governance: Lessons Learned from NGO Endeavours in Nech Sar National Park, Southern Ethiopia

GIRMA KELBORO, TILL STELLMACHER

University of Bonn, Center for Development Research (ZEF), Germany

Abstract

The Ethiopian Government and the international non-governmental organisation African Parks Network (AP) signed an agreement in 2004 to hand over the management responsibility to the latter for 25 years. The agreement foresaw resettlement of those local communities who live inside the park area to outside its boundaries. However, after only three years, AP totally withdrew from Nech Sar National Park and left Ethiopia. This research illustrates and analyses governance of the park with a focus on the engagement and failure of AP. This allows learning lessons for national park governance in Ethiopia and beyond. Empirical data was collected from May 2010 to March 2011 through review of secondary sources, participatory mapping, group discussions, observations and key informant interviews. Additionally, officers and experts who worked at different positions for AP as well as government authorities were interviewed. Data shows that AP's activities were stopped due to a combination of factors: problems in engaging government actors; exclusive negotiation with people who live in the park for boundary re-demarcation as a solution to the long-time controversial resettlement question; political sensitivity of the park management due to its location in the area where two regional states share boundaries; and lack of common understanding or formal agreement on timing of actions in effecting the responsibilities of both the government and AP. As it had been the case, during the three years of AP engagement in Nech Sar National Park, the natural resources of the park were also continuously degraded by cattle raising, illegal wood collection, fishing and crop farming. The paper hence argues that beyond technical and financial capacities, transparent cooperation and trust between state bodies on different administrative levels as well as NGOs and local communities are of utmost importance to sustainably govern national parks in Ethiopia and elsewhere.

Keywords: African Parks Network, natural resource conflicts, park governance