

# Conservation conflict following a management shift in Pendjari National Park (Benin): a Q methodological study



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## Abstract

With biodiversity drastically declining on a global scale, the conservation of natural resources is becoming increasingly urgent. A common strategy to counteract biodiversity loss is the sustainable management of protected areas. However, as the protection of nature often conflicts with human livelihoods and involves many stakeholders with different interests, conservation conflict is globally on the rise. These conflicts can hamper sustainable development, social equity and the effective natural resource management. An important first step in resolving conflict is understanding and mapping perceptions of the different stakeholders. In this study, we investigated conservation conflict in the Pendjari National Park in Benin, which was fueled by a shift from participatory management to a Public-Private Partnership. Pendjari is the largest remaining savannah ecosystem in West Africa and home to several threatened megafauna species. Using the Q-methodology, we identified two distinct discourses among stakeholders. The first discourse, supported mainly by formally educated people with non-agricultural jobs, focuses on the limitation of anthropogenic activities in favor of biodiversity conservation. The second discourse is mostly supported by people with a lower education level and a direct dependency on the land. The second discourse agrees there is a need for conservation but even more so for viable alternatives to the people's current livelihoods. We identified the potential underlying factors that may have driven the conflict and suggest possible solutions. The identification of these discourses and their underlying drivers can be included into future decision-making processes and management of the Pendjari National Park.

**Keywords:** Africa, Biosphere Reserves, stakeholder perception, biodiversity conservation, conflict resolution

## 1. Introduction

Global biodiversity has been declining at an increasing rate in recent times, driven by different anthropogenic pressures (Butchart et al., 2010). The loss of biodiversity directly threatens the delivery of ecosystem services and hence threatens human well-being (Cardinale et al., 2012). One way to counteract this trend is through the sustainable management of existing protected areas (PA's) (Geldmann et al., 2013). Conservation focuses on the protection of natural resources and their diversity, however this is not a stand-alone process separated from human society. A more holistic approach to conservation follows the socio-ecological system approach, which includes interactions between natural resources, their users and governance systems (Ostrom, 2009). This approach has been adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in their Man and Biosphere program (MAB). The MAB program is realized through a worldwide network of PA's focusing on the conservation of cultural and biological diversity, sustainable development and outreach activities such as environmental education (Van Cuong, 2017).