

Zur Diskussion gestellt:

Wildlife Management as a Form of Sustainable Land Use in Marginal Areas of Africa

23 years ago in the early days of development cooperation the German Foundation for International Development (DSE) held an international conference on utilization of wildlife in developing countries. Participants concluded that it would be justifiable and necessary to include wildlife utilization as an integral part of development activities. Since then wildlife and other renewable natural resources have continued to be neglected.

Recently, however, they have received renewed attention as a result of desertification and growing environmental problems.

Economic and ecological benefits

In marginal areas of Africa where poor soils and low rainfall prevail, wildlife management can offer an alternative form of economic use of land. In such areas the meat production per area unit from game is normally higher than from cattle. Practical experience with proper management systems proves that even cash income can be higher if controlled safari hunting or the marketing of durable products is included.

At the same time, wildlife does not normally cause environmental degradation. On the contrary, even degraded habitats could be restored. Thus wildlife management can be an element in anti-desertification programmes.

Wildlife as a viable alternative to conventional livestock raising is valid in particular in tsetse infested areas. Experience has shown that it is difficult to guarantee sustainable land use with agriculture or livestock in marginal areas after tsetse eradication. Deforestation, overstocking, overgrazing and erosion were frequent consequences. Today it is not so much the insecticides which endanger the environment but improper land use once the tsetse "barrier" has been removed.

Game: Use it or lose it

Proper wildlife management means that the resource is utilised and exploited on a sustainable basis. It is thus a conservation approach which leads to the protection of the resource by its wise utilisation. If the protection of wildlife neglects the economic interests of local population or, worse still, is directed against them, it is neither politically acceptable nor will it be successful. Such "conservation against the people" is a concept of the past.

Only if the economic potential of the wildlife resource is fully realised for the benefit of local communities as well as national economies and governments will it be protected in the long run. In the final analysis, economic self-interest offers the only chance to safeguard this natural resource. Thus there is no contradiction between a conventional concept of preservation and controlled utilisation.

The approach contains the following elements:

- limitation of annual offtake at sustainable optimum production levels;
- in turn: exclusive protected long-term user rights for local communities;
- internal rules that limit individual access to the resource.

Conservation includes sustainable utilization

This type of conservation approach is well in line today with the thinking of conservationist organisations such as the World Wide

Fund for Nature or the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. The present concept is directed at game areas which are not national parks and that is the majority. If it is applied to the buffer zones around national parks it can contribute greatly to the maintenance of wildlife in the parks. National parks themselves require different concepts of management.

The forms of wildlife utilization are manifold and depend on local conditions. In most cases they involve harvesting a certain percentage of the stock for sale to urban areas or preferably for local consumption. Licences for controlled trophy hunting can be sold to private companies. Village industries can process wildlife products. Wildlife utilisation can in some areas go along with crop cultivation or livestock raising. It is thus one component in an integrated system of land use.

Where appropriate and feasible, tourism may be one form of utilisation.

Local communities must benefit and participate

Whereas national economies will benefit from a system of sustainable wildlife management, it is essential that local populations should benefit directly from the resource at the same time. In an optimal system the rural dwellers would not only participate in the benefits (conservation for the people) but manage the resource themselves (conservation through the people). It is a prerequisite that management techniques are adapted to the capacities of local people.

Such sustainable systems of land use based on the use and conservation of renewable resources and managed by the local populations need active government support in order to succeed. At the same time, a certain amount of control is necessary in order to avoid overexploitation. Governments, however, should refrain from themselves becoming involved in the economic activities. There should be leeway for private initiative and private sector involvement.

All programmes which require sophisticated management, like game ranches, should be left to the private commercial sector which will run such schemes, if they are profitable and if governments introduce a favourable framework. In order to create such conditions a dialogue with the governments is useful. Development cooperation will have to concentrate on the promotion of communal management of the wildlife resource in order to assist the poorer strata of the rural population.

Projects must be planned in close collaboration with the local communities as success will rest upon their participation. Self-help is an indispensable component of viable schemes. Spoon-feeding through the free provision of infrastructure and social services does not increase the social acceptance of wildlife by local communities. Follow-up costs of infrastructure projects can often not be borne. The basic needs of local communities should guide the layout of productive projects. Local culture, customs and traditional patterns of land use have to be given due consideration.

Every country has to find own solutions

The role of wildlife in rural development and food production should neither be overestimated nor should the practical political, socio-cultural or management problems be overlooked. There is no blueprint solution for the conservation of natural resources and anti-desertification efforts. Game management is not a panacea that will solve Africa's food problem. However, its possible contribution is so large and so little realised and potential areas are so close to the people who need the protein that it should receive far more emphasis than it has so far. Wildlife has a special, though limited, place in extensive agricultural development. Any practical approach has to be tailor-made according to local conditions.

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