



Power imbalances, social inequalities and gender roles as barriers to true participation in national park management: The case of Korup National Park, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Forest resource management has undergone profound changes in the last decades, including a tendency to apply participatory approach that seeks to involve local communities. However, the success of the participatory approach tends to remain dependent on the historical and societal context in question. To understand how the participation of forest communities has been changing as a result of the enforcement or non-enforcement of forest management practices, we carried out a study in Cameroon's Korup National Park, with villages within and outside the park that continue to utilise the resources in the park. The empirical research included focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews in three communities and key informant interviews with selected community members, government officials, and non-governmental organisations involved in the park's management. Research findings show that although the forest management system has changed in various policy documents, over the past years from a top-down to participatory approach, a centralised state system is still operational in the national park, with participatory approaches used merely as a legitimizing tool. We show how the existing horizontal power relations (such as gender roles within the communities) and vertical power relations (such as government-community dimensions) simultaneously impact the outcomes of participatory approaches on the ground. Finally, our case shows how the existing governance structures continue to reproduce inequalities and exclusions that originated from the colonial times and through path dependency still influence livelihoods and day-to-day survival of people in the communities.

1. Introduction

Attempts to promote local people's participation in the management of forest resources have increased over the years (Islam et al., 2013; Wilfred, 2017), with governmental organisations in many African and Asian countries promoting the participation of local populations in forest management through different forms of 'social' approach to forestry (Lund et al., 2018; Ribot et al., 2010; Ribot et al., 2010; Schreckenberget al., 2006). As a result of the upsurge in participation practices, it has been argued that the role of the people living in the vicinity of forests has gradually changed from that of 'lawbreakers' (as a result of activities such as poaching or undesired logging) to 'lawmakers' and collaborators in forest management (Duguma et al., 2019). Studies from around the world have also recognised that successful management

of biodiversity would require the participation, at all levels of administration, of local people living in the forest communities (Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004; Coulibaly-Lingani et al., 2011; Mbeche, 2018). At the same time, in addition to fostering conservation, participatory approaches in governing and managing protected forest areas have been found to improve people's livelihood (Islam et al., 2013; Oladeji and Fatukasi, 2017; Wilfred, 2017). Evidence also suggests that forest communities are more likely to comply with and commit themselves to long-term conservation strategies when their livelihoods are secured and they are involved in forest management decision-making processes (Ramcilovic-Suominen et al., 2013; Ramcilovic-Suominen and Epstein, 2012, 2015).

Yet while participatory forest management has been encouraged, flaws and weaknesses have also been identified (Purdy, 2012). It has

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been observed that the level of participation of local people in forest management is influenced by their gender and socio-cultural relations within a particular historical context (Inagaki, 2007; Liu and Innes, 2015), with women often excluded or ignored due to cultural norms (Coleman and Mwangi, 2013). The increasing push for participatory management also has raised concerns about power imbalances and possible exclusions and domination of some actors over others (Purdy, 2012). Therefore, in many cases, participation in forest management is neither uniform nor equitable within or between local forest communities due to pre-existing socio-economic inequalities and gender and power relations.

There are considerable challenges in implementing participation in a way that leads to local people's voices being heard and their livelihoods secured (Bhattarai and Ojha, 2001; Ramcilovic-Suominen and Kotilainen, 2020). In this paper, we explore how the interests of different stakeholders, coupled with pre-existing socio-economic inequalities and historically embedded power relations, affect the abilities of local people to participate and influence forest management and other decisions related to forests. Our research question is: What are the main barriers in implementing participatory management of protected forest areas and how historical context, socio-cultural norms, gender, and other power relations influence local people's participation?

We build on an empirical study in the Korup National Park (KNP) in the South West Region of Cameroon. While scholars have examined the interlinkages between power and participation in community forestry worldwide (Krott et al., 2014; Maryudi and Sahide, 2017), and people's participation in forest management has been studied across Cameroon (Nkemnyi, 2016; Piabuo et al., 2018), fewer studies have investigated local people's participation in the management of protected areas, especially national parks in Cameroon (Essougong et al., 2019; Manfre and Rubin, 2012; Movuh and Schusser, 2012). It is in this context that we, in this paper, explore how historical events, socio-cultural norms, gender, and other power relations influence the participation of the local village inhabitants in the management of the protected forest areas in their vicinity and how these conditioning factors are linked with international and national efforts for nature protection and conservation.

In Cameroon, the development of participatory forest management, as a concept and policy, has been significantly facilitated by international development agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The narrative and justification for participatory approaches have been built on sustainable management, brought about in recognition of local people's rights and access to forest resources (Movuh and Schusser, 2012; Minang et al., 2019). Equitable access to resources, recognition of local people's rights to forests, and securing their livelihoods depend on their participation in decision-making concerning protected forest areas and their management (Islam et al., 2013, 2016; Manfre and Rubin, 2012). For these reasons, it is pivotal to understand who participates and in what ways and who does not and why, which further leads to the importance of understanding the complex and multiple interests and motives of the stakeholders involved.

In what follows, we outline our analytical framework of participation, focusing on different power relations, followed by a description of our research methodology and a historically grounded analysis of the transformations in the principles and practices of forest management concerning the KNP. Drawing on the empirical findings, we analyse how the different power relations, including issues related to socio-economic inequalities and gender, have affected the locals' participation in managing forest resources in the KNP over time. Finally, we discuss how participatory management could more effectively be implemented and sustained not only in the KNP but more widely in Cameroon and beyond.

2. Participation and power relations

Participation in the management of natural resources, including forests, is a concept that has received significant attention in scientific literature, policy and as a practice in the field, and it has been labelled as

a catalyst for social change (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991; Minang et al., 2019; Nkengla, 2015). Due to the perceived limitations of the traditional top-down approaches in forest management and governance, inhabitants of forest communities receive support to participate in the management of forest resources (Islam et al., 2013, 2016; Minang et al., 2019). Participatory forest management was introduced in the early 1990s in sub-Saharan Africa by development agencies (Matose and Wily, 1996; Salomao and Matose, 2007; Wily, 2002) to encourage the central governments to devolve the management of forest resources to the local communities (Andersson et al., 2006). As proposed, this decentralisation of decision-making power would enable forest communities to manage forest resources in a sustainable, efficient, and equitable manner (Agrawal and Ribot, 1999; Blaikie, 2006). Therefore, participatory forest management is viewed as a pathway towards improving conservation while simultaneously enhancing the livelihood opportunities of the forest communities (Nkengla, 2015).

However, implementing participatory approaches has not been without challenges (Ako, 2017; Claridge, 2004; Green, 1998). Research has showned that local participation in participatory forest management projects is quite low in sub-Saharan Africa (Chomba et al., 2015; Degnet et al., 2020). In the worst cases, participatory forest management has been found to trigger decentralisation (Sunam et al., 2013). In some instances, it has been reduced to tokenism and misused by various actors with vested interests, including local elites, and often it has been found to have been reduced to a tool for only legitimizing policy initiatives (Handberg, 2018; Mustalahti and Lund, 2009; Ribot et al., 2010). It is thus important to know who should be involved, which genders participate, what the participants want to achieve versus what they are expected to achieve, and how participation would happen (Agarwal, 2001). For instance, women and men play different roles in securing livelihoods. The implications of these different roles on forest use and management have gained attention in terms of participation (Agrawal and Chhatre, 2006; Agarwal, 2009). Women's role as home caregivers and their responsibilities for raising children is reflected in their interests in maintaining access to non-timber forest products, firewood, and farmlands in deforested or degraded forest areas where food crops are planted. Men, on the other hand, have been seen as more engaged in income-generating activities. Therefore they tend to engage with timber harvesting or prescribed burning of forests for farming purposes. These gender differences alone, and the very principle of participatory forest management, have all pointed to a need to reconsider gender aspects in participation concerning forest management (Agarwal, 2009; Boissière and Doumenge, 2008; Liu and Innes, 2015).

To define and analyse participation, scholars have suggested hierarchical and normative models of participation. Agarwal's (2001) typology of participation ranges from nominal participation with membership in a group to interactive or empowering participation, with people having a voice and influence in decision-making. Despite the goal that the participatory approach aims to strengthen a community's participation in development processes, a potential pitfall is the power imbalance amongst actors that threatens the integrity of a participatory strategy (Inagaki, 2007). Power relations are flexible, socially constructed relations that influence interactions amongst and within different actors. Power can be used to advance the joint efforts of different actors for one's own, mutual or altruistic gain (Huxham and Vangen, 2000). Nevertheless, sharing rights, responsibilities, and associated powers amongst different actors causes contentions and strategic alliances (Agarwal, 2015). Thus, it is important to understand the nature of rights and powers devolved, the manner of such transfer, and how they influence the operation of participatory forest management systems (Cronkleton et al., 2012).

To emphasize the importance of the different forms of power relations on participation, we approach the concept of power as a relational typology, distinguishing between vertical and horizontal power relations as shown in Fig. 1. Vertical power relations operate via formal regulations and governmental policies and involve an authority external

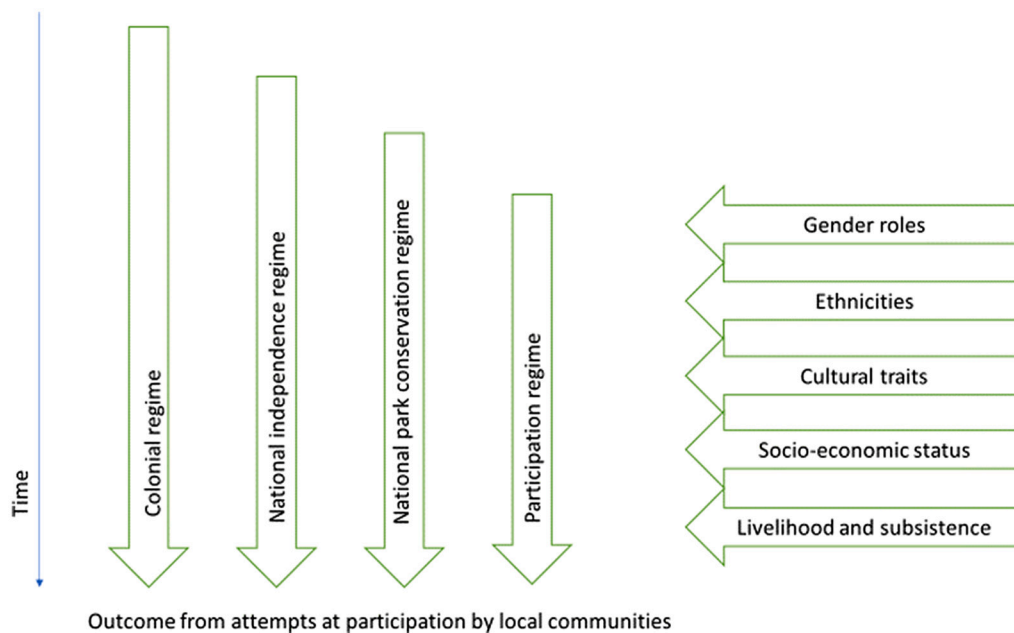


Fig. 1. Vertical and horizontal power relations impacting on the outcome from attempts at participation.

to communities, such as the national government or international NGOs (Giessen et al., 2016; Ramcilovic-Suominen and Kotilainen, 2020). Horizontal power relations, on the other hand, refer to the heterogeneous nature of local communities, and how they are formed and present within a community. Local communities must be seen as consisting of heterogeneous actor groups, composed of members of different ethnicities and genders, and individuals and groups with varying social and economic status (Schusser et al., 2015). In comparison to vertical power relations, horizontal power relations are more fluid and complex, and they are reproduced in everyday interactions between the members of a community (Maryudi et al., 2018; Ramcilovic-Suominen and Kotilainen, 2020). As an example, one of the important aspects within a community that relates to power and the possibility to participate concerns gender. Gender relations can be framed as horizontal power relations embedded within the communities. In this regard, one of the challenging aspects of participation is the role of gender in the actual possibilities to participate. It has been noted that women's involvement in local and national policy formulations and decision-making in natural resources and environmental management remains limited (United Nations, 2015). Despite the global frameworks and national plans concerning women's participation in sustainable forestry (Asher and Varley, 2018; Elias et al., 2017; FAO, 2018), there are major challenges such as social norms which prevent women from participating in forest management (Evans et al., 2017). Social norms involve divisions of labour, with women having many domestic obligations reducing the time available to attend meetings that are necessary to get involved with the participatory schemes of forest management. Also, there are gendered behavioural norms and cultural traits, which may cause men to refuse to listen to women in the meetings, preventing their voices and interests from being heard (Coleman and Mwangi, 2013).

Overall, the vertical and horizontal power relations form a complex combination of interactions that crucially impact the local forest communities' abilities to engage and work for their interests in the forest and park management participatory schemes. Since many of the challenges within the participatory approaches are linked to power asymmetries between the different actors involved (Purdy, 2012:409), we use the vertical-horizontal power relations framework (Ramcilovic-Suominen and Kotilainen, 2020) to analyse the influence of power on the practices, success and failures of formal participation schemes. In what follows, we explore the barriers of participation in forest resource management in

the KNP, in a historical context and in relation to the different vertical and horizontal power relations.

3. Methods and materials

The empirical study was conducted in the Korup National Park (KNP) in the South West Region of Cameroon, about 50 km inland from the Bight of Biafra (Fig. 2). KNP shares about 23 km of its South West boundary with the Cross River National Park in neighbouring Nigeria. It is one of the oldest rainforests in Africa (Gartlan, 1984). It covers a surface area of 126,900 ha and has two climates: a distinct dry season from November to March and an intense wet season from April to October (Eyong, 2009). The park is the only one in Cameroon with villages located within the park: five villages located inside and 27 villages located outside the park's boundaries (Mbile et al., 2005). The KNP was selected as the study area based on its ecological importance, status as the only protected area with villagers within the park, and the ongoing implementation of the Programme for the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the South West Region of Cameroon (PSMNR-SWR). Village selection for data collection was based on their location in the park as well as the relocation scheme that was implemented after the park creation.

The research material consisted of data from interviews - considered as the most widely used methods in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016; Maryudi and Fisher, 2020) and the use of repository materials which contributes to the rich empirical evidence (Rahayu et al., 2019). As to the latter, we analysed both published and unpublished materials, including historical documents and records, policy documents, project reports, books, maps, conference proceedings, journals from the park archives in Mudemba, as well as records from the Regional Delegation of Forestry and Wildlife in Buea and the internet. These documents provided information on forest resource management policies and practices before, during and after park creation and the different management plans before and during the current co-management era. The documents provided a clearer picture of how the policies put in place are implemented through existing management practices on the ground.

To analyse how power relations and gender inequalities affect participation in forest management practices, we collected data from men and women at the community level and from park management authorities. Primary data was collected through 22 key informant

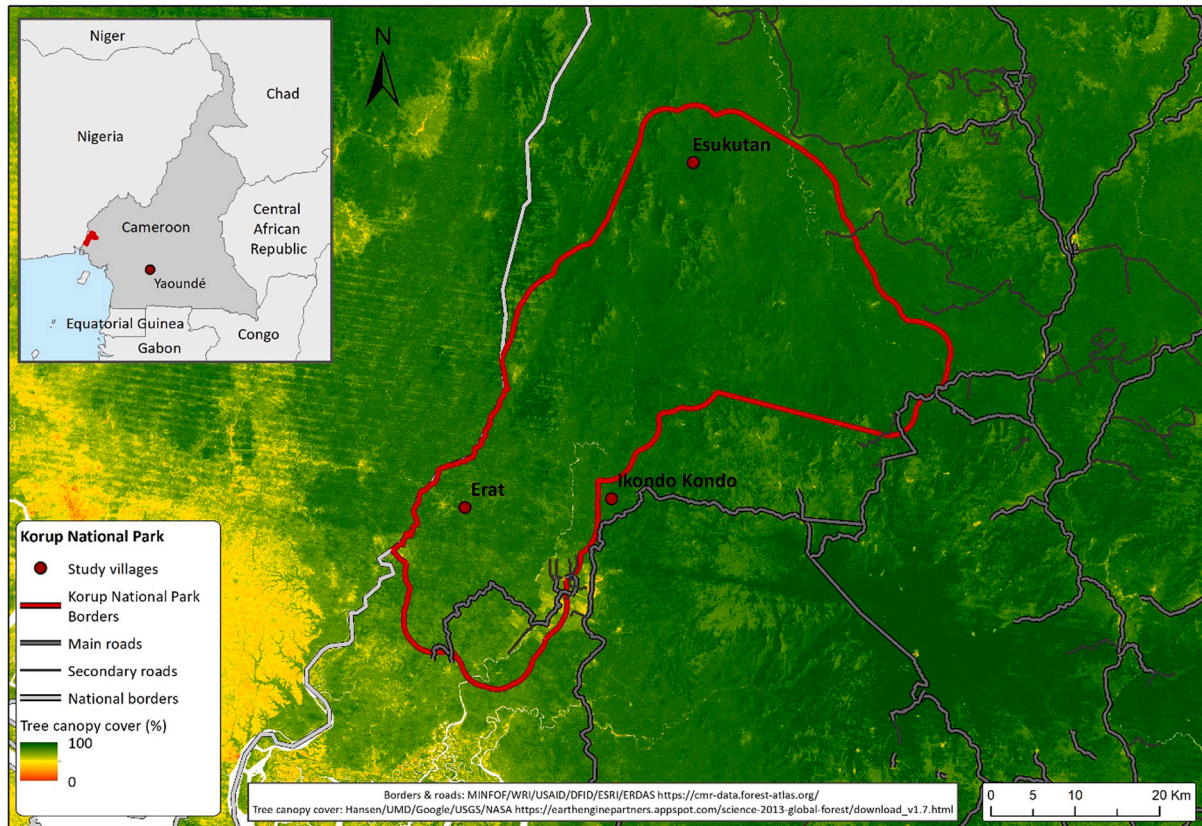


Fig. 2. Map of KNP showing the study villages.

interviews, 12 focus group discussions, and 30 semi-structured household interviews. Fieldwork was carried out between February and May 2016 in three villages: villages 2 and 3 located within the park boundaries, and village 1, which has been resettled out of the park.

Key informants were selected using the snowball sampling technique. At the community level, fifteen key informants (5 from each village), consisting of village chiefs and elders versed with the historical context of park creation and people's participation in the process, were selected and interviewed. Four park officials (one game guard, two officials at the divisional level and one at the regional level) were selected to record how the park is managed at divisional and regional levels and how it affects the livelihoods of the inhabitants in the villages. We also interviewed three NGO officials (one from each of the three NGOs in the area). The data from the key informant interviews at communities were compared with the data from interviews with government officials and non-governmental organisations.

Semi-structured interviews comprised of open-ended qualitative questions were carried out with household heads. Ten households were selected per village using a purposeful sampling technique. Household selection was based on their knowledge about our study interest. A total of 30 households in all three villages were interviewed, representing approximately half of the households in those villages. The data is therefore highly representative, as we also conducted four focus group discussions and five key informant interviews in each village. The questions asked in the semi-structured interviews with the heads of the households revolved around the participation of men and women in park creation and management, resettlement issues, and their perceptions of the impacts of different enforced forest management systems on their livelihoods. By asking such questions, we aimed to learn respondents' views on the different forms of power relations (vertical and horizontal). Questions during fieldwork were not asked in theoretical academic language but by referring to the everyday experiences of the

respondents. The aim was to discover the role of the different power relations and how the participatory schemes related to the creation of the national park turned out in practice. In particular, the questions related to the creation of the national park and the plans for the resettlement of the villages revealed insights about vertical power relations, while the questions concerning the participation of men and women in the park management were insightful concerning the horizontal power relations. Questions related to the everyday interactions within the communities and of the village inhabitants with the authorities provided contexts on the interplay between participation in forest resource management and conservation and the different forms of power relations.

In order to triangulate and complement information from the key informant interviews and the semi-structured household interviews, four focus group discussions (FGD) were carried in each village, totalling 12 FGDs. Each FGD comprised of six to eight participants. Focus groups were separated by gender and age, which helped create a comfortable and safe atmosphere and prevented the different groups from influencing each other's answers. Most importantly, this allowed for a gender-sensitive insight into the studied issues. Questions during the FGDs revolved around the roles of men and women in the committees created, the level of and reasons for participation in these committees in the forest management, changes in the park management practices over the last decades, and the effects of the above on livelihood options. Other issues discussed dealt with the history of the resettlement process and its effect on the village inhabitants' livelihoods.

In the context of the study, focus group discussions were a very useful way of identifying and understanding how the different power relations and the marginalisation that results from those power relations operate within the community and how they influence the village inhabitants' participation on the ground. The data was collected with an audio recorder in the local pidgin English Language. It was transcribed

verbatim, meaning full transcriptions with filler words and any side comments. The transcribed text was coded, and themes were identified and categorized based on our conceptual framework, including the following: access and rights to the forest, livelihoods, participation of men and women, gender inequalities, power relations, and village resettlements. The themes identified provided an understanding of the access, use, and management of the forest resources for both men and women and the existing power relations at play. The identification of the themes required continued refining as new information, topics, and concepts emerged (Anderson, 2003; Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012). This was carried on until theoretical saturation was reached, following Morse's (2015) argument, that theoretical saturation happens when the building of rich data within the process of inquiry has substantially contributed to the theoretical aspects of the research.

4. Results

4.1. Korup National Park (KNP) from colonisation to present and the continued reinforcement of vertical power relations as a legacy of colonial forestry model

The early history of the management of forest resources in Cameroon illustrates how historical events have contributed to path-dependent practices that add to the challenges of establishing a participatory forest management approach in the KNP. Top-down principles and practices in forest management applied are remnants from colonial times that have been transmitted to the era of independence. This history also illustrates the presence of power relations in ways that have impacted on how the participation schemes have turned out until the present. Before colonisation by the German colonial power in 1884, forest resources in Cameroon were managed according to the 'people's law,' meaning communal place-based, largely unwritten, and context-specific sets of rules and responsibilities (Mbatu, 2009). The village chiefs were the authority granting permissions for hunting and sharing the catch within the community (Mengang, 1998). Women gathered non-timber forest products (NTFP), fished, and performed subsistence agriculture, while men mainly hunted and assisted in the fishing and agricultural activities. Even though these communities were in contact with the Portuguese since 1472, their livelihood practices did not change significantly during this era, as European presence was primarily for slave trade (Lanz, 2000).

The situation changed drastically with German colonisation of Cameroon in 1884, when the forest resources became the property of the colonial administration through the Crown Land Acts of 1896. The collective use of land and forests by the natives was dismantled, and a system of individual property based on the law of contract was instituted (Austen, 1983). Therefore, new property and hence new power structures and relations were introduced that led to more vertical and hierarchical notions and ways of exercising power in forest use and management. Timber extraction became systematic in line with the concession system in 1989, allowing institutions like Gesellschaft für Süd Kamerun and Gesellschaft für Nord Kamerun to acquire over 12 million square hectares of forests (Lanz, 2000). By 1914, plantations of German colonial power in Cameroon grew across 100,000 ha in the South West coast (Njoh, 2002). However, exploitation of wood and setting plantations in the area that later became KNP was not possible due to inaccessibility. The German colonial power invested in forestry programmes and trained the locals to sustain and manage "their" colonial forest. During this time, the livelihoods of the local people and their role in forest management were questioned and portrayed as a problem. Ownership and control of the forest resources shifted from the hands of the locals to the German colonial administration (Mengang, 1998). At the same time, differences in gender roles started to emerge. Men diversified their activities, as some got involved in low-wage labour on plantation sites alongside hunting, while women continued with the same activities as during the pre-colonial era. This phase of top-down

land and forest management policy in Cameroon by the German colonizing power lasted until 1916. After World War I, Cameroon was placed as a mandated territory of the League of Nations. In 1919, without consulting the indigene populations, the country was entrusted to France and Britain who divided the country into two. Three-quarters of the country was being ruled by France (Cameroun français) and one-quarter by Britain (British Cameroon). The KNP lies in the area which used to be British Cameroon.

Under the new rule, the vertical power relations established earlier continued to persist and were strengthened as new rules, and administrative organs were introduced. The British colonial administration maintained a centralised system of forest management installed by the German colonial power. In the early 1930s, the British colonial administration established the Forestry Department and the Native Authorities. These Native Authorities were appointed by the colonial administration to control local forest resources and were not related to the existing local chiefs (Lanz, 2000). In 1937 the Korup Native Administration Forest Reserve (KNAFR) was created by order No. 25 (Gartlan, 1984; Korup Report, 1936). The goal was to set aside land for timber production. Three villages – Bakumba, Bera, and Esukutan – the last is one of our case study villages – were granted legal rights to stay within the reserve. By permission from the Native Authorities, the local people could hunt, fish, and collect NTFPs in the reserve (Malleon, 2000; MINEF, 2002). The decision to require permissions by the local people to access land and forests went against the UN land policy on administering trusteeship territories, as stated in article 8 of the Trusteeship Agreement (Meek, 1957), which shows that the vertical power relations at play were limiting the rights of the local population.

After independence in 1961, the vertical power relations with regard to forest management, established in the colonial era, did not vanish but were reproduced by the new state (Mbatu, 2009). Following the model set by the colonial administration, the State Forestry Service adopted the top-down state-centered forest management policies. During this time, Erat, one of the three communities included in our study, became a village in the forest reserve (Eyong, 2009). The Korup Native Administration Forest Reserve was modified and renamed the Korup Forest Reserve (KFR) by the Kumba Western Council through an Order of 27 January 1962. In the 1970s, the state reserved the right to reconfer on local communities 'special privileges, but not rights' to use forest resources, subject to permission granted by the state (Mbile and Misouma, 2008). In line with these earlier developments, deriving from the previous eras of administrative regimes, vertical power relations, characterized by top-down state-centered management policies and practices, were at play. They represent a complete opposite of the ideas guiding the principles of participatory forest management. In 1981, Steven Gartlan and Phil Agland wrote a proposal to the government of Cameroon to create three rainforest national parks in Cameroon. The Korup Forest Reserve was finally upgraded to Korup National Park by presidential decree N° 86/1283 of 30th October 1986 (MINEF, 2002; MINFOF, 2008, 2017). After creation, its boundaries were expanded to include three more settlements: Ikondo-kondo (case study village), Ikenge and Bareka Batanga (Oates, 1999; Malleon, 2000), totaling six villages within the parks' boundaries (Mbile et al., 2005). The stated aim for the park creation was to maintain the rich and unique biodiversity of the area. As such, resettlement of villages within the parks' boundaries became inevitable and imminent (Diaw et al., 2003; Malleon, 2000; Mbile et al., 2005; Schmidt-Soltau and Brockington, 2007; Ndi, 2013).

Results from key informant interviews showed that the resettlement plan was communicated through meetings at the level of the communities by the Korup management project officials. Resettlement plans exemplify the power relations and dynamics between the different actors, especially government authorities and the local people, where the government proceeded with setting up the national park with minimal consultations and involvement of the communities. Resettlement became the preoccupation of the state and its non-governmental partners as they claimed the presence of the local population and their day-

to-day activities were no longer compatible with the management and conservation objectives of the national park (Mbile et al., 2005). Resettlement efforts were met with resistance from the local people who were not in favour of the resettlement (Malleson, 2000). Even though the local people were not in support of resettlement, the position of the government of Cameroon remained unchanged (ibid). Amidst this resistance, only Ikondo-kondo village (one of our study sites) was successfully resettled out of the national park boundaries. The resettlement process was faced with difficulties such as poor planning, implementation and gross overspending, and insufficient funds were available to resettle the remaining five villages in the park (Diaw et al., 2003; Nijborg, 2000). It became clear by 2001 that the Korup Project lacked funds to continue with resettlement, and the resettlement programme was suspended (MINEF, 2002). Because of these difficulties and conflicts encountered with communities before, during and after the resettlement process, with just one out of six communities being resettled out of the park boundaries, it was evident that collaboration with communities in park management activities was unavoidable.

Despite this recognition, the efforts at communities' participation were implemented in a top down manner, with the logic of vertical power relations, as the powerful actors, including state and international donor agencies continued to plan and make decisions in advance, while the less powerful actors at the lower scales were being informed and/or consulted on the premade decisions. Zooming into the local dynamics, however, we can observe the different abilities of the local actors to participate in meetings, express their views and in some cases influence the process, if not the decisions. This finding from focus group discussions (FGDs) suggests that some community members are able to exercise a certain degree of influence and power, while others are not. According to our findings from FGDs, these abilities tend to depend on the actors' gender and position in the social structure of a community.

As illustrated above, vertical power relations have been prominent and at play in the park creation process. These vertical power relations are manifested through the government authorities' exclusive formal powers to make decisions concerning the resettlement of the villages, with minimal involvement of and consultations with the local people. Yet, the situation has been more complex and we can observe local people's ability to resist the governmental plans of resettlement, given that only one from the six communities was eventually resettled. With little prospects to negotiate and influence decisions in a participatory manner, villagers used disobedience as a strategy to resist the top down decisions. We next move into the villages to investigate in more detail the different power relations within them.

4.2. Attempts at participatory forest management in the KNP and interplay between different power relations

Failure to resettle and include the communities and to meet the conservation objectives set in the first Korup Park management plan gave room to the Programme for the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the South West Region (PSMNR-SWR). Initiated in 2006, PSMNR-SWR was a development programme that focused on sustainable management of protected areas as well as community participation in the management of protected areas (Dupuy, 2015). The PSMNR-SWR also emphasised the importance of international forestry goals and governance principles, such as biodiversity conservation and forest management. A participatory approach to the management of the national park was introduced after the PSMNR-SWR was developed and applied in accordance with the existing policies and legal instruments such as the 1994 forestry law (ibid). This participatory approach signified an increased role of the decentralized Village Forest Management Committees (hereafter referred to as village committee), composed of elected village members. As per Decision No.1354/D/MINEF/CAB of 26th November 1999, these village committees were meant to serve as an intermediary body between the local people, the park administration, and other stakeholders. Village committees comprised of eight members

elected by the general assembly of the community and accountable to them. There is a quota of two women participating within each committee (Village Forest Management Committee, Internal Rules and Regulations, 2015). The participatory forest approach adopted in the park management represents a point where actors and rules from different policy levels and spaces – specially the village and the national decision-making organs – collide and where tensions between the different actors concerning authority, legitimacy and power occur in various ways.

In terms of KNP, the participatory park management approach included various interventions and measures. First, there have been conservation development agreements, which were meant to incentivise the actors who are external and internal to the villages on the participatory forest management in the park. Second, the park area and the villages in it were divided into management units called cluster conservation zones. However, the traditional boundaries of the villages were not taken into consideration when these cluster zones were adopted. Six clusters, consisting of 32 villages, were established in the KNP. Third, the practice of organizing bi-annual collaborative management meetings between park authorities and communities in each cluster was adopted as a way to facilitate participation. Fourth, 'cluster platforms', consisting of three individual members per village were elected from the village committee members; of those members at least one had to be female. The cluster platforms were meant to be involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the participatory management within their respective cluster zones. Fifth, conservation incentives in the form of conservation bonus and credits were established and monetary and non-monetary village development provisions which involved the provision of income generating activities (e.g. crop seedling varieties) and infrastructure projects (e.g. construction of farm-to-market roads) also became part of the sustainable participatory forest management in the KNP.

The park conservator – an authority appointed by the central government, accountable to the regional forestry authorities - ensures that communities follow the stipulated forestry laws. Together with other staff, they have the power to control the behaviour of the local people through penalties for disobedience and incentives for obedience of the conservation policies. In addition, the authority and responsibility of park management and local people's participation have been devolved downwardly to the village committees. For example, village committee members have the power to decide whether or not to convey information to the villagers before the meetings with the park authorities, or only after the meetings have been held. Our findings from FGDs and interviews showed that representatives in the village committees that made decisions on behalf of the community were determined by people's socio-economic and political status in the village. Furthermore, the participatory forest management practices in the KNP have resulted in unintended complexities and distortions of community relations and involvement of horizontal power relations in particular, as some village members are empowered over others, directly conflicting the sense of community and traditional roles of the community members. This has led to power struggles at the community level and dissatisfaction, questioning the legitimacy of the elected village cluster platforms and village committees, who after training, were expected to facilitate fair and just participation in line with the Programme for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources guidelines. In practice, such training has been marginal or has not taken place at all. A youth respondent who is also the youth representative for the village committee said in an interview:

I do not know if I have any other role apart from being a messenger. I receive 'circulars' for meetings in Mudemba, but no mention of the agenda before the meeting. So, I cannot represent the voices of the people in the meeting.

On the one hand, the elected community representatives have faced

criticism from fellow villagers on not representing their interest, while on the other hand, they have been given little power to change things for the better.

The park authorities, in practice, have continued to exercise vertical power in relation to community participation. They decide on locations of meetings (which often have been organized in places that are far from the communities), making it difficult for all village committee members to attend. In cases where they attend, their opinions are not taken into consideration in decision making, but rather they are asked to implement said decisions in their communities. The roles and power delegated to community representatives hence have appeared on paper but have not been put into practice. This, in turn, has resulted in failed attempts to encourage the participation of local people and their interest in the meetings. During focus group discussions, it was highlighted that the opinions of the local people during general meetings in the villages were not taken into consideration, but rather instructions were given out by park authorities on what and how things need to be done. The participatory forest management led to more roles and responsibilities to the communities, while their rights and roles in decision-making remained as they had been before the participatory forest management was introduced. This highlights the exercise of the vertical power relations by a higher authority over the local people by restraining their input and disregarding their interests in the forest management activities.

Looking beyond the participatory nature of the Sustainable Management Programme, to the distributional dimensions of the same, what is relevant is the conservation development agreements (CDA), wherein the communities were to be provided with development measures, such as monetary and non-monetary provisions for income generating activities and infrastructural projects as well as bonuses and credits as incentives for law compliance. Respondents in a village within the park during focus group discussions said that their conservation bonuses have been cut by the park authorities for poaching. They said eco-guards hear gunshots in the park and penalise them for illegal hunting without assessing the situation. At the same time, the respondents during focus group discussion and household interviews claimed poaching was being done by people from other neighbouring communities not located within the park boundaries. These contestations indicate that the existing structures put in place open up possibilities for corruption amongst the park authorities, as well as lack of motivation amongst villagers to comply with anti-poaching regulations, as they realize that they are losing both the financial incentives and the benefits of hunting. Similar problems were encountered in terms of the construction of farm to market roads. The park authorities during the key informant interviews stated that prior to the road construction, it was agreed that motorcycle roads were to be constructed. However, respondents in the villages 1 and 2 complained that the roads were too narrow for motorcycle riders to transport their farm produce to the markets in larger quantities. One of the respondents in village 2 said: *Because of this inconvenience, we spend more on transportation cost of crops resulting in little or no profit after sales. Is this the assistance the park is offering us? They are killing us indirectly.* The villagers argued that if they are to be actively involved in agriculture for income generation instead of hunting, the park authorities should ensure that they earn a reasonable amount of income to support their families by providing them with motorable roads to ease transportation of their farm produce to generate income. Hence, the established structures and interventions in the PSMNR, coupled with diverse interests and power asymmetries between local people, the eco-guards and park authorities, are reproducing new inequalities and poverty traps, for the people and their livelihoods. Our overall observation is that vertical power relations have reversed formally designed plans for participation by the members of the local communities and influenced the existing horizontal power structures and relations simultaneously.

As far as the gender dimension is concerned, while women's representation is required in both the village committees and village cluster platforms, the requirement was not observed in the case of the cluster

platforms. Apart from the unequal gender representation in the committees and platforms, in practice, implementation meant little more than women attending meetings. During the group discussions, the women complained that they were expected to be seen but not heard during the meetings. They listened as decisions were being made, but had to keep quiet because of the societal norms. In addition, due to the gendered division of labour, and their triple role, women could not always attend all the meetings. In effect, horizontal power relations within the community members significantly influence the outcomes of the participatory processes. When it comes to gender not only is there a contradiction between the policies and the practice, there is a contradiction between the imposed state rules and local social norms.

Overall, neither participation by women nor men has been translated into what Agarwal (2001) defined as active or interactive (empowering) participation. Women's participation can be understood as nominal and passive and to a very limited extent consultative, while for men, it was more consultative as they were largely excluded from making decisions about forest management. This ties in with the viewpoint of Arnstein (1969), that participation is not necessarily a catalyst for positive change, but could be an expression of manipulative control over people in a specific development setting. In this way participation is used as a tool to empower the existing authorities and powerful actors, and little more than a window dressing to effect changes in forest communities' participation. However, the challenges for true participation come from several directions, which is captured by the notions of vertical and horizontal power relations, which produce the complex setting in which the intentions for participation have ultimately failed.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we have investigated the participatory management approaches employed in the KNP and have documented various challenges and failures to produce the desired outcomes. According to our findings, the power asymmetries, between actors at different scales and between those at the same scale, have greatly influenced these participatory processes. As we present in our analytical framework (Fig. 1), the external power structures (i.e. vertical power relations), have put strong pressure on the local forest communities, causing resistance, disobedience and dissatisfaction amongst them. For the KNP, the constructed historical vertical power relations and new vertical power relations have impeded outcomes of the participatory models applied more recently to manage the KNP forest resources and the communities within the national park and in its periphery. The vertical power relations have also impacted on the horizontal power relations (i.e. those operating between the members of the local forest communities and between the different social structures within them) and modified how they have operated. While it cannot be assumed that the pre-existing horizontal power relations would have been beneficial for participation, inclusion or equity amongst the local populations, our findings suggest that the processes through which the vertical power relations have altered horizontal ones, have resulted in further inequalities within the local communities, and that these have further hindered the participatory management schemes.

Lack of political will to establish true deliberative and participatory processes that would support a dialogue between the different actors involved with and concerned about the management of the national park, has led to a loss of interest in the local communities to support the arrangements that were created for the participatory process. This lack of will and dialogue seemed to underpin most of the challenges of participatory management. Moreover, as an indicator of the mixed impacts of vertical and horizontal power relations, the village committee members mentioned the loss of motivation to undertake their activities, due to the limited interactions with the park authorities, on the one hand, and mistrust by the fellow villagers, on the other. The mistrust has stemmed from some village leaders using their authority to make decisions on behalf of their communities without consulting them. In turn,

concerning horizontal power relations, the less involved community members have used the means available to them to oppose the village committees, which has led to conflicts and contentions within the communities. As an important dimension of horizontal power relations, we have noted important gender differences in respect to participation: men have been represented in larger numbers in the committees at the various levels of park administration; women, more often than men, have tended to assume a role as nominal and passive participants. Yet while men sometimes have been consulted in terms of local village affairs, they more often have been excluded from the higher-level decision-making process. In such cases, the vertical power relations as we have defined them, seem to override the horizontal ones.

Under the label of participation, the current governance structures continue to reproduce inequalities and exclusions originating from colonial times and are a product of historical events and top-down approaches in forest management. There is a clear path dependency shaping the power relations and the roles of the different actors at scales from the local to the national, and between the actors at the same policy-making level. Finally, the production of inequalities and inefficiencies also relates to the overly complex and bureaucratic institutions that have been produced by the park management system at large.

On a more general level, an active involvement of local communities at all stages of the planning, design and management process would be needed to ensure that their voice is an integral part, not only in resource management in a protected area, but also in the planning phase and discussions about whether or not, for what purposes and in whose interests nature conservation areas should be set up in the first place. This would help empower the local people and ensure that their values, logics and interests are driving the process of creation, management and implementation of the participatory conservation schemes.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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