

## **Bridging Livelihood and Conservation: The Role of Ecotourism in the Campo Ma'an National Park, Cameroon**

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**Abstract :** Ecotourism is viewed as a double edge sword for the enhancement of conservation and local livelihood within a protected landscape. The Campo Ma'an National Park (CMNP) adopted ecotourism in its management plan as a strategic axis for better management of the park. The growing importance of ecotourism as a strategy for the sustainable management of CMNP and its environs requires adequate information to bolster the sector. This study was carried out between November 2018 and September 2021, with the main objective to contribute to the sustainable management of the CMNP through suggestions for enhancing the capacity of ecotourism in and around the park. More specifically, the study aimed at; 1) Analyse the governance of ecotourism in the CMNP and its surrounding; 2) Assessing the impact of ecotourism on local livelihood around the CMNP; 3) Evaluating the contribution of ecotourism to biodiversity conservation in and around the CMNP; 4) Evaluate the determinants of ecotourism possibilities in achieving sustainable livelihood and biodiversity conservation in and around the CMNP. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained from household surveys (N=124), focus group discussions (N=8), and key informant interviews (N=16). Data collected were coded and imputed into SPSS (version 19.0) software and Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Findings from the Chi-square test revealed overall poor ecotourism governance in and around the CMNP, with benefit sharing ( $X^2 = 122.774$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and conflict management ( $X^2 = 90.839$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) viewed to be very poor. For the majority of the local population sampled, 65% think ecotourism does not contribute to local livelihood around CMNP. The main factors influencing the impact of ecotourism around the CMNP on the local population's livelihood were gender (logistic regression ( $\beta$ ) = 1.218;  $p = 0.000$ ); and level of education (logistic regression ( $\beta$ ) = 0.442;  $p = 0.000$ ). Furthermore, 55.6% of the local population investigated believed ecotourism activities do not contribute to the biodiversity conservation of CMNP. Spearman correlation between socio-economic variables and ecotourism impact on biodiversity conservation indicated relationships with gender ( $r = 0.200$ ,  $p = 0.032$ ), main occupation ( $r = 0.300$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ), time spent in the community ( $r = 0.287$ ,  $p = 0.017$ ), and number of children ( $r = -0.286$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ). Variables affecting ecotourism impact on biodiversity conservation were age (logistic regression ( $\beta$ ) = -0.683;  $p = 0.037$ ) and gender (logistic regression ( $\beta$ ) = 0.917;  $p = 0.045$ ). This study recommends the development of ecotourism-friendly policies that can accelerate Public Private Partnership for the sustainable management of the CMNP as a commitment toward good governance. It also recommends the development of gender-sensitive ecotourism packages, with fair opportunities for rural women and more parity in benefit sharing to improve livelihood and contribute more to biodiversity conservation in and around the Park.

**Keywords :** biodiversity conservation, Campo Ma'an national park, ecotourism, ecotourism governance, rural livelihoods, protected area management

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