

The hotspot between Nigeria and Cameroon

A TBCA that includes the Korup National Park and Cross River National Park could help resolve some chronic problems

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Korup National Park in southwestern Cameroon and Cross River National Park in southeastern Nigeria form a contiguous area separated by an international boundary. People living in enclave communities within both parks readily claim nationality on either side: for example, if Cameroonian authorities come to them for revenue collection or taxation they claim to be Nigerians, and vice versa. So it is a complex situation.

The region is a biodiversity hotspot: it contains, for example, the world's most northerly gorilla populations as well as chimpanzees and drill monkeys. Recently a new species of banded gecko was discovered following a series of field biological surveys and DNA studies: it has been named *Hemidactylus enianai* after the author, who collected a specimen at the Erokut Park entry gate of Cross River National Park in 2006.



Cross road: A signpost shows the way to the Cross River National Park in Nigeria. Photo: E. Eniang

There is cross-border friction. Recently, for example, Cameroon won a case in the International Court that awarded a large area of land to Cameroon from Nigeria (especially the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula); needless to say, Nigerians are not happy about this. Now, some local people go into the forest and pull out markers and put them back into Cameroon in an effort to gain more farmland and nutrient-rich soils for crops. Recently there has also been a move in some Cameroonian quarters for Nigeria to relinquish the Obudu Cattle Ranch and Resort—a popular tourism destination—to Cameroon.

There is a need to respond sub-regionally to climate change. The Korup/Cross River complex has a large store of carbon. A coordinated response to climate change is required that enables the uptake of opportunities presented by REDD.



Transboundary friends? Chimpanzees (*Pan troglodyte*) in the Cross River National Park, Nigeria. Photo: E. Eniang

The area is under increasing threat from a rapidly expanding human population. Almost all the large intact forests in West Africa have been lost to the extent that northern graziers are now coming down to the rainforest zone to find resources for their stock. They cause great destruction and even traditional conservation strategies are being disrupted. In many communities of the region, for example, taboos on the hunting of gorillas are no longer working.

There are grey areas in national policies on the environment. In Nigeria there is friction between ministries, even in the interpretation of environmental laws. Enforcing such laws is sometimes difficult because one agency frustrates the efforts of others. There is a great deal of cross-border trading in forest products. Timber is floated down the rivers and the poaching of animals and trafficking of bushmeat are widespread. Large quantities of NTFPs, such as *Gnetum africanum*, are imported from Cameroon into Nigeria, which has a large market for forest produce.

A transboundary approach could help address such problems. Co-financing and cooperation between the two countries, and international assistance, are urgently required.