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## Reviews — Revues

**Floodplain Rehabilitation and the Future of Conservation and Development. Adaptive management of success in Waza-Logone, Cameroon,** by P. Scholte, 2005. 344 pp. incl. 32 col. plates. Tropical Resource Management Papers 67, Wageningen University and Research Centre, Wageningen. ISBN 90-6754-953-3, paperback, €15. Available from the author <scholkerst@cs.com> and online at <[http://www.leidenuniv.nl/cml/bieb\\_internet/dissertations.html](http://www.leidenuniv.nl/cml/bieb_internet/dissertations.html)>.

This is the published version of the author's Ph.D. thesis from Leiden University. However, its relevance is far broader than its title and origin might suggest. It is a masterly piece of work about a unique 15-year (so far) project, and both project and book contain enormously important lessons for conservationists.

Scholte has worked in the Waza-Logone area of N Cameroon since 1990, mainly on the far-sighted floodplain rehabilitation project. This book is mainly about that project but also places it in a global context, and deals comprehensively with related subjects of intense interest to the challenge of making conservation work in Africa, such as the roles of training and of community involvement. The project is of immense importance as the first large-scale attempt to rehabilitate a semi-natural floodplain following severe degradation caused by ill-planned hydrological changes. In this case, construction of a road, and of a dam for an irrigated rice scheme, cut off the annual flood in 1979, from 1500 km<sup>2</sup> of the floodplain, which includes the Waza National Park as well as fertile grazing and fishing grounds. This resulted in severe vegetation degradation, rapid declines in wildlife and hardship to local fishermen and pastoralists, all very well documented. The rice scheme failed, creating a rare opportunity for rehabilitation, with almost all interested parties in favour. A pilot reflooding of 400 km<sup>2</sup>, begun in 1994, demonstrated rapid regeneration of perennial grassland, rebound in wildlife populations and improvements to cattle grazing and fisheries. Not all elements came back equally, nor to pre-dam levels, so predictions are made for the future progress of the regeneration. The fishermen and cattle recovered faster than the vegetation and wildlife, indicating a need to build in adequate controls to prevent over-use. Reflooding increased grazing intensity, and the rate of incursions by pastoralists into Waza NP did not clearly fall, which was one desired outcome. This could eventually destroy the gains of reflooding unless controlled. Local communities can be given incentives to defend these rich resources, such as by implementing immigration controls, but these experiences strongly indicate a need for conservation and development projects such as this to think regionally, rather than creating, by means of local development alongside a conservation area, honey-pots which draw people in from surrounding under-privileged areas, thereby increasing pressure on the area which the project seeks to conserve. The study highlights the need to incorporate a protection element, too often

forgotten in simplistic applications of the conservation-and-development approach, with park guards or other authorities enforcing both national and local rules.

Several of the book's 12 chapters have been published or are in press as journal articles, while other aspects of the author's comprehensive studies in Waza-Logone have been published elsewhere, including in *Malimbus* (21: 16–50; 22: 29–31). Chapter 1 gives a general introduction and demonstrates the unprecedentedly comprehensive nature of the studies undertaken, including reviews of pre-dam surveys in the well-studied Waza area, and detailed investigation of the effects of the dam on vegetation, wildlife, grazing and fisheries, which demonstrate conclusively the ecological and social disaster it caused. The point is made that this project succeeded in part because it attempted to re-establish natural and traditional use, whereas most failed conservation-and-development projects have sought to establish new developments. There is a 32-page section that tells the book's story very effectively in colour photographs and captions. Chapter 2 outlines the human and environmental history of the area, and chapters 3–7 examine the effects of the reflooding on vegetation, waterbirds, antelope and pastoralists. Chapter 8 looks at the risks of success—development increasing pressure on natural resources—while 9 considers the success of the consensual management planning approach and emphasises the importance of regional planning. Chapters 10 and 11 review training at the three African colleges of wildlife management, especially at Garoua, where the author taught for some years. Chapter 12 is an excellent synthesis, marred only by the abstract and not-very-useful analysis in incomprehensible development-speak.

My main criticisms reflect the book's origin as a thesis and separate papers: repetition of introductory material; too many near-identical maps but none at the beginning to show all main features mentioned; a confusing use of “years” related to the flood cycle, where “Feb 1991” might actually mean “Feb 1992”, which might have been useful to the author but should have been changed for publication. The English is poor in some sections, despite the author's attempts to get the text proofed by native English-speakers: they let him down in places, resulting in ambiguities or occasionally incomprehension. But these should not stop anyone reading the book.

The whole book is in effect a balanced review of the pros and cons of the old conservation “protection” and the more recent “integrated conservation and development” approaches. The latter is criticised where criticism is due, especially for its simplistic reliance on development carrots and neglect of the need for regulation, or even neglect of the conservation *raison d'être* of the project. The supreme importance of majority community approval for conservation projects, regional planning, and protection against abuse are emphasised, and other conclusions and recommendations are carefully considered and sensible. Given that these recommendations come from a success story, they should be taken very seriously.

This book should be required reading for all conservation scientists and managers.

Alan Tye