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"What Does Conservation Mean for Women? The Case of the Cantanhez Forest National Park"

Costa, Susana, Catarina Casanova and Phyllis Lee

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Community-based conservation programmes need to engage the support of all its members. Gender is a key component in shaping attitudes about conservation, and lack of attention to gender differences in perceptions can work against the aims of community-based conservation actions and initiatives. We present a study of the obstacles to women's participation in conservation strategies associated with Cantanhez Forest National Park (CFNP), in Guinea-Bissau, West Africa. Field-work took place in CFNP over two years, 2007-2008. Five women-only focus group interviews (N=47 participants) were conducted to understand the perceived effects of CFNP's establishment on women's daily activities, livelihoods and future expectations. The findings revealed that the women felt the Park was responsible for malnutrition in the communities due to damage of crops by wildlife. Although they were promised compensation, most of the farming households are still waiting for reimbursements for crop damage. Women expressed an unwillingness to directly participate in conservation efforts related to CFNP, but they believed that park researchers could help them to improve their lives. (Text from authors' abstract)

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