

Lagoa do Peixe National Park, a protected area on the coast of southern Brazil, is inhabited by traditional fisherfolk who depend on its natural resources for their livelihoods. Governance (how and by whom decisions are made and implemented) for this conservation area has led to vastly negative social impacts on the fisherfolk to the point of violating human rights and therefore conservation can be considered a human rights issue.

State governance of this conservation area has led to negative social impacts such as conflict and instability, and human rights abuses such as arbitrarily depriving people of their property. The park is governed by an office of Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade (ICMbio), a subset of state and federal governments. The park was implemented (without proper consultation of the fisherfolk) as a “no people” protected area, and its inhabitation by traditional people was made illegal (Almudi & Kalikoski, 2010). Nonetheless, the government has only properly compensated for about 14% of the land and the remaining fisherfolk are only allowed to remain and fish inside the park until the government gets funding to relocate them (Almudi & Berkes, 2010). The possibility of eviction and the fishing licenses’ revocability and inability to be transferred to children has led to uncertainty for community members. Furthermore, the top-down, state governance approach led to conflict and physical violence after ICMbio officials restricted the activities of the fisherfolk and were caught “entering their homes without permission, and setting fire to their fishing boats, vehicles and tents,” forcing many fisherfolk to relocate without proper compensation (Almudi & Kalikoski, 2010, p. 229). These violations of human rights to property and security show that conservation is a human rights issue.

Officials having full power over decision-making and implementation caused human rights violations such as those to security and liberty, and social impacts such as uncertainty and disempowerment (because even when fisherfolk were consulted, long-term problems were not discussed and none of the decisions were binding (Almudi & Kalikoski, 2010)). A participatory (shared) governance approach could reduce violations of human rights and negative social impacts. It has been proven that participatory approaches can support biodiversity simultaneously with human livelihoods and communities (Berkes, Kofinas, & Chapin, III, 2009). The involvement of government is important because

they have power over external pressures: in the past, mine projects have been negotiated away from the park (Lanctot, et al., 2002). A shared governance approach, where resource management decisions are shared between the community and governments, would likely allow the fisherfolk to have a voice in decision-making, reducing conflict, would still benefit biodiversity and also have positive impacts on the community.

It could be claimed that the prohibition of extraction of natural resources in conservation areas must be established in order to preserve species and as such conservation is not a human rights issue. The park is critical habitat for several species including the Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and natural resource exploitation may have negative effects on that species (Lanctot, et al., 2002). However, there has been no proven negative impact from the fisherfolk; furthermore, their traditional ecological knowledge has helped sustain local species (Almudi & Kalikoski, 2010). The dichotomous idea that humans cannot be part of a successful conservation area is false and so conservation must be considered a human rights issue.

Conservation should be considered a human rights issue because governance of conservation areas can lead to negative social impacts and human right violations. A shared governance approach could reduce negative impacts on local inhabitants and would thus be a better practice than state governance, enhancing conservation while supporting human rights.

References

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