

History of delegated management in Ethiopia (2004–2024)

In 2004, Ethiopia was amongst the first African countries where delegated management was initiated. However, Ethiopia is one of only three countries where delegated management initiatives have been discontinued (Scholte, 2022). To learn from this previous experience, we describe them here. From 2004–2007, African Parks, contracted the management of Nech Sar NP and Omo NPⁱ. Amongst the changes in the short period under delegated management, Nech Sar NP experienced a five-fold increase in budget and staff numbers doubled (Kelboro & Stellmacher, 2012). Both parks conducted baseline aerial wildlife surveys (Kauffman et al., 2021). Several rangers we spoke to in 2024, remember the period as the ‘good times’, contrasting the generally negative image that human rights groups and the international press presented (Van Beemen, 2024). In December 2007, African Parks withdrew simultaneously from both contracts, given the inability of the Government of Ethiopia to resettle communities from Nech Sar, in particular, the Guji agro-pastoralists in the eastern part of the park (Kelboro & Stellmacher, 2012). The ‘negative image of African Parks towards indigenous people’ was widely publicised, especially in the American press (Turton, 2006); as opposed to the communication from African Parks’ perspectiveⁱⁱ.

In 2014, African Parks joined an EU-funded coalition to support Gambella NP. Although no management contract was signed, their involvement was perceived by many in the Ethiopian conservation community as a second attempt towards the delegated management of an Ethiopian park. One highlight was the aerial surveys (2015 dry season), which showed the continued migration of some 250 000 White-eared Kob (*Kobus kob*) to Gambella NP (Kauffman et al., 2021). Two years later, the collaboration ceased, apparently because of governmental requirements regarding expatriate staff.

When African Parks took on management of the bordering Boma NP in South Sudan, interest in Gambella NP was raised again. In October 2021, EWCA signed an MoU with African Parks to prepare for delegated management of Gambella NP. Extensive negotiations were held, in particular on the possibility of park revenue retention (entrance fees, tourism, concession fees) that was concluded by an 80% retention for African Parks-Gambella, and 20% at EWCA-national level. Other outstanding issues were the possibility of Payment for Ecosystem services revenues (including carbon credits), for which EWCA will ‘do its best’ to ensure its retention by Gambella NP. Although initially foreseen for signature by EWCA and African Parks only, three years later, a renewable 10-year delegated management contract was signed by the Gambella regional government, EWCA and African Parks (December 2024), see Photo S1.

Photo S1. Signing of delegated management contract for Gambella NP (December 2024) (from left to right, DG-EWCA, President of Gambella regional government, CEO African Parks) (credit: Paul Scholte, December 2024).



Additional References

Kelboro, G. & Stellmacher, T. (2012). *Contesting the national park theorem? Governance and land use in Nech Sar National Park, Ethiopia* (No. 104). ZEF Working Paper Series.

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ⁱ <https://www.mursi.org/pdf/apf-omo-agreement.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.africanparks.org/termination-management-activities-nech-sar-and-omo-national-parks>