

IMPACT OF ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN OBAN DIVISION OF CROSS RIVER NATIONAL PARK

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism in recent times has become very relevant globally as one of the sources for income generation. However, though its strategies are tailored towards sustainable use of natural resources with little or no impact on the environment, protected area managers always encounter challenges that lead to the degradation of the environment. This study therefore, assessed the impact of ecotourism development in Oban Division of Cross River National Park. Primary and secondary data were used for this study. The sample size was 1% of the estimated population in each community. Therefore 53, 28, 35 and 14 questionnaires were administered in Obung, Aking, Nisan, and Orem communities respectively giving rise to a total sample size of 130. Also, 20 separate questionnaires were administered to the staffs of the park. The results were analyzed using descriptively. The results indicated that the community was fully aware of the presence and activities of the park (100%). Majority of the respondents (67.69%) were in support of the Park's benefit-sharing programme a situation that was supposed to encourage the communities to support the park and its programmes. The community's participation in tourism development was (69%) while participation in at policy implementation (10%) and policy formulation (7%) was less impressive. Funding was a major challenge as general allocations to the park were below proposed estimates submitted by the park. It was therefore recommended that adequate funds be made available to the park for effective execution of park projects.

KEYWORDS: *Awareness, Funding, Challenge, Cross River National Park, Ecotourism*

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism that is currently gaining grounds on a global scale during the past few years (UNWTO 2001). It is one of the recent opportunities for income generation from natural resources without any impact on the environment (Colvin, 1996). Its strategies revolve around minimizing negative impacts on the environment and showcasing local cultures while actively contributing to the economic well being of host communities and all the stakeholders. Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improve the well being of the people (Epler Wood, 1996). It is also said to be the movement or traveling made by people in appreciation of their environment or nature.

This form of tourism is likely going to represent sustainable tourism development and also provide opportunities for the development of the disadvantaged, marginalized and rural communities. Ecotourism stimulates economic development and social well being of the people and at the same time preserves the natural environment and cultural heritage through awareness creation.

Ecotourism, however, can be seen as the recreational travel for the purpose of observing and experiencing natural environments (Anonymous, 1999). The international ecotourism society defines ecotourism as responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and sustain the wellbeing of local people (Denman, 2001). This definition recognizes the negative and positive support for the conservation of natural resources, both by suppliers and consumers. The natural resources are mostly rainforest area and are often jointly operated by a combination of government, private and environmental as well as indigenous people. The necessary social dimension to ecotourism is commonly referred to as “Community Based Ecotourism” where the local community has substantial control over and involvement in its development and management, with a major proportion of the benefits, remain to the community.

It is a widely acknowledged fact that ecotourism is relatively easy to develop as long as government, private and local communities are available and willing to undertake the task of conserving their natural resources to ensure the long-term availability and sustainability of the ecosystem. This is however, a bigger challenge that requires sound planning and adequate management. The maintenance, cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and supporting systems cannot be achieved without the full participation of host communities. This study seeks to assess the impact of ecotourism development in Oban Division of Cross River National Park.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area



Figure 1: Map Showing Oban Division of Cross River National Park

The Oban Division lies between latitude 8°05'N and 8°55'N and longitude 5°00'E and 6°00'E in Akamkpa and Etung Local Government Areas of Cross River State, Nigeria. It covers a total area of 3000 square kilometers and shares a long border with the Korup national park in the Republic of Cameroon, forming a single protected ecological zone. It is renowned for its diverse scientific, education and tourism potentials being one of the oldest rainforests in Africa identified as a biodiversity hotspot. Over 350 bird species have been identified in the Division including Xavier's green bull. Also recorded are 16 primate species, 42 species of snakes and 75 mammal species among others (Birdlife International, 2015).

The soils of the Division are derived from basement complex rocks consisting of granite gneiss. The igneous and metamorphic rocks are crystalline and they weather easily and deeply under humid conditions to form deep soil profiles. Apart from deep soil profiles, depending on the topography, soils in the study area are characterized by coarse to fine sand texture, low base status, acidic reaction and low activity clays probably due to the high amount of rainfall and high soil temperature among others (Aki et al, 2014). The northern part of the Oban division is drained by the Cross River while the southern parts are drained by the Calabar, Kwa and Korup Rivers. The area is very humid with the rainy season of at least nine (9) months (March - November) and receives over 3500mm annually with peak periods observed between the months of July and September. The vegetation is a lowland rainforest and characteristic tree species include *Coula edulis*, *Hannoa klaineana*, *Klainedoxa gabonensis*, *Khaya ivorensis* and *Lophira alata*. Over 350 bird species have been identified in the study area including Xavier's green bull. Also recorded are 16 primate species, 42 species of snakes and 75 mammal species among others (Birdlife International, 2015).

Methods of Data Collection

Primary and secondary data were used for this study. The sources of primary data included personal observations in the communities, oral interviews and the use of well-structured questionnaires. Secondary data was drawn from textbooks, journals, internet, and libraries. The sample size was 1% of the estimated population in each community. Therefore 53, 28, 35 and 14 questionnaires were administered in Obung, Aking, Nisan, and Orem communities respectively. This gave rise to a total sample size of 130. Also, 20 separate questionnaires were administered to the staffs of the park.

Two (2) questionnaires were used for this study for two different target groups; Local communities as well as the staff of CRNP in the Division. This was necessary to compare responses from both parties as it will help draw valid conclusions. The questionnaire for the communities was designed to elicit answers from respondents while that for the park staff was structured around a Likert Scale which allowed respondents to make personal decisions based on individual degree of rating with questions varying from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Not Sure (NS), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD).

RESULTS

Responses from Local Communities

Awareness of Park Existence

Table 1: Awareness of Park Existence

Community	Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)	Total
Obung	53(100)	Nil	53(100)
Aking	28(100)	Nil	28(100)
Nisan	35(100)	Nil	35(100)
Table 1: Contd.,			
Orem	14(100)	Nil	14(100)
Total	130(100)	Nil	130(100)

Source: Field survey, 2016

The results in Table 1 showed that all the respondents surveyed in the field were aware of the existence of the national park in their community. This may likely be due to the active awareness programmes mounted by the Cross River National Park in the communities, right from its inception.

Benefits of Ecotourism Development

Table 2: Benefits of Ecotourism Development

Community	Benefits (%)	No Benefits (%)	Total (%)
Obung	44(83.02)	9(16.98)	53(100)
Aking	16(57.04)	12(42.86)	28(100)
Nisan	23(65.71)	12(42.86)	35(100)
Orem	5(35.71)	9(64.29)	14(100)
Total	88(67.69)	42(32.31)	130(100)

Source: Field survey, 2016

The results from respondents indicated that 32.31% (Table 2) were of the views that ecotourism development has not benefited the local communities while the opinion of 67.69% of the respondents supported benefits accruing from tourism development in that area.

Level of Community Participation

Table 3: Level of Community Participation

Operations	Responses	Total (%)
Policy formulation	9	7
Policy implementation	12	10
Irregular consultation	90	69
No consultation	3	2
No response	16	12
Total	130	100

Source: Field survey, 2016

Majority of the respondents (69%) as shown in Table 3, asserted that the community's participation in tourism development in the Park was irregular, while participation at policy implementation (10%) and policy formulation (7%) was less impressive.

Annual Gross Income of Households

Table 4: Annual Gross Income of Households

Communities	Sources of Income	Before EST. of Park (₦) (X ₁)	After EST. of Park (₦) (X ₂)	Difference in Income Level (₦)
OBUNG	N.T.F.Ps	4,000	4,000	0
	Farming	8,000	14,000	6,000
	Hunting	6,000	7,000	1,000
	Mining	30,000	80,000	50,000
	Others	3,000	5,000	3,000
	Total	51,000	110,000	59,000
AKING	N.T.F.P	5,000	5,000	0
	Farming	7,000	12,000	5,000
	Hunting	5,000	6,000	1,000
	Mining	4,000	11,000	7,000
	Others	2,000	3,000	1,000
	Total	23,000	37,000	14,000
NSAN	N.T.F.Ps	4,500	5,000	500
	Farming	9,000	13,000	4,000
	Hunting	6,000	7,000	4,000
	Mining	—	—	—
	Others	3,000	4,000	1,000
	Total	23,000	28,000	5,000
OREM	N.T.F.Ps	25,000	2,000	-5,000
	Farming	6,000	10,000	4,000
	Hunting	300	3,000	0
	Mining	—	—	—
	Others	400	5,000	5,000
	Total	15,000	20,000	5,000

Source: Field survey, 2016

From Table 4, the total gross annual income of the communities sampled have appreciated by ₦59000, ₦14000, ₦5000 and ₦5000 for Obung, Aking, Nisan, and Orem communities respectively. A chi-square statistical test of the tables in the Appendix showed that for each of the communities, the calculated frequency was greater than the tabulated frequency.

Employment Opportunities

Table 5: Employment Opportunities

Communities	Before EST. of the Park (X ₁)	After EST. of the Park (X ₂)	Total
Obung	23(43.40)	20(37.74)	43(81.13)
Aking	15(53.57)	9(32.14)	24(85.71)
Nisan	18(51.43)	11(31.43)	29(82.86)
Orem	6(42.86)	5(34.71)	11(18.57)
Total	62(47.69)	45(82.31)	107(82.31)

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 5 showed that 83.31% of respondents sampled were of the opinion that the number of indigenes engaged in gainful employment had increased after the establishment of the Park compared to the 47.69% of those who felt that the situation has not changed.

Responses from Park Staff

Challenges of Ecotourism Development in Oban Division of Cross River National Park

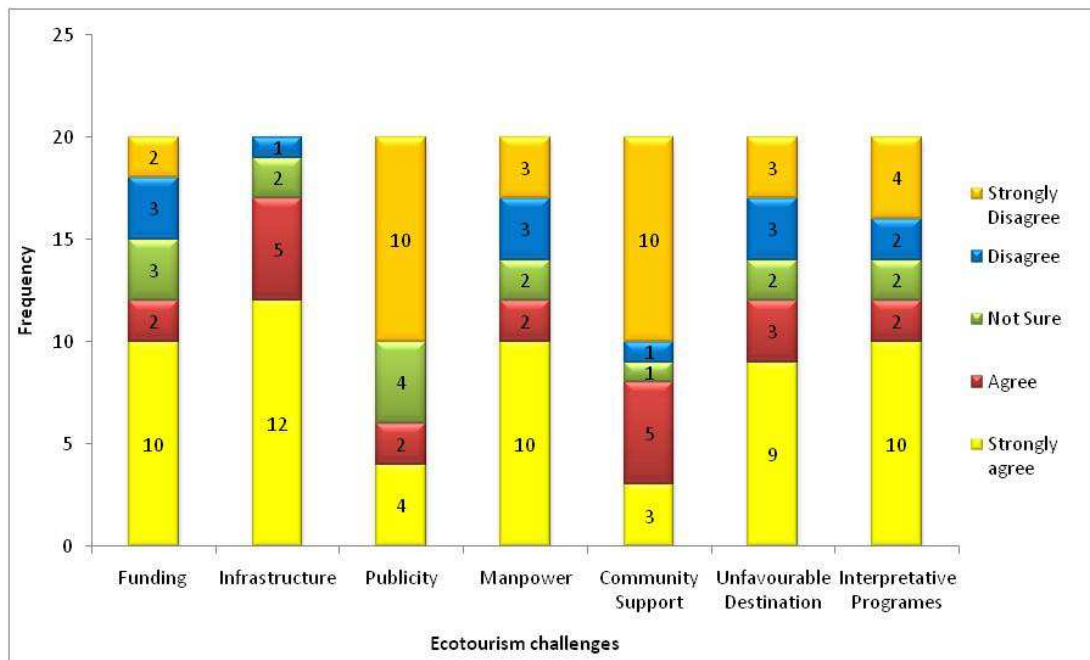


Figure 2: Challenges of Ecotourism Development

Results from the opinions of twenty (20) staff of the park on the challenges of ecotourism development showed that inadequate infrastructure (17%) was the greatest challenge, followed manpower (12%), inadequate funding (12%). Poor interpretive programmes as well as unfavourable destination were also reported as challenges. However, community support/participation (11%) was not considered by respondents as a challenge.

3.2.2. Park Finances

Table 6: Cross River National Park Allocation Profile (2010 – 2014)

Year	Personnel	Overhead	Capital	Total
2010	190,331,937.67	102,056,874.05	-	292,388,811.72
2011	243,137,160.94	116,314,116.18	-	359,451,277.12
2012	82,216,311.92	107,310,165.91	11,740,940.00	201,267,417.83
2013	-	83,299,588.00	255,871,994.00	339,171,582.00
2014	-	56,441,846.00	88,311,806.11	144,753,652.11
Total	515,685,410.53	465,422,590.14	355,924,740.11	1,337,032,740.78

Source: CRNP Annual Reports

A review of the allocation of funds to the park for a period of 5 years (Table 6) showed that ₦1.337bn was received by the Park as both capital and recurrent allocation during the period. There was a drop in the overall allocations from ₦292.388m in 2010 to ₦144.75m in 2014. Capital allocations were only released to the Park in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Generally, allocations were below proposed estimates submitted by the Park during the period.

Lodging Facilities and Tourist Inflow

Table 7: Tourist/Inflow of Visitors (2010 – 2014)

YEAR	Domestic						Foreigner				Grand Total
	Official	Students	Pupils	Children	Adult	Total	Student	Children	Adult	Total	
2010	80	416	66		86	648	1		6	7	655
2011		868		20	96	984	2	1	16	19	1003
2012		775	103	1	86	965			16	16	981
2013		643	131		166	940			12	12	952
2014		948	155		268	1371			29	29	1400
Total	80	3650	455	21	702	4908	3	1	79	83	4991

Source: CRNP Annual Reports

Lodging Facilities

The Oban Division of Cross River National Park provides modest lodging facilities for tourists at the Erokut Park Entry Gate about 30km from the Park Head Office in Akamkpa. Forty (40) completed chalets are presently available for tourists. However, basic facilities including regular water supply, constant electricity, and other basic needs are lacking.

Inflow of Visitors to the Division from 2010 – 2014

A total of 4,991 visitors were in the Park between 2010 and 2014 as shown in Table 7. Out of this number, 83 were foreigners while 4908 were local visitors.

DISCUSSIONS

Awareness and Level of Participation

There was a unanimous agreement by respondents that the communities are aware of the existence of Cross River National Park. This is due to effective campaigns and sensitization programmes carried out by park officials and other Non-Government Organization (NGOs). Consequently, the communities have shown that they were not only aware of the park and its activities but also of the benefits of conserving the natural resources in their localities.

The level of participation of the communities in conservation projects was poor due to the limitation of participation to passive, consultative and the provision of material incentives. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that though Forest Management Committees were established by the park to represent the communities, these committees were mere paper works without functional structures.

Like many other areas of rural development, conservation has been characterized by very different interpretations of participation. Some typologies of participation include the following;

Passive Participation: People participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened.

Participation by Consultation: People participate by being consulted, and external agents listen to views.

Participation for Material Incentives: People participate by providing resources, for example, labor in return for food, cash or other material incentives.

Interactive Participation: People participate in the joint analysis which leads to action, plans and the formation of new local groups or the strengthening of the existing ones.

However, reflected that participation was very poor and limited to passive, consultative and incentive levels.

Local participation is expected to include the empowerment and involvement of communities in decision-making, implementation and identifying local problems (France, 1998) as well as introducing something that is adapted to local needs (Lea, 1988).

Effective participation is regarded as something which is very essential and that should be encouraged because it makes the planning process more effective, equitable and legitimate, as long as those who participate are representative of the whole community and are capable of looking after collective interests as well as those of their own group. Ideally, community participation should lead to community economic development which 'calls for citizens to shape their local economies by influencing the type of business, industry, and employment opportunities in their own backyards' (Roseland, 2005).

It, therefore, involves designing development in a way that encourages intended beneficiaries to be at the forefront and participate in their own development, by mobilizing their own resources, making their own decisions and defining their own needs and how to meet those (Stone, 1989). Furthermore, community participation is seen as a useful tool for educating locals about their rights, laws and political good sense, and, therefore, it is very important for public education (Tosun, 2000).

Challenges of Ecotourism Development

Some of the major challenges of ecotourism development in Oban Division of Cross River National Park have earlier been highlighted as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure and publicity, low level of manpower and ineffective interpretive programmes.

There are no interpretative programmes in the Park except for a few signposts and boards at the Park's head office in Akamkpa. A tourist can patiently take a walk into the rainforest in any part of the Park under the direction of a Park Guide.

Inadequate funding was a serious weakness in Cross River National Park. There was a significant drop in the overall allocations to the park from 292.388m in 2010 to 144.75m in 2014.

Generally, allocations were below proposed estimates submitted by the park. The worst situation was reflected in capital allocations which were only released to the park in 2012, 2013 and 2014. Funding was not considered adequate to conduct critical management activities. This is defined as any management activities that prevent irreplaceable or unacceptable losses to natural or cultural resources. Inadequate funding has erupted to other management problems, including inadequate field equipment, transportation, and facilities.

Underfunding of protected areas appears to be a systemic problem in other parts of the world. It has been documented that protected areas across Africa and Latin America are managed on less than US\$110 per square kilometer (km²), far less than the generally accepted US\$210 per km² needed to adequately manage tropical parks. Spergel (2002) had identified a variety of potential financing mechanisms for protected areas. These include annual government allocations; park visitor fee, resource extraction and hunting; taxes on property and gasoline; fines from illegal activities; carbon emissions trading; international donor contributions; conservation trust funds as well as debt for nature swaps.

The major staffing weakness in the park was the number of staff as reflected in annual reports of the park during the period of investigation. Lack of funding was the indirect cause of this shortfall in staff strength. Inadequate staffing is not limited to Cross River National Park alone. Rao and colleagues (2002), for example, found that 1% of Myanmar's parks had no staff at all, while 40% had some staff but not enough to adequately perform management duties. Similarly, Singh (1999) reported that 10% of India's national parks and 13% of its wildlife sanctuaries did not have staff allocated to them. Numerous other studies (Brandon *et al.* 1998, Therborgh *et al.* 2002) corroborate that inadequate staffing is a widespread phenomenon in many protected area systems.

CONCLUSIONS

The communities have shown that they were not only aware of the park and its activities but also of the benefits of conserving the natural resources in their various communities. The level of participation of the communities in conservation projects was poor due to the limitation of participation to passive, consultative and the provision of material incentives. There was a significant drop in the overall allocations to the park from 292.39m in 2010 to 144.75m in 2014. Inadequate funding was therefore, a serious weakness in Cross River National Park. It was recommended that sufficient funds should be made available to the park to overcome some challenges associated with poor funding.

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