

National Park System In Tourism Development: Yankari National Park,
Nigeria

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Abstract

The importance of National Park System as source of revenue generation for a country cannot be over emphasized. Many countries with well developed National Parks have continued to use them to boost their economy. Such countries include Kenya, Indonesia, Isreal, Gambia and some other countries of the world. But in Nigeria, despite the presence of eight National Parks and numerous Game reserves scattered all over, the country has continued to depend on the exportation of petroleum products for revenue generation. This is because only two of the National Parks have been developed for the promotion of tourism in the country. The problem is that Nigerian government is yet to recognize the importance of National Parks in tourism development. Given the economic benefits being derived from Yankari National Park, one of the developed National Parks, it is evident that the National Park system can constitute an important source of revenue generation for the country. This paper, therefore discusses the role of National Park System in tourism development in Nigeria using Yankari National Park as a case study.

Introduction

The National park system has become very popular all over the world. The reason is that many countries have discovered its important roles in the preservation, conservation and propagation of important natural cultural heritage "for the enjoyment of people" (W T O, 1992). It has also been discovered that the system can be self-financing and has the

potential to sustain rural economy while ensuring ecological balance. Therefore, National parks have unique attributes that are vital for the development of tourism in any country. In fact, it has made ecotourism grow “in influence and importance with man’s understanding of his environment and more importantly the role it plays in its improvement and demise” (Lawan, 2001:15).

In Nigeria, for instance, there are eight National parks and over 20 Game Reserves that cut across various geographical and ecological regions. However, the general observation shows that the various reserves are yet to be fully developed to the standard required to promote tourism. If well developed, National Parks can be exploited for domestic and international tourism (Aremu, 2001:30). Yankari National Park, the focus of this paper, can make important contributions to the development of tourism in Nigeria if well harnessed. Situated within the drier north, the park has distinctive species of wildlife, archaeological and historical features that will provide worthwhile experience to visitors. Data collected during visits to Yankari national park were used to compliment library sources that gave rise to this research.

Background Information

The idea of “setting aside of reserves and parklands for the protection of the landscape” and its plants and animals” is not new (Oladele 2000: 4). The practice had for centuries been a common feature in many societies/cultures. Howbeit, the designation of areas as National Parks was first recorded with the establishment of the Yellow Stone National Park in United States of America, which was declared a National park by the US Congress in 1872. Since then interest in the natural environment and its content has continued to increase in almost every part of the world. Today, the number of National parks has increased to about 1510 in 169 countries including Nigeria (Uhuegbu 1998 in Aremu, 2000: 52). Brayer (1975 in Oladele 2000: 5) has also reported that the oldest park in Africa was established between 1933 and 1934.

However, the concept of National Parks is a relatively recent development in Nigeria. Lawan (2001: 16)) reports that it was only in 1979 that Nigeria’s first National Park (Kainji Lake) was established following “the Promulgation of Decree 49 of 1979. This became necessary after the establishment of the Nigerian Tourist Board via Decree No. 54 of 1976, which took effect in 1978 (Alabi, 2001:37). But the actual development of National parks for ecotourism purposes did not

start until 1991 when Yankari National Park was established by Decree No. 36. This was in reaction to the launching of the tourism policy on July 10, 1990 that accorded tourism a certain degree of government recognition in Nigeria's economy. The Old Oyo National Park followed thereafter. Other National Parks that were subsequently established include Chad Basin, Cross River and Gashaka National Parks. With the establishment of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation two additional National Parks (Okomu and Kamuku) were created in 1999 through Decree 46 bringing the number to eight (Ayodele, 2001: 120, 136). However, the Yankari National Park eventually became the first developed National Park in Nigeria (Lawan, 2001:15).

Today, Nigeria can boast of eight National parks. But it is unfortunate that up till now only two of the parks, Yankari and Kainji lake National parks have been developed to assume the status of a National park (Ekechukwu, 2006:190). However, efforts are being made to develop Okomu and Cross River National Parks by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in collaboration with the government of Edo and Cross River State respectively.

National Park System in Tourism Development

As contained in the Nigeria's National Parks Brochure, the following are the primary roles of national parks in national and regional development.

1. Enhancement of ecological processes and life support systems such as soil regeneration and protection of nutrient cycles
2. Environmental protection and the indigenous genetic resources which are the basis for any meaningful improvement in agricultural development or production.
3. Scientific research and educational development, especially in agriculture, medicine, psychology, spiritualism etc.

It is therefore evident that National Parks are important contributors to the primary function of tourism in the area of preservation, conservation and propagation of important natural and cultural heritage for posterity. The natural and cultural heritage of a country refers to those unique resources ranging from wildlife, wild vegetations, landscapes, geological formations to historical sites of particular scientific and aesthetic value. In most countries some of these unique endowments are protected through the development of National Parks and Game Reserves.

It means that the National Park system is an important aspect of ecotourism. It can be argued that ecotourism cannot develop meaningfully without the development of National Parks and other protected areas. In other words, since the National Parks are tourist destinations where some scenic features can be appreciated, their development is essential for ecotourism and tourism development in general. Therefore, the National Park System is perhaps the reason ecotourism is regarded as a “powerful instrument for conservation of the world natural and cultural heritage (Lascurian 1991:33). Tourism in National Parks and other protected areas can serve as a tool for conservation” (WTO, 1992).

National Parks and other protected areas also play economic role. According to Boo (1991:4), ecotourism is a conscious attempt to integrate conservation with economic development. In fact, most countries have discovered that apart from the conservation function of tourism, it also has the potential to sustain the rural economy. Lascurian (1991:34) in recognition of this assertion, adds that ecotourism “represents a practical and effective means of attaining ... economic improvement for all countries”. This is also true of tourism in National Parks and other reserved areas. As Oladele (2000:3) rightly noted “what draws foreign tourist to Nigeria mostly is the wildlife resources”. He observes that tourists/visitors do not come to Nigeria to see magnificent buildings and other developments found in Nigerian cities, rather what attract them into the country are “those things deposited by nature, that may not be available in their own countries”. Indeed Nigeria is endowed with unique natural and cultural resources that are capable of stimulating the flow of tourists into the country.

Some of these natural and cultural features can be found in the National Parks. Apart from sports, annual festivals such as the masquerade festival, Arugungu fishing festival, business and education etc, National Parks are other important contributors to the flow of tourists/visitors into the country. Unlike the annual festivals and sports, National Parks provide recreational/leisure opportunities for tourists throughout the year. The parks offer the tourism industry a promising recreational/leisure playground for tourists who come into the country for business and other purposes. According to Krippendorf (1991:310) National Parks, especially the most developed ones offer themselves to the tourism industry as promising play grounds, promising success”.

Therefore, when a mention is made of tourism as an income multiplier, reference is also made to the economic role of tourism in National Park. When tourists visit a park, their presence can be a source of business to people around the park. This is because the money they came with is eventually spent within the park in transport and in the provision of other needs or services such as hotel bills, souvenirs etc, thereby increasing the income of the communities where the park is located. McIntosh (1977 in Oladele 2000: 11) defined income multiplier as “the increase in income resulting from each dollar injected into the economy of a region”. Oladele (2000:11) “is also of the view that income multiplier is as a result of the money injected into the economy by tourists who came from other countries or other towns of the same country”. Oladele (2000: 16) reports that “about 88.51 percent of traders interviewed at” contiguous locations to Yankari and Kainji National Parks reacted positively to increase in sales anytime visitors to the parks stopped over and made purchases”.

Archer (1991: 16) has also noted that “as the tourist spending seeps its ways through the economy, employment opportunities increase”, and this happens when the “tourism establishments payout wages and salaries to local employees and in addition replenish some of their stocks from local wholesalers and manufacturers, whose turnover are hereby increased”, and in order "to meet this additional demand, more employees may be taken on and/or higher wages paid to the existing labour force”. Lawal (1971: 165) adds that when tourists pay for hotel rooms and part of this amount is used to pay hotel staff, which means increased income for the workers, “there is the tendency for the workers to increase their expenditure on consumer goods and services” which in turn will bring about increase in demand for these goods and services. The increased demand for goods and services will stimulate demand and increase employment provided the staff have the propensity to spend their income and not saving them. This chain reaction explains' the fact that when income increases and there is great propensity to consume, the greater will be the number of employment resulting from a given amount of investment.

However, it is important to' note that tourism expenditure does not only create additional (increased) income for the workers, it is also a source of revenue for the government, since the tourism industry is expected to pay taxes or licence fees to the local or central government. Besides, since the tourists coming into a country will first change their

currency to the local currency to enable them spend their money in the destination country, this may mean an increase in foreign exchange earnings for the host country. This explains why Archer (1991:16) describes tourism expenditure as “invisible export to the host country.

Actually, it is the tourist experience (the experience gained by the tourists during their stay) that represents the export (what the host country has exported) while the expenditure made by the tourists represents imports for the host country. Even the items bought which will be taken home by the tourists can as well represent goods exported from the host country to other countries (Oladele, 2000: 65, 66). In most African countries as well as developed countries, tourism in National Parks has brought about a remarkable growth in their economy as reflected on the Gross National Product (GNP) and Balance of Payment Receipt on annual basis (Oladele, 2001:65, 66 and Akehurst, 1992:218, 219). For instance, because Kenya was determined to conserve the values of her wildlife, they realized US \$36 million, \$83 and \$146 million from wildlife tourism in 1970, 1977 and 1979 respectively (Ayeni et.al 1982 in Aremu, 2001:32). Since then, “the development of wildlife based-tourism has placed tourism as the second largest foreign exchange earner in Kenya” (Oladele, 2000: 13). This is also the case in Gambia, Israel, Indonesia and some other countries of the world (Ailemen, 2006:120). This shows that with proper development, ecotourism can boost the growth of tourism in general.

Tourism in National Parks can also be a significant employer of labour through the provision of “job opportunities for the people as tourist officers, tourist guides, stewards and/or receptionists at tourist centres, such as in museums and hotels etc” located in the park (Aremu, 2001:75). As a matter of fact, “the encouragement of tourism is often seen by policy makers as particularly useful way” of combating, unemployment because many of the jobs have a relatively low skill required and may be especially suited to young people” (Peter and Barry, 1992:6). A survey conducted by Oladele (2000:81) shows that out of the 200 staff members in Yankari National Park 180 are from the contiguous local area. Others include Kainji National Park 182 out of 300, Cross River National Park 192 out of 200 and Old Oyo National Park 30 out of 55 staff members. And as noted earlier, the parks also provide indirect employment for those not opportuned to be employed into any of the direct services as the park creates opportunities for them to market their

goods and services that help to promote tourism activities within and outside the park such as transportation of tourists to and fro.

Apart from the provision of employment opportunities, it has also been stressed that tourism can be an important factor in the development of the rural communities, a function that is performed through the establishment and development of National Parks, In other words, the provision of tourist facilities and the physical development of tourist attractions can have profound influence on the local communities in which they are located. Also the provision of basic amenities such as good roads, water, electricity, communication, transportation etc will not only improve the touristic values of such centres but can as well help to accelerate the development of the communities including the neighbouring ones (Eze-Uzomaka, 2006:112). For instance, the completion of the 45 million electricity project signed by the Federal Government in 1996 that linked the Wikki tourist camp of Yankari National Park to the national electricity grid line has no doubt provided “all the tangible and intangible benefits to its surrounding communities in Bauchi State and the nation at large. Such a connection has helped to promote rural industrialization at appropriate technological and small scale levels in these areas”.

In fact, the provision of these basic necessities of life has always been the basis of development in any community. A community without portable pipe born water, good roads, electricity, etc cannot make much progress in her developmental effort especially in the area of rural industrialization. Like other industries that require factories and machines before production could commence, government must provide the enabling environment for tourism to thrive (Folorunso, 2001:45). The strategies government must adopt in the development of tourism in Nigeria include the provision of these basic infrastructural facilities, so that the touristic values of the parks can be fully exploited.

It is evident that the establishment of National Parks is one of the aspects of tourism instrumental in tourism development as contained in the Guidelines on the Development of National Parks and Protected Areas for tourism published by two organizations (UNEP IE/WTO), in 1992. The key element highlighted by the publication is environmental sustainability for which the National Parks system plays a dominant role. The National Parks System is perhaps one of the surest ways of implementing the programme on Sustainable Tourism Development as

contained in Agenda 21 for the travel and tourism industry published in 1995 by the World Tourism Organization.

According to Krippendorf (1991:311) emphasis is now on a new human and environmentally oriented tourism policy, that no longer concentrates on benefits and economy alone but emphasizes “the demand for an unspoiled environment and consideration of the needs of the people, that is, the tourist and the local population”. Krippendorf refers to this kind of tourism as “soft tourism” while the former is termed “hard tourism” Indeed, National Parks have been recognized as one of the important aspects of tourism that have the potentials for the propagation of Sustainable Development all over the world. It is one of the best ways to ensure ecological balance as man continues to enjoy close contact with nature.

Origin, Geography and Tourism Potentials of Yankari National Park

It is important to note that the Kainji Lake National Park was the first park established in Nigeria, however, Yankari National Park eventually became “the first protected area specifically earmarked and developed for ecotourism in Nigeria” (Lawan, 2001: 15). This site was “formerly known as Yankari Forest Reserve, but the then Northern regional Minister of Animal Health and Forest Resources, Mohammadu Ngileruma, Klali directed that it be converted to a Game Reserve in 1956”. In 1991 it was up-graded to a National Park status.

Therefore, the Minister, Alhaji Mohammadu Ngileruma Klali was instrumental in the establishment of the Yankari National Park. According to Ajayi and Milligam (1975) the idea was conceived during his visit to the Sudanese Conservation Areas in early 1950s where he had the opportunity of viewing wild animals in their natural habitat. On his return to the country, he persuaded the government to establish similar reserves in Nigeria. And by 1962, Yankari Game Reserve was opened for public visitation and enjoyment. Thus, it became the first Game Reserve established in Nigeria, followed by the Borgu Game Reserve in 1963 which was later combined with Zugurma Game Reserve to form the Kainji Lake National Park in 1979 (Lawan, 2001:16, Oladele 2000:5).

Yankari National Park falls within the drier north which has a shorter growing season with savanna vegetation of grass and scattered trees (Udo, 1980:14). However, as a result of human occupation and exploitation prevalent in almost every part of Nigeria, the area has been reduced to more open grassland especially towards the Sahel region.

According to Ayodele (2001: 139) and Ekechukwu (2006:190), the park occupies an area of about 2,250 Kilometres and is located in Duguru, Gwana and Pali districts of Alkaleri Local Government Area, about 113km to the River Gongola at Dindima bridge, off Gombe-Bauchi road (Fig. 1 and 2). Oladele (2000:59) adds that the park lies approximately between latitudes $9^{\circ} 20''$ and $10^{\circ} 00''$ North and longitudes $10^{\circ} 15''$ and $10^{\circ} 45''$ East, underlined by sedimentary rocks (tertiary sandstones) to the west of River Gaji and Cretaceous deposits of Shale and sandstones to the east from where five springs, Wikki, Mawalgo, Tungan-Maliki, Gwana and Dimil, are supplied with water.

Figure 1: Entrance gate to the park



Figure 2: the Park's administrative block

The Park's Tourism Potentials

It must be stressed, that the presence of unique features or attractions constitute one of the important considerations for the selection of an area as a National Park. Oladele (2000:9) has also added that there is need for the provision of certain facilities, mainly for recreational purposes, to complement the natural/cultural features in a park. Such facilities include swimming pool, lawn tennis and table tennis courts, ludo, basketball etc as well as accommodation facilities. With these, man is able to relate more meaningfully with the environment both naturally and socially. It is important to note that, other, attractions within a state, town or locality not necessarily inside a park are also important considerations in establishing a National Park.

Some of the important features/facilities in Yankari National Park as reported by Aremu (2000: 54), Oladele (2000: 61) and Ekecukwu (2006:190) are grouped as follows:

- 1. Fauna or Wildlife Resources**
 - a. Numerous populations of wild animals such as lions, buffalos, antelopes, hippopotamus, elephants, baboons, etc.
 - b. Varied species of birds
 - c. Many different fish families
- 2. Archaeological/Historical Sites**
 - a. Faliyaran cave
 - b. Marshal cave (old stone age site)
 - c. Paleolithic Arts at Dwall (Old stone age site)
 - d. Acheulian sites at shamaan hill and Dukkey well (Old stone age site)
 - e. Ampara Iron smelting site (Early Iron age site)
 - f. Delimiri Iron smelting site (Early Iron age site)
 - g. Shaushan Mile 8 Iron smelting site (Early Iron age site)
 - h. Dukkey well, Wikki and Yankari (Historical site)
 - i. Machido palace stone walls (Historical site)

The Faliyaran cave has been identified as the only man made cave in West Africa. Wikki warm spring, the largest of the five springs (Dimil, Gawalگو, Tungan and Maliki) has been developed for recreational purposes (Aremu, 2000:54).

Other touristic facilities include:

- (a) Museum (b) Game viewing (c) . Bird watching

3. Recreational Facilities

- (a) Swimming (b) Boat cruise (c) Squash (d) Table tennis
 (e) Lawn tennis (f) Sport fishing (g) Racket
 (h) Badminton

4. Other Facilities

- a. Modern hotel with 110 chalets of various sizes and grades, students/low income hostels
 b. Activity centre housing the bar and souvenir shop
 c. Reception centre made up of the museum and 140 seat conference hall
 d. Bauchi State presidential hotel or villa inside the park

Visitors Statistics in Yankari National Park

The visitors statistics provided at Yankari National Park show that about 235, 021 foreign tourists visited the park from over ninety-eight (98) countries between 1985 and 1997 (Aremu, 2000: 61). Lawan (2001: 17) added that “between 1984 and 1993, a total of 205, 904 tourists visited the park. Of these 147, 114 were Nigerians, making up 71% of the total tourists and 58, 790 or 29% were foreign tourists from 92 nations throughout the world”,

Furthermore, a total number of 374,133 tourists visited the park between 1985 and 2003, and the highest was recorded in 1985 and the lowest in 1998. -The breakdown shows that out of the 374,133 tourists, 296, 450 were Nigerians while 77,683 were foreigners from over 100 nations representing 79.2% and 20.8% respectively. The state of tourist flow and revenue generation in Yankari National Park can form the basis for comparism concerning what happens in other parks. Being the only relatively developed park in Nigeria, apart from the Kainji national park, it is likely to offer more attraction to tourist than the less developed ones. Consequently, the less developed parks are likely to receive less visitors, since no tourist would want to visit a place where there are limited leisure/ recreational facilities. However, since 2005 the number of foreigners that visit the parks has continued to decrease because of the problem of insecurity of life and property in the country. But with the government effort to combat insecurity in the country, it is hoped that the situation will be reversed in no distant time.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted to identify and highlight some of the roles of the national park system in the development of tourism. Parks contribute immensely in preservation and conservation of important fauna, flora as well as cultural resources for the benefit of mankind in the area of culture, research and education. They help to boost national and local economy through revenue generation and the provision of employment for the rural populace. The provision of social amenities to the parks is certainly one of the quickest ways of developing the rural areas. And being self financing, part of the revenue generation can be used to develop other aspects of tourism.

The above assertion is particularly true in those countries where ecotourism is properly developed and managed, otherwise the benefits that accrue from the park system will be little felt as it is the case in Nigeria today. However, given the tourism potentials of the parks, Nigeria can benefit immensely from ecotourism development. If Kenya and some other African countries can benefit so much from ecotourism development, how much more Nigeria with her vast natural and cultural resources that are scattered all over the country. It is not that Nigeria lacks the resources with which to develop them, but the problem is certainly that of the inability of the successive governments in Nigeria to appreciate or recognize the very importance of tourism in national development.

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