

## POTENTIALS OF DEVELOPING THE CROSS RIVER STATE NATIONAL PARK AS AN ECOTOURISM RESORT, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The study examines the likely benefits of developing the Cross River State National Park (CRSNP) as an ecotourism resort. The simple random sampling technique was used to select three villages adjoining the national park, 358 respondents across the selected villages were administered copies of questionnaire. In addition, accidental sampling technique was used to sample 17 staff of the park. Data obtained from the administered questionnaire were analysed using tables, frequencies and chi square. The result showed that developing and investing in the CRSNP would bring enormous economic growth in trade and industries, as its development would attract industries, firm and commercial activities to the area. The chi square result revealed that the development of CRSNP as an ecotourism resort result would enhance wildlife conservation and as well as speed up the economic development of host communities ( $p < 0.05$ ). The result further revealed that insufficient funding, lack of full local participation and lack of facilities were the major problems affecting the CRSNP from realizing its untapped potentials. In order to explore and maximize the potentials imbedded in the CRSNP, the study suggested the need for public - private partnership as a valuable and indispensable component of sustainable development as well as encouraged the government, corporate bodies and well-to-do individuals to support the viability and performance of the CRSNP as an ecotourism enterprise through effective marketing, education and training.*

**Keywords:** CRSNP, Capital Investment, Socioeconomic Development, Ecotourism, Public-Private Partnership, CRSNP

### INTRODUCTION

In developing countries, ecotourism is an important tool for promoting socioeconomic development and a way of giving nature an economic value. Ecotourism is indeed a more sustainable way to protect the natural environment and create socioeconomic, cultural and ecological benefits for local communities. Despite this, ecotourism when poorly planned and implemented can quickly turn gains into social and environmental disaster (Buchsbaun, 2004), but if adequately planned as well as receives government's development priority, the inherent potentials on the host and adjoining communities as well as the state in particular are enormous. Ecotourism, due to its socioeconomic and ecological importance has continued to gain popularity and acceptance over the past two decades. Regions blessed with natural resources and that have perceived the need to develop and preserve their God's endowed resource have benefitted immensely from it. According to Honey (1999), estimates on the growing importance of ecotourism indicate that its demand is growing at an annual rate of 10 to 30 percent. In this era that ecotourism has assumed such height, Buchsbaun (2004) advised that it is especially important to scrutinize its effectiveness as a strategy for sustainable development, and search for ways to improve policies and practices that will ensure its maximum development.

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In addition, ecotourism has minimal impact on the environment and ensures that host communities maintain their focus of control over natural resource exploitation. In its theoretical and conceptual form, ecotourism provides an ideal sustainable development strategy for communities that depend on natural resources (Wearing, 2001). It can enhance the conservation of natural areas in and around the host community, as well as serve neighbouring communities a source of external capital. The investment in nature-based tourism is particularly relevant to Akamkpa communities where it has been hit hard by the dwindling and degradation effect of quarrying and forestry activities which formally where major employers of labour in the area. The development in this sector of the economic will diversify the economic as well as provide employment opportunities to thousands of indigenes and non-indigenes. It will also have multiple effects on the economy as revenue generated can be used for further conservation as well as develop other areas of the economy.

However, ecotourism depends on fine landscapes, abundant wildlife and richly diverse culture in order to be to be feasible and sustainable. The Cross River State National Park (CRSNP) is a nature-based tourism whose potentials have not been fully explored to complement the state's tourism demands and pursuits. The park lacks facilities and it is not well developed to meet international standards and to attract foreign arrivals as expected. This could among other factors be attributed to the lessen attention government and cooperate individuals accord to this sector. This nature-based tourism asset of the state has not received enough financial support and priority compared to the huge capital government continuous invest in economic and cultural tourism areas like Tinapa, Calabar Carnival Festival and Obudu Cattle Ranch. This has perhaps limited the opportunities the park can offer to adjoining communities and the state in particular. Though the Cross River State Government has developed ecotourism strategies in the past years, but not all have been well integrated into the biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction imperative of the state.

The potentials of national parks on the socioeconomic and cultural development of communities have been reckoned by scholars in the past (Weaver, 1999; Lash, 2003; Buchsham, 2004; Koens et al., 2009), in Africa, several researches on exploring the potentials of their natural assets as an ecotourism resort have been documented (Mbaiwa, 2002; Appeal, 2008), while in Nigeria, only few studies have examined the potentials of ecotourism (Ojo et al, 1979; Oyaklilome, 2005; Bankole and Odularu, 2006; Akpabio et al., 2006; Gbede, 2008) but in Cross River State, there are few quantitative studies that have examined the potentials inherent in the development of the CRSNP. This study based on the background above attempts to examine the inherent potentials of developing in terms of capital investment in the CRSNP as an ecotourism resort.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Area

The Cross River National Park (CRSNP) lies between latitude 5° 05' and 6° 29' N and longitude 8° 15' and 9° 30' E. The park is situated in the south-eastern part of Nigeria in Cross River State. The Park covers a total area of 4000km<sup>2</sup> and segmented into two non-contiguous Divisions – The Oban hills in the Southern part of the Park cover 3000km<sup>2</sup> and the Okwangwo Division in the Northern part of the park covers 1000km<sup>2</sup> ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross\\_River\\_National\\_Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross_River_National_Park)). The park has a total area of about 4,000 km<sup>2</sup>, most of which consists of primary moist tropical rainforests in the North and Central parts, with mangrove swamps on the coastal zones. The CRSNP has one of the oldest rainforests in Africa, and has been identified as a biodiversity hot spot ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross\\_River\\_National\\_Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross_River_National_Park)). The park has a tropical climate characterized by a rainy season between April and November. The annual rainfall is about 2000m-3000m; relative humidity in and around the park is well over 30%. The parks temperature rarely falls below 19<sup>0</sup> C and average of about 27<sup>0</sup> C all year round. The CRSNP is one of the richest areas of tropical rainforest in West Africa, it contains the last remaining ram forest in Nigerian. The park has a herd of forest elephant, buffalo, leopards and low gorillas. Other animal special found in both section include antelope, chimpanzees, high forest monkeys, high forest elephant, manatees and bush pigs. Others are baboon, leopards and gorillas some of which are endangered species which have the park as their last stronghold in the whole West Africa ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross\\_River\\_National\\_Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross_River_National_Park)).

## Types and Sources of Data

The study made use of both primary and secondary data. The primary data included data on the challenges faced by the Cross River State National Park (CRSNP), data on the potentials inherent in the developing the CRSNP, data on the role played by the CRSNP as a resource conservation tool and data on the socioeconomic relevance of the park to people in the area. The secondary data involved the population size of the four selected communities. The aforementioned set of primary data were obtained through the administration of a structured questionnaire to residents adjoining the CRSNP and staff of the park, while secondary data on the population size of selected communities was got from the 1991 national population and then projected to 2010 as there is no breakdown of the 2006 population census.

## Sampling Procedure

The simple random sampling technique was used to select three villages adjoining the national park, out of the six villages found the area. The three selected communities were Nyaye, Osomba, and Oban. In other, however, to sample a fair representation of respondents across the selected villages, the projected population figure was subjected into the formula given by Yamane, (1967) and cited by Israel 2003 as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population figure of the three villages

E = limit of tolerable error (0.05)

This implies that 358 respondents (both males and females) out of 3,431 people in the three communities were sampled. However, after the sample size was determined, the questionnaire was distributed to the communities in relation to their population size, while systematic random sampling technique was employed in the administration of questionnaire due to the poor arrangement and numbering of the houses in the area. Nevertheless, accidental sampling technique was used to administer a set of questionnaire to 17 staff of the park. The staff administered questionnaire cut across Park Protection and Conservation, Park Engineering, and Finance and Administration staff.

## Data Analysis

Data obtained from the administered questionnaire were analysed using tables, frequencies and chi square. Analysis of the data was carried out using SPSS 17.0 software for Windows

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of respondents revealed that 64.3% were males and 35.7% females. The ages showed that 34.1% were between the ages of 15-25, 26.1% and 18.1% were between the age of 36-45 and above 45 respectively. The education of respondents revealed that 12.8% had no formal education; 13.1% had early education and stopped at primary level; 16.5% had post-primary education; 26.4% had post-secondary education ranging from NCE, Diploma-OND; 18.7% had post-secondary education, while 2.7% had post-graduate training. Information on occupational indicated that 36.3% were farmers; 10.7% were traders; 27.2% were students; 20.8% were civil servants; 4.5% were park staff/rangers, while 5.1% constituted individuals engaged in menial jobs like wine tapers, security men, bricklayers among others.

### Potentials of Developing the CRSNP as an Ecotourism Asset

Tables 1 – 3 give vital information on the potentials of developing CRSNP as an ecotourism asset as well as the inherent socioeconomic and conservative benefits associated with its development. Table 1

showed that 25.9% of the respondents held the opinion that developing and investing on the CRSNP would bring enormous economic growth in trade and industries, as its development which attracts several industries, firm and commercial activities. This according to Robert and Thomas (2003) commercialise the existence of value of sensitive ecological regions, protection of forests and generating employments and income at the same time. They argued further that ecotourism through the development of national parks has prospered Costa Rica largely, because, it has made her become more profitable than competing destructive land use such as agriculture, cattle grazing, hunting, logging and conventional mass tourism. In addition, 21.9% believed that improvement on the park would ensure economic stability, in that investing and developing the park to international standard will not only attract tourists, but would diversify the revenue base of the government. It would also provide ready market for our local goods and craft, thereby providing employment opportunities for many at the local level. Furthermore, 52.3% of the respondents believed it would enhance the conservation of resources (both fauna and flora) with a lot of socio-economic, cultural and ecological benefits. In similar way, Naranjo-Barrantes (2007) noted that protected nature areas are very important for a state's economy, and nature conservation plays a fundamental role in the economic development of the country. Its existence and conservation support various socio-economic activities around the area that contributes towards development both at the local, regional and national levels.

Table 1. Inherent potentials of developing the CRSNP

<i>Options</i>	<i>No of respondents</i>	<i>%</i>
Facilitate economic growth	97	25.9
Ensure economic stability	82	21.9
Enhance resources conservation	196	52.3
Total	375	100

Still on the potentials of developing the CRSNP, table 2 provides information on the benefit of developing CRSNP on the host communities. The result revealed that 24.5% of the respondents were of the opinion that the development of the CRSNP would bring about employment opportunities for their sons and daughters who definitely would be employed as park/range staff; 24% alleged it would help in the generation of income and revenue (salaries and royalties); 12.8% said it would result in the conservation of resources (plant, animal and macro as well as micro-organism); 18.7% were of the

Table 2: Intended socioeconomic impacts of developing the CRSNP on host Communities

<i>Options</i>	<i>No of respondents</i>	<i>%</i>
Employment opportunities	92	24.5
Income/revenue generation	90	24
Conservation of resources	48	12.8
Infrastructural development	70	18.7
Cultural restoration and development	40	10.7
local control of resources	35	9.3
Total	375	100

opinion that the development of the CRSNP would result in infrastructural developments (roads, electricity, schools, hospitals, recreational centres among others); 10.7% believed it would bring about cultural restoration and development (enhancement of local talents such as craft development); 9.3% believed its development would bring about local control of resources (community participation), while 18.9% believed its development would result in all of the option mentioned above. The

findings above agree with earlier studies like those of Koens et al., (2009) that the development of ecotourism in both the Manuel Antonio and the Monteverde regions has stimulated locals to improve their education, medical care and has facilitated communities to gain empowerment. In similar way, Koens et al., (2009) reported that economically, the Manuel Antonio and the Monteverde regions have benefitted from an increase in foreign exchange as a result of tourist spending in hotels, restaurants and souvenirs shops.

Furthermore, table 3 examines the role played by the CRSNP as a resources conservation tool and ecotourism potentials. It shows that investing financially in the CRSNP would help in the creation of national parks for the preservation of biotic resources; creation of reserve areas with the absence of human impact/influence; 21.3% believed its creation would help in the conservation of threatened species; 13.6% of the respondents believed it helps in the maintenance and monitoring of impact carried by anthropogenic activities around the parks, while 13.1% believed its creation helps to provide an ideal environmental condition (ecological importance in and around the park). The result obtained therefore reveals that the development of the CRSNP as an ecotourism asset will facilitate resource conservation and environmental protection, as it will reduce the wanton destruction of forest thereby giving nature an economic value. Burlingame (2000) in a similar study noted that ecotourism helps to diversify the local economy rather than result in a loss of other resource bases.

Table 3: The CRSNP as a resources conservation tool

<i>Options</i>	<i>No. of respondents</i>	<i>%</i>
Creation of national park	121	32.3
Creation of reserved area	74	19.7
Conservation of threatened species	80	21.3
Maintenance and monitoring impact	51	13.6
ideal environmental resource	49	13.1
Total	375	100

### The Challenges Faced By the CRSNP

Table 4 depicts information of some of the problems that affect the CRSNP from exploring its potentials. It identified insufficient funding from government and corporate individuals; the lack of local participation and integration in the management of the park and lack of facilities consequent upon its complete neglect from the government as principal setbacks inhibiting the development of the CRSNP to assume international standard, as well as one of the state's tourism sites.

Table 4. Identified problems inhibiting the ecotourism potentials of CRSNP

<i>Option</i>	<i>No of respondents</i>	<i>%</i>
Insufficient funding	101	26.9
Lack of local participation	120	32
Deforestation around the park	33	8.8
Lack of facilities	81	21.6
Inadequate planning	40	10.7
Total	375	100

These identified problems limit the park from achieving its full potentials as a nature-based tourism asset. The current and subsequent budgets of the state government has not considered or included development of the CRSNP as part of its revenue drive. Indeed, poor funding of the CRSNP makes it more valuable to disintegration. The result above also supports those of James et al.,(1999) when they reported that annual expenditure on protected areas in many developing countries is extremely low and protected areas in tropical regions are under-funded even though they require resources for annual operating budgets, capital investment, staff training, community development and public awareness among a wide range of other activities. In the same position, Meduna et al., (2009) identified insufficient funding, poor salaries for protection staff and lack of equipment as prominent management problems affecting biodiversity conservation in Kainji Lake National Park.

### Effect of Developing the CRSNP on Wildlife Conservation

In the course of this study, the researchers sought to find out if development of the CRSNP as an ecotourism resort would enhance wildlife conservation. In order to achieve this, the chi square test was employed using the data in table 3. The result in table 5 showed that calculated value of 45.253 was significant at probability value of 0.01, which therefore implied that the development of CRSNP as an ecotourism resort would enhance wildlife conservation.

Table 5. Development of CRSNP and wildlife conservation

<i>Model</i>	<i>Calculated value</i>	<i>Critical value</i>	<i>df</i>
Chi-square	45.253*	13.277	4

\*Significant at 1% alpha level.

### Effect of Developing the CRSNP on the Economic Development of Host Communities

The researchers also sought to find out if development of the CRSNP as an ecotourism resort would result in the economic development of host communities. The analysis was carried out using data presented in table 2. The chi square result in table 6 showed that calculated value of 50.488 was significant at probability value of 0.01, which therefore implied that the development of CRSNP as an ecotourism resort result in economic development of host communities.

Table 6: Investing in CRSNP and economic development of host communities

<i>Model</i>	<i>Calculated value</i>	<i>Critical value</i>	<i>df</i>
Chi-square	50.488*	15.086	5

\*Significant at 1% alpha level

The analysis above has evidently revealed that financial investment and development of the CRSNP as an ecotourism resort would impact on host and adjourned communities in numerous ways like the creation of employment opportunities, infrastructural development, income/revenue generation, resources conservation and cultural restoration. The CRSNP when fully explored would help to preserve and conserve biodiversity, which has socio-economic, cultural, political and ecological values. The result revealed that full development and capital investment of government, private individuals in the CRSNP would enhance the social and economic development of communities concerned and the state as well. The research shows that lack of local participation, insufficient funding and lack of facilities were the major problems affecting the CRSNP from realizing its untapped potentials.

### CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

It is imperative to conclude here that the future of ecotourism in Cross River State is bright and the challenges great as well. However, for accelerated development of the CRSNP, there is an urgent need for government, the private sector and the general public to pool resources together in order to maximize the gains from the development of the CRSNP goldmine as an ecotourism resort. However, to explore and tap the potentials imbedded in the CRSNP, the following are suggested:



- a. There is also need for public private partnership, for we live in a global village and a world of interdependence. Public-private sector partnership is a valuable and indispensable component of sustainable development.
- b. The government, corporate bodies and well-to-do individuals should support the viability and performance of the CRSNP as an ecotourism enterprise through effective marketing, education and training.
- c. To explore the potentials of the CRSNP, there must be a positive government support; as for a successful tourism development, government leads while the private sector follows.

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