

STATE PARK SYSTEM: A FRAMEWORK FOR DOMESTIC ECOTOURISM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

On global scale tourism is the leading export earner. The World Tourism Organization statistics revealed that international arrival for the year 2000 was 653 million people. This excludes arrival for domestic tourism, which was projected to be ten times more than international tourists (Brackenhury 2000). The reality of economic benefits from tourism prompted the creation of Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism with an emphasis on domestic ecotourism. The goal was to stimulate local interest in tourism at the preserved ecological zones as expressed in section seven of the nation's cultural policy. While section 7.13 of the policy emphasized the role of government in promoting and encouraging domestic tourism, section 7.20 implored the States to establish parks, game reserves and beaches for recreation.

State parks are created to preserve areas of ecological, historical and scenic values. They occupy a pivotal position between National Parks and Local Government Parks in a typical three tier governmental system. In state parks conservation and recreation are compatible land uses. The aim of sustainable state park system is planning and managing ecological resources at the grass root for the educational, economic, recreational and environmental benefits of the people without jeopardizing the same benefits for future generations. This permits conservation – recreation symbiotic concept. It is a concept that explores the principle of ecosystem management, resource preservation and friendly tourism services. The preserved area has minimum human impact and is exclusive for public management. At the buffer zone series of park support services are planned for private participation while the park front country made up of interpretation center and transportation system is opened to public-private partnership.

INTRODUCTION

Section seven of the nation's cultural policy focused on parks and domestic tourism development. (Aik-Imoukhede 1991). While section 7.13 emphasized the role of the government in promoting and encouraging domestic tourism, section 7.20 implored States to establish parks, game reserves and beaches for recreation. Nigeria is a federation of 36 States with local government councils as the smallest administrative units. The State Government occupies a pivotal middle position. They relate to a variety of Federal Government ministries, agencies and corporations identifying social, economic and cultural needs of the citizens on one hand and implementing fiscal programs directed to local government councils and individuals at the grassroots. The cultural policy recognized parks as one of such socio cultural infrastructures expected on the three level hierarchies, that is, National Parks, State Parks and Local Government Parks. While national park system is already established, state parks are yet to be constituted.

State Parks are generically public land areas set aside for purposes beneficial to the people. The definition of state parks varies and is often influenced by the prevailing socio-cultural development of the nation. For the purpose of this paper, United States of America, Department of Parks definition as stated by Dechiara & Koppelman (1982) will be assumed. State Parks are referred to as *“relatively spacious areas of outstanding scenic and wilderness character, often – times containing also significant historical, archeological, ecological, geological and other scientific values preserved as nearly as possible in their original or natural condition and providing opportunity for appropriate types of recreation where such will not destroy or impair the features and values to be preserved. Commercial exploitation of resources is usually prohibited”*. This definition identified state parks as land and water resources, selected, developed, managed for conservation and recreational purposes.

According to Lawson and Baud – Bovey (1977) recreation is programmed activities people are engaged during leisure time. Such activities may be passive or active. When the activities involve traveling and staying for more than twenty-four hours then recreation becomes tourism. Tourism therefore includes recreational pursuits that involve traveling and lodging over night out of a living quarter. The sub sector of tourism industry that takes place in conserved areas has of

recent taken a center stage in rural economic development. Such nature oriented tourism ,also known as ecotourism, is what Fuller (1997) defined as ‘a visit to any tourism area with the purpose to study, enjoy and appreciate the scenery, natural social as well as the life style of the local people, based on the knowledge about and responsibility for ecological system of the area’.

The paper explores the conceptual framework for the constitution of scenic landscapes and transformation of some degraded forest reserves, amenity forest areas, wildlife sanctuary into State Parks.

NATURAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION.

Land budgeting for natural use including agriculture, range management, dams and related hydrological purposes, mining, adventurous recreation, conservation and forestry are related to the existing developmental economic policy. A typical example is forest reservation. Forest reserves are constituted primarily to support local economy through active timber industry. While fulfilling this objective, degradation of the ecosystem emerges as major by product. Uncoordinated logging degrades the forest, reduces biodiversity, destroys wildlife habitat and often leads to over exploitation of culturally favored species. This is particularly true of the nation’s forests under reservation. The destructive impact of uncoordinated logging and mismanagement of other natural land resources had reduced the national forest area to less than 9.6% of the total 913,000 square kilometers land area (Okojie and Akande 1995). The long term effect manifests in biodiversity index reduction. Adewoye (1998) observed that 484 plant species of the nation’s 4, 6000 flora are on extinction list. The situation report of the nation’s wildlife resources is equally frightening. Lost of habitat, high national poverty index induced appetite for ‘bush meat’ and economic benefits from trading in priced living fauna constitute threat to the wildlife. 25 animal species including primates are endangered. The total recorded bird species in Nigeria is eight hundred and eighty seven. Twenty one of these are at the verge of extinction (Obot 1999).

Afforestation and re-afforestation programs have always been the defense of timber companies for the continuous exploitation of the forest areas. The effectiveness of these programs on Nigeria’s reserved forests is yet to be felt since plantation forests rely heavily on exotic species especially Tectona grandis and Gmelina arborea. Conservation on the other hand stands to reverse the destructive logging process and save the environment for posterity. Conservation as an environmental management tool seeks to reverse the process of forest resources degradation;

increase the biodiversity of preserved landscapes; create a conducive environment for the return of threatened species; restore the environment for archeological, historic, and cultural posterity; and introduce passive recreation for the mental and spiritual welling of the people. Conservation is very relevant to the sustainable development paradigm. It is an acceptable fact that forests need to be sustainably managed to provide a range of products and social services perpetually. This is particularly necessary in developing nations of the world where means of livelihood is directly dependent on the natural resources. It is apparent that emphasis on timber industry supported by active forestland has minimum consideration for the future. As Crossley et al (1996) rightly observed convectional forest practices must be improved upon from the current objective of maximum yield towards sustainability. Sustainability in forestry takes a deeper look at efficient use and conservation of the forest ecosystem.

The desire to prevent further abuse of our forest resources culminated in to the 1985 National Conservation Strategy Seminar (Aladejana 1985). The focus was on drawing up a framework for integrating conservation in national development policy. Conservation, preservation and reservation of wilderness, scenic landscapes, fragile ecosystem and area of historic and archeological interest were some of the measures instituted. By year 2001 eight National Parks were created through decree 36 including Kanji Lake, Chad Basin, Cross River, Gashaka Gumpti, Old Oyo, Yankari and Okomu . While conservation was the primary goal of these parks, rural socio- economic development through capacity building of support villages, environmental education and development of ecotourism industry were the secondary goals. Historic overview traced the eight National Parks to state or similar administrative units forest reserves (Afolayan and Ajayi, 1983). Yankari National Park was Nigeria's premier game reserve established in 1956. According to Ajayi and Milligan (1975) this 2240 square kilometers park was originally a forest reserve in pre-independence Bauchi province (The survey of Borgu area wild life in 1961 paved way for the Borgu game reserve under the provincial forestry department in 1964. By 1991 it was taken over by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development and reconstituted as Kanji Lake National Park. The 7th National Park Okomu National Park was originally a 112 square kilometers wildlife sanctuary located in the core of Okomu forest reserve and administered by Edo State Forest service. The remaining parks followed the same pattern.

The evolution of National Parks from state, provincial forest reserves, wildlife sanctuaries or game reserves is not peculiar to Nigeria. The State Park movement in the United States of America preceded that of the Federal Government as shown in the transformation of 1864 State of California Yosemite Park to Yosemite National Park (Godby Geoffrey 1978). Whereas National Parks in the U.S.A., evolved from State Park systems, National Parks in Nigeria so far evolved from forest reserves originally constituted for the extraction of economic trees. This is probably due to sudden termination of democratic process in 1966 that led to the introduction of unitary government as against the three-tier system. A void was created and the natural resources management taken away from the grass root. The recent clamor by the government of Bauchi State for the return of Yankari National Park testifies to the desire of states to manage resources at their disposal as expected in true federalism. Irrespective of the evolutionary pattern National Parks followed in the two countries, three facts are established. First, the Federation System of Governance practiced in United States of America that we now operate allows for National, State and Local Government Park Systems. Secondly, conservation is still the primary goal for these parks. Finally compatible ecotourism facilities are usually introduced to meet the needs of visitors in search of nature based suburban leisure centers. It is interesting to note that the encouragement for the establishment of recreation demonstration areas in the state park system by the U.S.A. Federal Government took place in the 1930s – the period of acute economic depression (Godby Geoffrey 1978). The objective was not only getting regional recreation centers close to cities but also to create jobs for rural dwellers. This seems to be at par with the decision of the Federal Government of Nigeria at this period of economic recession to create Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The Minister of Culture and Tourism is currently promoting domestic tourism, which is meeting the recreation, and leisure services at the grassroots. State Park System may be a better fertile ground to sow the seed of domestic ecotourism.

It is interesting to note the place of outdoor recreation in conserved landscapes. The compatibility of ecotourism and conservation as land uses is based on physical, social and economic symbiotic relationship. Ecotourism is a land use whose location is dictated by two broad site variables namely functional resources and landscape resources. While functional resources address conducive social, political and economic parameters for profitable management, landscape resources examine nature's gift that will accommodate recreation services. The argument for tourism in natural parks is hinged on the following:

- There is minimum destruction on the landscape
- It will boost the local economy
- Creation of employment opportunities in rural areas.
- Financial benefits from ecotourism can be ploughed back into conservation
- The same resources conservation seeks to preserve are the same resources outdoor recreation needs to draw visitors.

Sourcing fund for conservation projects is one of the major reasons that strengthened ecotourism - conservation relationship. All over the world and especially developing nations, financing sustainable forestry project is a major concern in recent years. According to FAO(2004), governments budget for forestry projects are falling. At the same time forest products prices are in decline. Thus there is a need for creative sustainable forestry financing mechanism. Ecotourism industry is one of such friendly industry compatible to forestry management. As noted by FAO (2004) ecotourism assumed the second largest source of forestry program funding. Funding from ecotourism is particularly important for biodiversity conservation and protected area management. Revenue for ecotourism often comes from three sources namely, entry fees, license fees from commercial tourism operators and public-private joint ventures. Developed nations of the world including United Kingdom have successfully commercialized forest recreation.

Domestic ecotourism industry is currently receiving national attention as an alternative rural economic empowerment strategy. This is due to the huge annual financial returns from tourism industry in recent years. The World Tourism Organization (W.T.O.) statistics revealed that International arrival (i.e. international tourist) for the year 2000 was 653 million (Brackenbury 2001). This excludes arrival for domestic tourism, which is projected to be ten times more than international arrival. On global scale tourism is the leading export earner. In the year 2000 tourism generated an income of US\$4476 billion and contributed 7% of the world G.D.P. (De Villiers 2000). As far back as 1987, W.T.O. record indicated that Kenya and Togo earned US\$ 344 million and US\$ 40 million respectively. That amounts to 36% and 18% of the total export and 4.6% and 4.1% respectively of the G.D.P. In comparison Nigeria with a 1987 population of 80 million earned a pittance of US\$ 78 million, which was 1% of her annual export and 2% of her G.N.P. The reality of economic benefits from tourism prompted the creation of Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism with an emphasis on domestic tourism. The interest of the

present administration in tourism encouraged the hosting of the 38th meeting and seminar of WTO/CAF on the 26th April 2002 with the theme “Ecotourism a Tool for Sustainable Development”. The goal was to stimulate tourism in preserved ecological zones in the three-tier administrative level. Facilitating tourism in preserved natural areas demands a bioregional model that takes into consideration ecological carrying capacity. This is necessary to proactively minimize environmental impact especially in a society with a high growth rate. This paper examines a public-private sector frame work for the establishment of state park that accommodates nature tourism on a domestic scale.

STATE PARK SYSTEM - DEVELOPMENTAL STRATEGY

The principal criteria for State Park selection include unique scenes, historic, geologic and bio diverse features. The type of recreation and leisure services to be introduced in a State Park will usually depend on the following inter-related factors namely conservation goal, visual quality, primary site features, vulnerability to development and the driving socio-political policies. The later, socio-political decision, play major role in the final analysis. Four overlapping steps will be discussed in the realization of state park system.

Philosophy: The first step towards sustainable State Park is a well-articulated philosophy. This is a visionary driving force embedded in the policy to keep alive the goals and objectives of the land use for generations. The deeply held view of the Province of Ontario - Park System is a “natural enclave for healthful enjoyment and appreciation” (Government of Canada 1970). Within this philosophy is the conservation, recreation and tourism master plan. Federal Government of Nigeria in this democratic dispensation desire to explore tourism especially ecotourism to partake of the 77.3 million projected tourist arrivals in Africa by the year 2020 (W.T.O. 2001) The National Park service (NPS) is created to be the arrow head of this economic drive. Unfortunately NPS had no foundation to accommodate profitable ecotourism industry. The effectiveness of NPS in this new dispensation of viable governmental parastatal demand flexible ecotourism master plan for each of the 8 National Parks. State park system needs a philosophy that respects the social needs of the people, accommodates economic viability, allow for cultural dynamism, protects the biodiversity and improves life expectancy of Nigerians.

State Park Authority: At the national level, National Park Service, a parastatal in the Ministry of Environment is saddled with the responsibility of administering the eight national parks. There is

equally a need for an independent organization at the state level to midwife the park system. Such organisation should be independent of State Ministries of Environment, Agriculture, Natural Resources and Tourism. The agency should be responsible for the following:

- Defining State Park system policies in line with the long-term social, economic and Cultural policies of the state.
- Acquisition of appropriate land areas for all categories of State Parks
- Production of each State Park Master plan bearing in mind resource analysis, park support communities and recreation demand of each city.
- Development, management and research works of each park including private participation mechanism
- Working in cooperation with the State Tourism Agency for marketing and successful ecotourism goals.
- Working in cooperation with other governmental bodies including State Department of Forestry, Inland Waterways Authority, Coastal Zone Management Authority, River Basin Authority, Department of Rural Development, Tertiary Institutions, International Agencies, Non Governmental Organisation and Community Development Association.

State Park development requires a multi disciplinary approach including professionals in park management, landscape architecture, forestry, wildlife, fisheries, civil or forest engineering and extension or community social workers. The present situation whereby State Tourism Agencies annex the management of natural recreational areas is not ideal. In the absence of a park agency, the Department of Forestry should administer the preservation aspect of such areas while the State Tourism Agency strictly adheres to the coordination of attached tourism activities. It is advisable that each state government fashion out a functional profit oriented model. The model should spell out in clear terms the role of various agencies associated with the industry from the on set.

Lands Acquisition: Land acquisition for park is a necessary exercise for a long term socio-economic development of the people. There are two approaches to this program. The first is the transformation of depleted forest reserves into state parks. The other is new acquisition of natural land areas. It is suggested that depleted forest reserve may be transformed into state parks. But there is a need to look into acquisition of land in the absence of such forest reserves. As stated in

Town and Country Planning Act of 1946 the Government is empowered to “compulsorily acquire land for open spaces, development and preservation of scenic landscape” (Govt. of Nigeria 1946). An ideal acquisition programme demands a detail understanding of physiographic features that will support state parks. This is in addition nearness to major cities that will serve as the primary ecotourist markets. In the transformation of degraded forest reserves to state parks the following observations will ease the metamorphoses:

- Evaluate the original goal of the forest reserve
- Identify existing problems
- Carry along the stake holders as defined by the original goal
- Define new conservation and preservation goals
- Identify most compatible and profitable recreational and leisure services
- Accommodate private participation mechanism
- Define new stakeholders and allow community participation mechanism. The new State Park Agency should undertake land acquisition and the itemized steps.

State Park Design Concept: The focus of sustainable state park system is planning and managing ecological resources for the educational, recreational and environmental benefits of people without jeopardizing the same benefits for the future generations. This goal allows a symbiotic concept for park projects. It is a concept that explores the principles of resource preservation compatible technical knowledge and harmonious tourism oriented designs as shown In Figure 1.

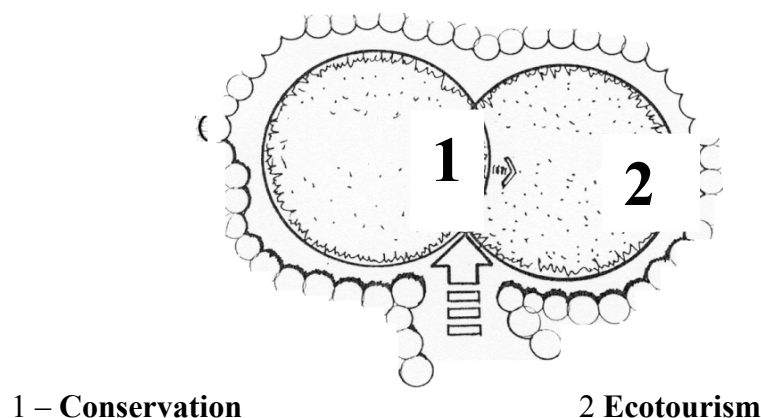
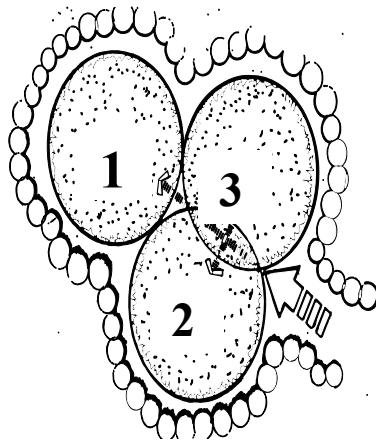


FIG.1. Symbiotic Ecotourism Concept

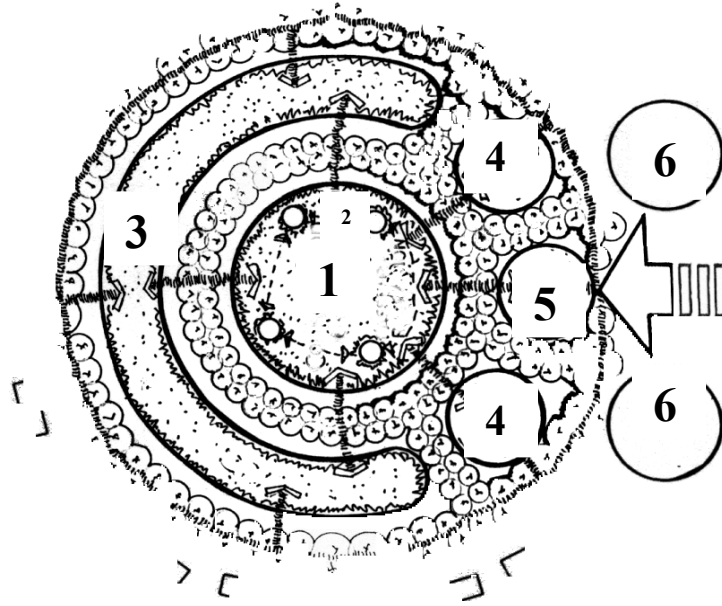
The conservation aspect of Fig. 1 requires a detail understanding of the natural, cultural, historical and archeological resources to be preserved. The tourism section call for the analysis of the recreation and accommodation needs of the nearest human settlement as the primary market. Subdividing the tourism section into recreation and accommodation modify the concept as Expanded Symbiotic Ecotourism Concept. (Fig. 2)



1 – Conservation 2 – Recreation 3 - Accommodation

Fig. 2 Expanded Symbiotic Ecotourism Concept

The variety and number of recreational and leisure support services in a State Park will depend on the projected carrying capacity, which is the synthesis of the site suitability, projected user population, provided leisure facilities desired, conservation goal and defined government policy. The carrying capacity must be stated so that impact of recreation will not degrade irreversibly the very resources and landscape scenes which attract it. The carrying capacity is simply the number of user per unit per period that a recreation site can provide each year without permanent biological and physical deterioration of the sites. It is the ability to support recreation without appreciably impairing the quality of the recreation experience (Lawson, Fred. and Baud – Bovy, 1977). The desire for effective carrying capacity further improved on the concept as Nature Friendly Ecotourism Concept represented as Figure 3.



- | | | |
|------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 – Conservation | 2 – Passive Recreation | 3 – Active Recreation |
| 4 – Lodges | 5 – Front Country | 6 – Support Villages |

Fig. 3. Nature Friendly Ecotourism Concept

There are two broad categories of recreational activities associated with nature base tourism namely passive and active recreational facilities. The first group, passive recreational facilities, include nature study, hiking, bird watching, game watching and scientific gardens such as herbal garden and arboretum. These activities are compatible with preservation core area. They are allowed within the preserved area. Active recreation facilities also include swimming in natural pools, artificial ponds, sport fishing, boating, rowing; kayaking; horse jumping, field games, hard court games, golfing and adventure sports namely mountaineering and obstacle courses. The environmental impact of these activities demand the introduction of natural buffer zones between the preserved enclaves and the surrounding land uses.

Lodging for overnight users and park management team residences are important physical features compatible to the buffer zones and park support villages. Overnight lodges include rural motels; hostels; guesthouses; ecologies, campgrounds – youth camps, family destination camps and primitive camps; and bread& breakfast in well-coordinated private houses within the support villages. Other high environmental impact components are interpretive center, vehicular transportation facilities such as parking lots, rural roads and jetties. These facilities (with the

accompanying services that include park shuttle bus services, light rail, monorail, cable car and water transportation) are better located within the buffer zone. All these park preservation support services are addressed in the nature friendly ecotourism concept.

Nature Friendly Ecotourism Concept is based on free economic idea that explores community entrepreneurship participation. The preserved area with light transportation access including natural trail, hiking and canoe trail are exclusive for public management. The buffer zone and the myriad of park support services are designed for private participation. Included are active recreation facilities, motels, ecolodges and alternative transportation facilities. Such facilities are shuttle buses, monorail, cable car, bicycles and motorcycles. Parks Front Country made up of Interpretive Center and central transportation system is open to public- private partnership. This is the arrival point with expanse of parking lot, information desk and environmental education studios.

CONCLUSION:

Wasteful logging, fuel wood extraction, bush burning, urbanization and mining activities continue to degrade the natural landscape. Currently less than 10% of Nigeria's land area is under forest cover compared with 20% international average. There is a need to increase areas under forest cover through conservation of land resources. Conservation programmes enhance restoration, rejuvenation and replacement of renewable natural resources. State Park System is one of such projects. Properly managed compatible recreational activities in state park system meet the social needs of densely populated cities and empower the rural communities economically. Embarking on eco friendly state park system call for the attention of the State Government in the following areas:

- Creation of State Park Commission as the sole governmental agency.
- Evaluation of depleted forest reserves
- Acquisition of land areas that have scenic, historical, geological, archaeological and biodiversity values
- Definite community participatory mechanisms.
- Provision of annual budget
- Definition of other related agencies role especially State Tourism Board
- Mobilization and provision of adequate incentives that will interest private investors

- Coordinated marketing strategy.

State parks must be conceived to be nature friendly and flexible to interest private investors. Besides bringing ecotourism to the grass root, State Park System will increase the land area under reservation.

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