Contributions of Cross River National Park to National Development: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract: Cross River National Park is one of the seven (7) National Parks in Nigeria. The Park has an awesome assemblage of biological resources and designated as one of the United Nations (UN) 25 Biodiversity Hotspots and World Heritage Site. The Park occupies a total land mass of about 4,000 km² which is one fifth of the total land mass of Cross River State. It contains one of the oldest rainforests in Africa and represents 90% of the remaining forest cover in Nigeria. The Park through its Support Zone Development component of Park management provides opportunities for raising the social and economic status of the rural dwellers and communities through ecotourism activities, employment opportunities and other support zone development programmes of the Park. Despite the prospects, Cross River National Park is confronted by myriad of challenges which ranges from hunting, grazing, logging and other anthropogenic activities. These activities mitigate against effective protection of the Park and threaten its very existence. In the wake of these challenges, effective collaboration with relevant stakeholders presents a way out.

Keyword: National Development, Cross River National Park, Prospect and challenges

INTRODUCTION
Cross River National Park (CRNP) came into existence in 1991 alongside with five (5) other National Parks spread across the country under Decree 36 of 1991 which was later repealed and replaced by Act 46 of 1999 (CAP 65 LFN 2004) that established eight (8) National Parks in the country and later seven (7) National Parks after Yankari National Park was de-gazetted and returned back as a Game Reserve to the Bauchi State Government in 2006. The Park was established to protect a larger part of the remaining tropical rainforest ecosystem left in the country and is located in the extreme southeastern corner of Nigerian border with the Republic of Cameroon. Geographically, it lies within longitudes 5° 05’ – 6° 29’N and latitudes 8° 15’ – 9° 30’E occupying a total land area of about 4000km². Cross River National Park is of mostly tropical rainforest vegetation (Plate 1) which thins out progressively to Montane Savanna Vegetation at the edge of the Obudu Ranch Plateau in Okwangwo area, and exists as two non-contiguous Divisions, Oban (3,000sqKm) and Okwangwo (1,000sqKm).

The Park area is drained by many fast-flowing rivers from the mountainous catchments, most of which empty into Cross River (Figure 1&2). Three main rivers; Oyi, Okorn and Bemi which are all tributaries of Cross River, drain the Okwangwo Division. Others include Magbe and Anyukwo rivers that drain the Obudu Plateau and Boshi Extension Area of the Park (Obot et al 1996).

Similarly, Oban Division is drained by many rivers and streams most of which empty into Cross River and forms a loop enclosing part of the northern and all the westerly axis of Oban area that empties into the Calabar Sea. These include Akarim, Calabar, Kwa, Eku and Aning rivers which are the major rivers in the region.

CROSS RIVER NATIONAL PARK BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES
Cross River national Park is blessed with an awesome assemblage of biological diversity and a compliment of illuminating and exciting cultural attributes of the local people living around the Park. Due to its high level of biodiversity (both Fauna and flora), the then rainforest of Southeastern State (now known as Cross River National Park) was nominated a candidate for World Heritage Site by UNESCO (Ebin, 1996).

The Park is a known refuge for several species of plants and animals that escaped the Pleistocene epoch of extreme dry and cool weather conditions. It is a home to over 2500 plant and animal species. Some of these are either unknown to science or new to the country, thereby making the Park a significant centre for endemism in Nigeria. The Park, being tropical rainforest vegetation has a cheering reputation of being one of the oldest forests in Africa, containing the oldest surviving collection of plants in the world (Ebin in Essential Partnership 1996). It is rightly acclaimed to be the richest part of Nigeria’s biodiversity and one of the United Nations (UN) certified 25 Biodiversity Hotspots in the World.

a. Faunal Resources
More than 18 species of primates occur in the Park out of 23 species that are known to occur in Nigeria. This represents 78% of total number of primates species recorded in Nigeria including the Cross River Gorilla (Gorilla gorilla diehli) which is an endemic sub species originally thought to be extinct (Happold, 1987; Anadu, 1987 in Obot, 1996; White, 1990).

Other species of conservation interest include the endemic Nigeria-Cameroon Chimpanzee Pan troglodytes elliotti (Plate 2), Forest Elephant Loxodonta africana cyclotis (Plate 3), Drill Mandrillus leucophaeus, Baboon Papio leucophaeus,
Plate1: Vegetation of Cross River National Park

Figure 1: Map of Cross River State showing location of Cross River National Parks. Source: Cross River State Forestry Commission Calabar

Figure 2: Drainage map of Cross River National Park (Oban Division) 
Source: CRNP (Oban Division) Plan for developing the Park and its support zone.
Plate 2: Nigeria-Cameroon Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes*

Plate 3: African forest elephant *Loxodonta africana cyclotis*

Plate 4: *Tetrahanis okwangwo* and *Thermoniphas barahingam*

Plate 5: *Ancestiocladus korupensis*

Plate 6: *Prumus Africana*

Plate 7: Cave exploration at Erokut Camp

Plate 8: Nature-trail at Erokut Camp

Figure 3: Schematic diagram of National development.
Putty-nosed Monkey *Cercopithecus nictitans*, Preuss’s Red Colobus *Cercopithecus preussi*, Forest Buffalo *Syncerus caffer*, Pangolin *Manis tricuspis*, Nile Monitor lizard *Varanus niloticus*, Royal Python *Python regius* and a wide array of bird species including the Grey Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Black Guinea Fowl *Guttera pucherani*, Grey Parrots *Psittacus erithacus* and the endangered Bare-headed Rock Fowl *Picathartes oreas*. The Park is one of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and contains endemic species such as: White throated babbler *Kupeothorhomonas gilberti*, Green breasted mountain bush shrike *Teleophorous gladiator* and Bannerman’s Weaver *Ploceus bannermani*.

About 90% of all Nigerian butterflies and about 33% of all butterflies of continental sub-Saharan Africa are said to be found in Cross River National Park (Obot et al., 1996).

The two newly discovered species of butterfly in the Park are *Tetrahanis okwangwo* (Plate 4) and *Thermoniphas barahingam* (Obot et al., 1996). Also, the aquatic resources of the Park are known to harbor a diverse fresh water fish assemblage containing about 165 species of fishes.

### b. Floral Resources

Obot et al. (1996) recorded a total of 1545 plant specimens representing 98 families in Okwangwo Division alone. Of these, six (6) were said to be new records to Nigeria and four probably new to science. The new records to Nigeria are: White throated babbler *Kupeothorhomonas gilberti*, Green breasted mountain bush shrike *Teleophorous gladiator* and Bannerman’s Weaver *Ploceus bannermani*.

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**CONTRIBUTIONS OF CRNP TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

National development is the ability of a country or countries to improve the social welfare of the people e.g. by providing social amenities like quality education, portable water, transportation infrastructure, medical care etc. (www.slideshare.net Sept.2014).

National development implies development of a nation as a whole. It can best be defined as the all-round and balanced development of different aspects and facets of the nation viz: political, economic, social, cultural, and scientific and material (Bhawna Bawa 2018). Lawal and Abe (2011) view development as a process of societal advancement where improvement in the wellbeing of people is generated through strong partnerships between all sectors inclusive corporate bodies and other groups in the society.

Gboyega (2003) captures development thus: ‘an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material wellbeing of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone in a sustainable way such that today’s consumption does not imperil the future, it also demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or
Cross River National Park thus contributes and has the prospects of contributing much more to the overall well being of the rural people and the whole nation in the economic, social, cultural, material, scientific etc aspects.

1. ECONOMIC

a. Ecotourism

Ecotourism account for over 60% of tourist traffic the world over. It is a form of travel to fragile, pristine and natural settings where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are primary attractions. Ecotourism activities, encourages environmentally friendly development that meets the requirement of the environment and does not compromise the requirement of our future generations.

In essence, a visit to a National Park is expected to contribute not only to the sustenance of the natural environment through the payment of appropriate Park fees while at the same time preserving and promoting the culture of the local people. It has the capacity to create jobs significantly to carter for employment of youths and women through ecotourism development. Cross River National Park is playing a leading role in the consideration of Cross River State as an Ecotourism paradise. Since its inception the Park has played host to over 50,000 visitors (Nigerians and foreigners) who come to enjoy the amazing beauty of this great rainforest resort. The Park has an array of rolling hills, caves, rock-bedded rivers with sandy shores, fast-flowing streams and cascading waterfalls, a pristine forest teeming with abundance of animal species which together with culturally vibrant and hospitable locals makes it one of the most compelling Ecotourism destinations in all of West Africa that commands a towering reputation in the world over (Plates 7 & 8). This reputation compliments Cross River State Tourism drive.

There are basic tourist facilities within the Park. A Tourist Campsite at Erokut with standard Visitor Facilities and Services (Plates 7 & 8). The Campsite is projected to serve various categories of visitors to the Park particularly those for camping, picnicking, holidaying, Seminars, etc. Others include chalets, public convenience, campfire area, restaurant and bar. The National Park plays a supportive role in Cross River State in terms of nature recreation, hospitality, ecotourism destination linkage and visitors management: Afi Mountains Nature Reserve/Wildlife Sanctuary, Drill Ranch, Agbokim Waterfalls, Kwa Waterfalls, Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort, Obudu Ranch Resort, Marina Resort and Slave Museum, etc. are some of the supplementary cluster attractions in the State (Plates 9 & 10).

The Ecotourism activities of the Park positively affect the economic and social wellbeing of the communities around the national Park and beyond. This is mostly through the provision of ancillary services by the rural peoples for Park visitations.

b. Social and Cultural

Cross River National Park is located around 105 rural communities (referred to as Support Zone Communities) peopled mostly by the Ejagham, Dusanga-Iyong, Boki and Obanliku ethnic groups in Cross River State.

The major Support Zone Communities (SZCs) have exciting and revealing cultural environment as adequately expressed in their songs, dances, cuisines, arts and crafts, hair-do and dressings. Among the most notable dances are Monikim, Mgbe, Bakwam, etc. The local cuisines include: Egome, Orang-Mbid, Afang and Edikang Ikong. The Park, through its management component of support zone development is positioned to showcase as well as provide opportunities to develop the social and cultural heritage of the support zone communities to national and international standards with attendant improvement in the social status of the rural people.

2. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Man’s dependence on nature goes beyond material needs such as food, water and shelter to include health and well-being benefits. Research on the benefits of contact with the environment revealed that it likely has an immeasurable positive psychological and emotional effect, serving to reduce stress, anger, frustration and aggression, providing an opportunity for social bonding, and serving as a place for learning and mental stimulation.

Protected Areas also cushion the effect of extreme environmental conditions and plays a significant role in the provision of clean water, improving food security and serving as an important resource for pharmaceutical industry. Obot and Anwanakak (1996) recorded up to 69 medicinal plants species in the park that are utilized by the support zone community members in Okwangwo Division in the treatment of various ailments ranging from malaria, toothache, dysentery, mouth and other sores, sexually
transmitted diseases (STDs), hemorrhage at child birth, bone setting etc. And parts such as leaves, flowers, seeds, stem, bark, roots etc are often utilized for the treatment.

3. SCIENTIFIC
Taking into account the enormous assemblage of biological and geomorphologic resources that abound in Cross River National Park, the Park offers a unique field laboratory facility for in-situ conservation studies and research in areas such as medicine, agriculture, education, horticulture, anthropology, etc. More than 50 number of research topics have been conducted between 2006 and 2016 (CRNP ANNUAL REPORTS).

A total of 913 students from tertiary institutions from different parts of the country have also received training at different times under the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) in the Park within the period 2006-2016 (CRNP Annual Reports) thereby contributing to quality graduates of wildlife and ecotourism, environmental studies, biodiversity conservation etc from the respective institutions.

4. EMPLOYMENT
As part of management strategy to encourage ownership of the resources of the Park by the surrounding communities and in turn achieve its mandate of protecting the natural treasures of the nation within the National Parks, majority of the staff are recruited from the catchment area. This provides opportunity to the rural populace (not only the rich in urban cities) to rise to managerial positions thereby raising their economic and social status in the society.

CHALLENGES
With all the adorning potentials, Cross River National Park is unfortunately threatened and bedeviled by:

i. **Deforestation**: a key threat through logging for timber at subsistence and commercial magnitude, farming, quarrying, expansion of enclave communities and poaching.

ii. **Insufficient annual budgetary allocation** by the Federal Government for more Park infrastructural facilities development and maintenance e.g. Ranger barracks, bridges and culverts, jeep tracks, vital tourist facilities, etc.

iii. **Molestation of Park Staff (Rangers)** on duty through agitation by the adjoining communities for infrastructural development and provision of alternative means of livelihood for the local inhabitants around the Park whenever any member of the communities are arrested for offences committed in the Park.

iv. **Unsustainable resource utilization**: due to ever growing population.

v. **Low revenue generation**: as a result of low patronage of the Park by both domestic and international visitors due to the current spate of insecurity in the country especially the insurgency; bombings, killings, kidnappings and abductions.

vi. **Poor job performance**: resulting from poor capacity building in Protected Area Management.

WAY FORWARD: PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS
It is no gainsaying that government budgetary allocations alone, cannot tackle the enormous challenges facing the National Park Management. In agreement with Lawal and Abe 2011’s view of development, it becomes imperative for other stakeholders to join hands in strong partnership with National Park management to surmount the challenges. Areas of possible intervention of which the National Park management is favourably disposed to partner with interested stakeholders include:

- Provision of Park Protection equipment and capacity building for staff, 4-Wheel Driven Patrol Vehicles, Fire Arms & Ammunitions, Motor-bikes, Powered boats, Booths, Tents, GPS, Compasses, Cyber Trackers, Staff Training, procurement of Field Guides and construction of Ranger barracks.
- Alternatives livelihood options – capacity building in sustainable agricultural practices; Livestock rearing (rabittry; goatry; poultry; piggery, fishery and domestication of wildlife species) Bee Keeping etc.
- Support Zone Infrastructural development – Health Care Services (including Health Centers), school buildings, roads, etc.
- Poverty Reduction through capacity building in manufacturing industry such as soap industry, cream making using locally available raw materials; carpentry, tailoring, auto mechanics, electricians, etc
- Establishment of participatory micro finance revolving loan schemes through established cooperative groups.
- Delineation of Park Boundaries and Provision of updated/reliable Maps (Topography, vegetation and Land-use)

CONCLUSION
Cross River National Park is unarguably the Ecological Pride of Nigeria and remains a major input to the protection of Nigeria’s ecological integrity. It is indeed, one of the few places in the world that provides hope for an environmentally
secured world, particularly as the only remaining tropical rainforest ecosystem in Nigeria under high level preservation.

However, this reputation may be marred and distorted if stringent measures are not adopted and committed effort that is backed up with adequate political will made by stakeholders at all levels. This is the only insurance that can guarantee the continuous existence of this valuable natural resource capital bank for today and posterity.

The potential of CRNP to contribute meaningfully to national development and especially to the poor and rural communities bordering the Park cannot be over emphasized. To mitigate the horrendous effect of climate change and its attendant disaster, efforts should be made to jointly protect and conserve our precious rainforest. All hands need to consciously be on deck to harness these great potentials for the benefit of all.

Finally, in the words of M. P. O. Dore (1996) ‘We have only one rainforest of this type (CRNP). Posterity will not forgive us if we destroy it’ (or allow it to be destroyed)”.

REFERENCES