

Examining Livelihood Benefits Derived by Gashaka Gumti National Park Communities in North Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper assesses the benefits derived by national park communities in the study area. Questionnaires were administered in all the fourteen (14) Communities of the National Park and staff of the park, as well as focussed group discussions with some selected residents ten (10) each from the fourteen recognised park communities. A total of 720 questionnaires were administered to the residents of the park communities to assess the benefits they received after upgrading the national park, while 250 questionnaires were administered to the staff of the national park to determine the impact of NGOs activities on the communities, as well as to assess the relationship of the national park staff with the park communities and the strategies for improvement. Also interviews were conducted with the key stakeholders such as ward-heads, village-heads, youths and women leaders. Findings of the study shows that there are three major benefits received by the park communities, they are primary schools, clinics and health centres and construction of roads and culverts, as well as drilling of boreholes and wells and obtaining loans for income generation. The national park was also able to provide most of its long and short term projects to the communities. However, the relationship between farmers and pastoralists is not cordial, because during dry season when forage is often scarce, livestock moved into farms and destroy crops before harvesting. It is recommended that the working relationships between the communities and the national park be improved with a view to achieving the general objectives of conservation programmes in Nigeria.

Keywords: National Park, Benefits, Park Communities, Tourism and Working Relationships

INTRODUCTION

National parks are large tracts of land (not less than 1 Kilohectare) declared as public property, by a national government with a view to conserving, protecting, preserving and developing for the purpose of tourism, recreation, education, research and cultural amusement (US-National Park Service, 2015). They are reserve of land usually owned and declared by a national government, protected from most human development and pollution.

Generally, National Park provides a number of socio-economic benefits to the local host communities, especially the disadvantage segments of any community. For instance, a number of permanent jobs will be created within the national parks (protected areas), e.g. in the conservation management and hospitality sectors. There are as well, a number of casual jobs will be created within the national parks (protected areas), e.g. for labour intensive management projects, such as game, culture, alien vegetation eradication and fencing. In addition, some jobs could be created in the service and peripheral industries e.g. suppliers of service and materials, suppliers of skills such as builders, plumbers, caterers, tourist guides.

Tourism can often generate higher cash returns locally than other uses of wildlife. In fact, these local earnings can off-set the cost of wildlife damage to crops and livestock lost and access to

core wildlife areas, so that wildlife becomes a net benefit to the local residents and hence an asset to protect. Also in areas of high tourism potential, returns can exceed returns from other land uses, and so justify maintaining or restoring wildlife habitat. Also the value that tourists place on the local natural and cultural resources can in turn increase the recognition of their value among the local residents (Baez, 2016).

The local people in the park communities are important stakeholders with whom protected area managers must co-operate with. Hence, when people gain from the sustainable use of resources such as coral reef, or wild animals through tourism they will protect their assets and may invest more resources into it (Marguba, 2012).

Gashaka-Gumti National Park is one of the eight parks established by the Federal Government of Nigeria in (1991) with a view to conserving and protecting the ecotourism potentials and attractions of the country. The park use to be three separate sanctuaries (Game reserves) of Serti, Gashaka and Gumti. It is the largest and the most diverse protected area in Nigeria. It is also the richest among the National Parks in the country.

Gashaka-Gumti National Park has unique features that distinguish it from other parks in the country. The park has some settlements that are officially recognised and allowed to be among the park communities within and around the park. These communities were there for decades, long before the area was declared as Game reserves. The declaration has some consequences on the means of livelihood of the communities residing within and around the park. These communities economically earned their living from the resources available in the park. In fact, even the surrounding communities from far and near periodically visit the park to harness the resources of the national park in terms of fishing, hunting, honey collection, lumbering, firewood collection, and for pharmacological purposes among others. These primary activities fetched the members of the park communities' financial and economic benefits.

However, the taking over these Game reserves by the Federal Government has seriously affected the means of livelihood of the communities residing within and around the national park boundary by restricting them from using the resources in the park, through controlling movement into the national park by the Rangers through arresting and prosecuting offenders. This restriction has affected the individual households and families in terms of income generation in high proportion. As a result, many members of these communities were rendered jobless particularly women and youths. Hence, there is a need to integrate the communities into the park programmes, in terms of assisting the park on security, protection, and conservation programmes, which at the end would create good working relationship between the national park and the communities residing within and the park.

The National Park law in Nigeria is perhaps one of the most comprehensive and proactive due to its sensitiveness to the needs of the rural communities. Generally, National parks play a central role in the social and economic development of the rural environment and contribute to the economic wellbeing of the Urban Centres and the quality of life of their inhabitants (Ayodele and Falade, 1993).

Nigeria is blessed with rich eco-tourism resources in both forest and savannah zones of the country (Figure 1). In Nigeria, there are about 1,129 forest reserves, 30 game reserves, 4 game sanctuaries, 2 strict nature reserves, 1 biosphere reserve and 7 National parks. National parks, must have their protection level raised and the benefits they accrue to the local communities be improved in order to give them genuine appreciation and acceptance. National Parks, in Nigeria

have once been regarded as luxury where wildlife and natural scenery are set aside for a few people to enjoy game viewing, hunting, swimming among others. The Nigerian national Parks also laid a firm foundation for the rural transformation so that their crucial roles in environmental protection, life support system, recreation and eco-tourism are realized.

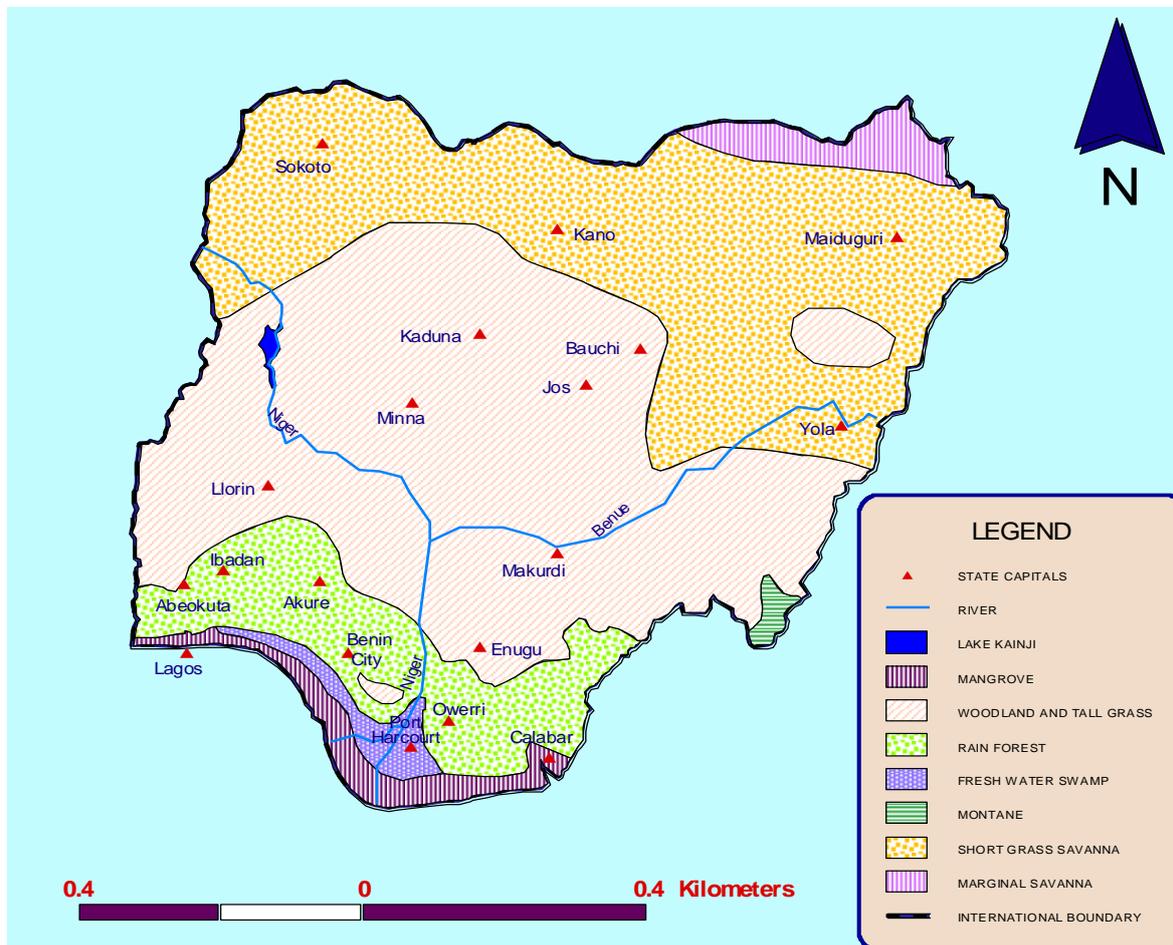


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the vegetation zones

The National Park Act of 1979 had singularly place Nigeria among the committee of Nations that demonstrated the political will to check the plundering of natural resources, so that the future generations can appreciate and enjoy their natural heritage. In Nigeria, the national park management as a concept focused on the conservation of unique ecosystems for sustainable development, recreation and public enjoyment unlike other countries that received foreign assistance. The Nigeria’s effort towards National Parks development was borne out of the desire to embrace environmental conservation, recreation and nature tourism for sustainable development.

Nigeria has a total of 1,538 conservation areas including the proposed ones, whose selection and establishment were directed towards attaining the United Nation’s conditions for the selection of conservation sites (Adebowale, 1993). This forbids exploitation of the Natural resources including commercial harvest of animals, fishing and hunting. Furthermore, these game reserves cut across the various geographical and ecological regions of the country.

Generally, the number of protected areas has been increasing drastically and dramatically globally in recent times. However, the growth of protected areas, and indeed national parks,

has not been marked by proper management due to poor financial status/under-funding, and many gazetted protected areas particularly national parks remain at risk (Zedan, 2010)

Ashley (1995) observed that community involvement and participation in wildlife tourism (eco-tourism) would bring many advantages to the residents or their neighbours such as jobs and business opportunities, training, increased skills and the local institutional capacity; upgrading of infrastructure; increased interest and pride in their culture. In addition, this has the potential of increasing income and employment opportunities, developing skills and institutions, which would empower the local people (Ashley and Gerland, 1994). Therefore, ecotourism could encourage and attract more economic growth, equitable distribution of resources and in the process of alleviating poverty.

Gahaku (2016) reviewed the communal involvement of the local communities in tourism in Kenya and concluded that such participation has been minimal and mainly confined to the supply of goods and services, sales of handcrafts and traditional dances entertainment. Until recently, the revenues from National Parks and Game reserves were shared between the Government and the tourism industry. For example, the Narok Local Council earns 90% of its revenue from the Massai Mara National Parks and Game reserves, but only a small proportion of the earning reach the people living around the reserve (Berger, 2015).

Good and cordial relationships between protected areas and its surrounding communities are essential for the preservation of biodiversity and particularly for the development of sustainable ecotourism. Lindberg and Enriquez (1994) discovered that, communities that share the benefits of ecotourism brought by the protected areas, will get involved and participate in the protection of the areas and facilitates its activities. When sharing occur, the results are the opposite whereby negative changes in the protected areas and communities prevail.

The Study Area

Gashaka-Gumti National Park is one of the eight national parks in the country. It is located in the remote mountainous region of North-Eastern Nigeria, between the boundaries of Adamawa and Taraba states. Ecologically, the National Park is situated in the sub-region of Guinea Savannah Zone of Africa, in the subtropical zone of the south-eastern highlands of the Savannah area of Nigeria, south of the River Benue. The National Park is the main watershed /catchment area of River Taraba, the major tributary of River Benue. It also shares international boundary with the Republic of Cameroon, adjacent to Faro National Park. Immediately to the south of the National Park is the magnificent and inspiring Mambila Plateau. Geographically, the National Park lies between latitudes 6.55-8.13°N and longitudes 11.04-13.08°E with an estimated landmass of 6,731.59sq km of undulating terrain and deep rolling valleys. It is administratively divided into the Gumti sector in the North (Adamawa State) and Gashaka Sector in the South (Taraba State).

Gashaka-Gumti National Park has fourteen (14) settlements residing within and around its boundary considered as park communities. These communities are divided into six (6) ranges and each range has five (5) substation or bids, each bid is manned by 3-4 rangers for better management, conservation and protection purposes by the park rangers and forest guards. These ranges comprises of Central-Squad Serti, Fllinga, Gam-Gam, Toungo, Gumti and Mayo-Selbe (Figure 2).

METHODOLOGY

Generally, simple random sampling method was used to administer questionnaires in all the fourteen recognized communities of the National Park. Two hundred and fifty questionnaires were administered to staff of the park and a total of seven hundred and twenty (720) questionnaires were administered to the residents of the national park communities to assess and examine the benefits they received after upgrading the national park (Table 1). Also one hundred and forty people, ten each from the park communities were selected for focussed group discussion with a view to determining the impact of NGOs activities in the communities, the relationship between the national park communities and the strategies for improving the working relationships between them. Also interviews were held with the key stakeholders such as ward-heads, village-heads youth and women leaders. This is done with a view deriving information, ideas and experience of the members National Park Communities. Analysis was done using frequency and percentage tables to determine the responses obtained from the residents of the park communities and the staff of the national park.

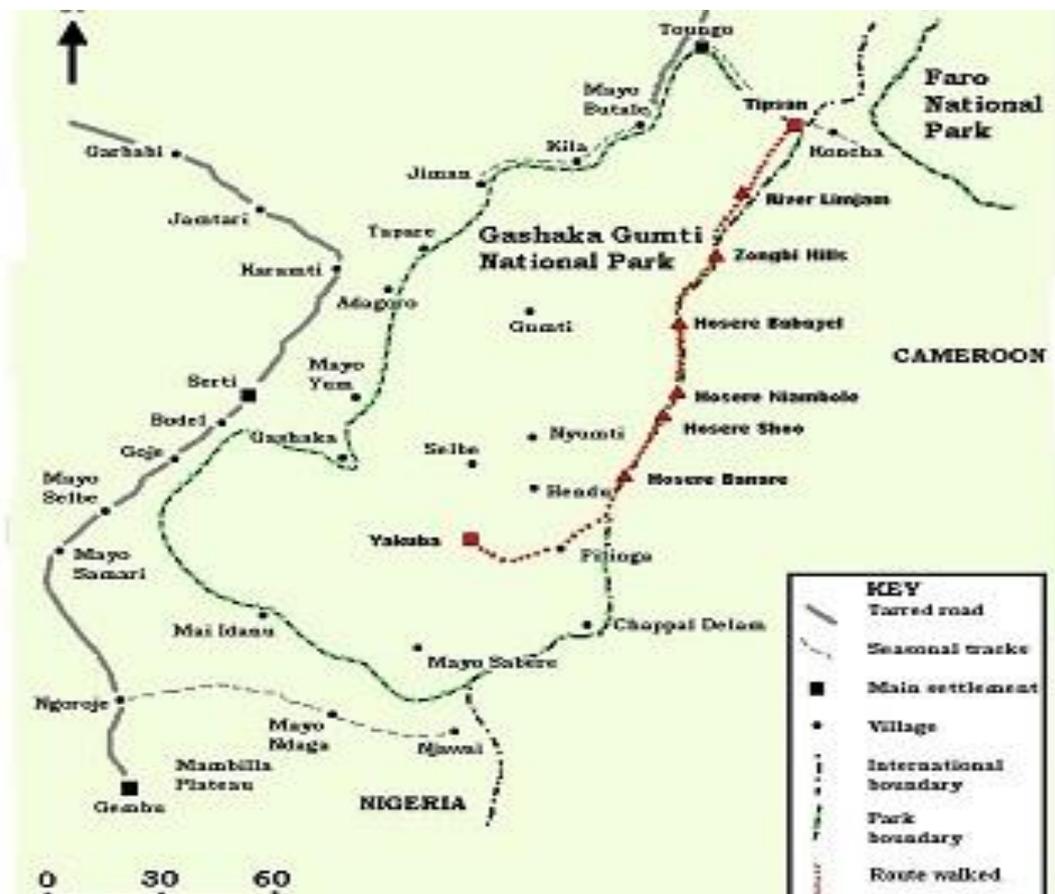


Figure 2: Map of Gashaka Gumti National Park, Nigeria

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Presently, almost all the national parks in Nigeria believed that the security, protection and success of tourism development depend on the support and cooperation given by the people of the park communities. Gashaka-Gumti National Park provided some social services in order to win the support and cooperation of the local people / park communities such as employment

opportunities, establishment of schools, construction of roads, bridges and culverts, clinics and the formation of cooperative societies with a view to integrating and involving the park communities in the management of the national park. Also formed are the Park–Community Development Association and Park-Community Relation Committee which serves as a channel for interaction and providing facilities and services to the park communities and visiting the communities formally and informally. There are also Community Liaison Officers and Environmental Protection Officers who regularly visits the park communities and sometimes stay with the people, discuss with them and report back the outcome of their interactions and observations to the park management. The report enables the park management to prepare its management strategies in terms of rural development, conservation and environmental protection programmes for proper and better park management.

Table 1: Gashaka-Gumti National Park Communities and Sampled population

S/N	Villages	Population (Projection rate = 5%)			*QD (2%)
		1991	1996	2008/2018	
1	Jiman/Kila	480	540	774/1,045	16
2	Tappare/Mayo Yim	615	692	992/1,339	20
3	Adda Goro	285	325	466/1,029	9
4	Mayo Yim/Sukare	546	622	892/1,204	18
5	Serti/Gidan Zaria	14,937	17,027	24,405/32,943	488
6	Bodel	686	782	1,121/1,513	22
7	Tipsan/Jauro	410	462	662/844	13
8	Toungo	476	536	768/1,037	15
9	Gumti/Daneji	611	696	998/1,347	20
10	Gashaka	2,265	2,582	3,701/4,996	74
11	Mayo Selbe	740	846	1,213/1,637	24
12	Fillinga	669	763	1,094/1,477	22
13	Sabere/Yakuba	4,440	4,998	7,164/9,670	143
14	Chabbal Shirgu	547	624	8,943/12,072	179
Total		27,707	31,495	53,157/71,803	1063

*QD questionnaire distributed of 2018 population.

On the benefits enjoyed or received from the national park, since it was upgraded, see Table 2. The result revealed that, 27.7% of the respondents, said they have benefited with the siting of primary schools in their localities (Primary Schools in Gashaka and Bakin Daga villages). Then 20.8% said they have benefited with the construction of clinics and health centres in their localities (Gashaka Clinic). Also, 20.8% said they have benefited with the construction of

Table 2: Benefits Received by the Communities after Upgrading the National Park

Benefit received	Frequency	Percentage
Sitting of primary schools in our localities	200	27.7
Construction of clinic/health centres	150	20.8
Construction of access roads & culverts	150	20.8
Digging /Drilling of wells/boreholes in localities	100	13.8
Employment and loans to generate more income	120	16.6
Total	720	100.0

access roads and culverts, particularly the 35 km of road from Mayo-Selbe to Mai-Idanu and Yakuba, also 13.8% said they have benefited with the provision of wells and boreholes, 16.6%

said they have benefited by obtaining loans to generate more income and have benefited from the park employment opportunity. Generally, there are three major benefits received by the communities, they are primary school, clinics and health centres and construction of roads and culverts. These are followed by drilling of boreholes and wells and obtaining loans for income generation.

On other assistance received from the national park management, 6.5% of the respondents said they have received small scale loans to boost their source of income, 39.3% said that members of their communities have been given employment opportunities to work with the national park (Table 3). Others are, 27.2% said they have received books and schools seats from the management of the national park, 14.2% said they have also received drugs in their clinics and health centres in Gashaka Village. In addition, 5.0% said they have received fertilizer and chemicals for their farm usage and 7.8% said their cattle were inoculated by the park management. Also some respondents said they have received one form of assistance or another from the management of the national park such as wooden boats were donated to the Support Zone communities at Kam Mayo-Yum for River crossing.

Table 3: Assistance Received from the National Park Management by the Communities

Other assistance received	Frequency	Percentage
Small scale loans as source of income	47	6.5
Employment opportunities	283	39.3
Provision of books & seats to schools	196	27.2
Provision of drugs to clinics/health centres	102	14.2
Assisted farmers with fertilizer & chemical	36	5.0
Inoculation of our cattle	56	7.8
Total	720	100.0

With regard to expectations from the National Park (Table 4), 52.6% wants the management to improve on their relationships. Also 25.0% said the only way to improve cordial relationship between the park communities and the national park is by providing more employment opportunities to the youths and any interested persons. Again, 22.4% said the national park management should construct more access roads and supply drugs to their clinics and health centres is the best way to improve cordial relationships between the communities and the national park. These views were expressed by many authors, who stated that communities that derived benefits from ecotourism activities normally support the parks conservation programmes wholeheartedly. Also if communities are contented with the park programmes there would be greater opportunities for enhancing tourism development through positive intercultural interaction with the local residents.

Table 4: The Communities Expectations from the National Park

Communities expectations	Frequency	Percentage
Fulfil promise made by the park	379	52.6
Provide employment opportunities	180	25.0
Access roads and supply of drugs in clinics	161	22.4
Total	720	100.0

On satisfaction with the relationship between the national park and the communities, 38.2% of the respondents said they are satisfied with the relationship between the park and its surrounding communities (Table 5). However, 39.7% said they are partially satisfied and 22.1% said they are not satisfied with the relationship between the staff of the park and the

members of communities because some communities connived with outsiders to commit illegal activities in the park. Although relationship between the park management and the communities is cordial, the relationship between farmers and pastoralists is not good. Because during dry season when forage is often scarce, livestock moved into farms and destroy crops. This leads to serious conflict and problems between farmers and the pastoralists particularly in areas like Filinga and Sabere. However, despite this apparent problems and conflicts farmers and pastoralists depend upon each other. Farmers in remote and inaccessible areas such as Gumti, rely upon the pastoralists to buy their surplus farm produce each year. Pastoralists in the highland areas such as Chabbal Yumti depend upon the presence of local farmers to supply them with their grains needs. Generally, if the park communities are satisfied or contented with the park management performance there would be greater opportunity for enhancing tourist experiences through positive intercultural interaction with the local residents.

Table 5: National Park-Staff Relationship with the Communities

Level of satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied	78	38.2
Partially satisfied	81	39.7
Not satisfied	45	22.1
Total	204	100.0

When asked on the strategies to improve the working relationship between the staff of the park and the gateway communities, 70% said the only way to improve good working relationship with the communities is through employment opportunities (Table 6). Also, 17% said the only way to improve their relationship is through involving members of the communities in the decision making policies and conservation programmes of the national park and 13% said the only way to improve the relationship between the national park and the communities is through the provision of health facilities and schools in various localities within the communities. In an ideal ecotourism situation, there should be a symbiotic relationship between the local host-communities and the national park including its resources and park staff that manage them. The local communities are more liable to support the conservation efforts of the park and may even act on behalf of staff of the park for the protection of the resources available in the park. Therefore, if the communities benefit from the protection and conservation programmes through sustainable harvesting of the important park resources such as forests and watersheds and provision of facilities, utilities and services.

Table 6: Strategies for Improving Staff Relationship with the Communities

Means of improving relationship	Frequency	Percentage
Organize meeting and employment	143	70.0
Workshops and seminars	34	17.0
Medical and educational facilities	27	13.0
Total	204	100.0

On the programmes that can improve their relationships with communities, 19.6% of the respondents said community development programmes that can involve the park communities to participate (Table 7). Also, 1.5% said only community economic programmes through financial assistance that will empower them. Another 1.5% said the park should support the communities to preserve their local values and norms. Also, 2.0% said the park should support the establishment of community base organizations in all the localities to serve as a bridge for meetings between the communities and the national park. Again, 1.0% the national park should support the identification and protection of the community’s assets and 19.1% said the national

park should support the formation of community park forum to dialogue always on any policy formulation that affects the communities. At least 50.4% said all the above mentioned suggestions should be supported by the park management, so that they will serve as a base for cementing the working relationship between communities and the national park.

On the presence of NGOs and their activities in the National Park, 76.0% of the park staff acknowledged the presence of Nigeria Conservation Foundation (NCF) in the park. Also, 7.4% of the park staff have recognized the presence of World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) and 14.7% of the staff have recognized the presence of Gashaka Private Conservation Project (GPCP) in the park (Table 8). In addition, on the area of operations and concentration of the NGOs, 22.0% said the NGO’s on providing facilities for the benefit of the tourists and park

Table 7: Improving Relationship between Park and Communities

Means of improving relationship	Frequency	%
Community projects/programmes that provide wide impact of practical experience on the localities.	40	19.6
Community socio-economic programmes through financial assistance	5	1.5
Support the community to preserve their local culture, norms & values.	5	1.5
Support the establishment of community-based organizations in all localities.	4	2.0
Support the identification & protection of community assets and resources.	8	1.0
Support the formation of park- community partnership forum for dialogue.	39	19.1
All of the above.	103	50.4
Total	204	100.0

communities, 6.4% of the staff said the NGOs focuses on health and environmental sanitation programmes. About 8.3% of the staff said the N.G.Os concentrate on poaching and security of the tourists in the national park, 42 respondents representing 20.6% of the staff said the N.G.Os focuses on educating the communities on poaching and illegal fishing. Also, 23.5% of the staff said the NGOs in the park focuses on bee farming and collection and 19.1% of the staff said the NGOs activities focuses on lumbering, firewood collection and bush burning in the national park.

Table 8: Non-Governmental Organization and Areas of Focus in the Park Communities

NGO’s area of focus	Frequency	Percentage
Using facilities for the benefit of tourists & communities	45	22.0
Health & environmental sanitation	13	6.4
Security of tourists in the park	17	8.3
Poaching & illegal fishing	42	20.6
Bee farming & collection	48	23.5
Lumbering, firewood collection & bush burning	39	19.1
Total	204	100.0

Basically there are four ways in which the NGOs have impacted the communities as confirmed by the respondents, 11.0% of the respondents said the NGOs assisted them to obtain small scale loans to improve their economic base. About 36.4% said the NGOs assisted them to secure job opportunities within and outside the national park, 39.5% said the NGOs organizes adult

education classes for them to improve their literacy level (NCF established Primary school at Gashaka village) .Then, 5.4% said the NGOs assisted them to obtain agricultural loan and 7.8% said the NGOs assisted all the stakeholders (fishermen, farmers and hunters) as a way of involving them to participate in the national park programmes (Table 9).

On employment and job pattern before and after the park was upgraded. It was discovered that there is about 40% increment in the civil servant (park staff) which may be as a result of the job opportunity offered by the national park. Also farming activities have reduced by 40% suggesting that poor accessibility to their respective farmlands may be attributed to this. In addition, continuous displacement of the communities due to expansion and demarcation of the national park boundary and reduction in their farmlands size to meet the policies regarding farming, Trading activities has also increased by 60%, although most respondents said the traders are petty business people who depend on the rate of tourists visit.

Table 9: Impacts of Non-Governmental Organization’s Operation on the Communities

Impacts of NGO’s	Frequency	Percentage
Assisted people to obtain loan	79	11.0
Assisted people to secure job opportunities	262	36.4
Organizes adult education classes for men/women	284	39.5
Assisted people to obtain agricultural loan	39	5.4
Assisted hunters & farmers	56	7.8
Total	720	100.0

At least 56.9% of the respondents said the park assisted people from the communities to secure employment opportunities in the national park or outside the park, 12.2% said the national park intervened anytime there is fire outbreak or epidemic in the communities, 19.1% said the park assisted the communities by donating school learning materials and medical facilities, 11.8% said the national park organizes skill training programmes in different fields. This is a clear indication that most people now have considered the establishment of the national park as something good to partner with (Table 10).

Table 10: National Park Partnership Programmes with the Communities

Partnership programmes	Frequency	Percentage
Assisted people from the communities to secure job	116	56.9
Assisted people during outbreak of epidemic	25	12.2
Provide school/medical facilities	39	19.1
Organized skill programmes	24	11.8
Total	204	100.0

Majority said employment opportunities and boundary demarcation were implemented as planned, because many people from the communities are employed in the national park. A few said extensive and intensive conservation and protection programmes are also introduced by the national park and some said combating illegal activities in the park (Poaching, Honey collection and Fishing etc.) were given much attention. However, many villages within the support zone communities requested that the park boundary should be adjusted with a view to allowing the residents have access to the farm lands. For instance the Fulbe pastoralist at Shirep requested that the escarpment between Mambila Plateau and Mayo Sabere should be removed from the national park boundary. The growth or development of protected areas, national parks in particular are marked by poor financial status/under-funding, therefore, remain at risk

(Zedan, 2010). Therefore, the risks/threats ranges from immediate problems such as illegal grazing and logging, poaching, mining, new settlements and farms as well as uncontrolled bush fires to long term problems such as toxic contamination and climate changes.

Furthermore, the pressure on the resources within the national parks are driven by the problems such as poor governance, poverty, government policies, inadequate funding and staffing, training and equipment, greed and lack of alternative sources of livelihood among other reasons.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

National park communities usually enjoy some benefits due to establishment of the park within their areas of jurisdiction. However, this depends on the relationship that exists between the management of the national park and residents of these communities hence the communities benefit more when the relationship is cordial. This study reveals that there are three major benefits received by the communities, they are primary school materials, clinics and health centres facilities and construction of roads and culverts. These are followed by drilling of boreholes and wells and obtaining loans for income generation. Also, the national park was able to provide most of its long and short term projects to the communities because of the cooperation and cordial relationship between the management of the park and the residents of the communities. Nevertheless, the relationship between farmers and pastoralists is not good, because during dry season when forage is often scarce, livestock moved into farms and destroy the crops available.

Nelson (2000) acknowledges that in order for all participants to benefit from ecotourism, attention need to be given towards the preparations and understandings of the participants, taking into account of the level of community involvement and social impacts of such involvement. But in a situation where the residents had positive attitudes towards tourism and limited awareness of employment or investment opportunities, lack of awareness along with increased activity by outside investors, without formalized planning, the possibilities for the community to further benefits from tourism will be limited.

The park management of Gashaka-Gumti should provide alternative sources of income as a substitute to the lost primary sources of income due to the rules, regulations and laws introduced which forbids hunting, fishing, farming, honey collection, lumbering, firewood collection among others in the park.

There is need to create an avenue for improving good working relationship between the park communities and the management of the national park through employment opportunities, providing social facilities and continuous meetings to discuss issues of common interest that affects the park and the communities in general (job creation, construction of rural feeder roads, culverts, health facilities school facilities etc).

There is need for the park management to provide sporting facilities for the common use and benefit of both the staff of the national park and the members of the park communities to serve as a forum for interacting and relating very well between and among themselves.

There is need for the park management of Gashaka-Gumti National Park to purchase new Trucks for conveying both the tourists and members of the park communities to different localities and destinations for Game Viewing as well as for taking community members of the park back to their respective communities.

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