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**University of Palermo, Argentina**

Department of Economics, University of Palermo, Argentina

St. Larrea 1079, 3 Floor, Capital Federal, Zip 1188

Buenos Aires, Argentina

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# **THE POLITICS OF WILD RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN YANKARI WILDLIFE PARK: Implications on Biodiversity Conservation and Ecotourism management**

**Ijeomah, H.M. & Odunlami, S.S.**

Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management,  
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria  
henryijeomah@yahoo.com

## **ABSTRACT**

Politics of wild resources management and its implications on ecotourism and biodiversity conservation in Yankari wildlife park was studied using two sets of structured questionnaires, In depth interview and field observation. Data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics. Results revealed existing conflicts of political interests on accessibility and control of wild resources between the Bauchi State government and the National Park Service of Nigeria prior to the downgrading of the Yankari national park to a game reserve in 2006. Conflicting policies and the duplication of functions by these institutions adversely affected the park performance as ecotourism is a proxy market, and depends on management ethics that are devoid of political sentiments, to protect the inherent environmental assets, which it thrives on. Part of the core area of the park was occupied by the district leader of Wikki and his administrative staff, a strange act that led to the building of a school and health centre inside this biodiversity hotspot of global ecological importance. Both institutions sold tickets to tourists at different prices. The Bauchi State Ministry of tourism issued permits for hunting (100%), collection of fuel wood (100%), and tickets to tourists (100%). Park workers who are controlled by the National Park Service, apart from maintaining the park resources also sold tickets though at different price. This culminated to indiscriminate hunting (90.0%), collection of fuelwood (85.0%); destruction of micro habitats (60.0%) and unregulated influx of tourists (100%), which reduced quality of tourism experience (75.0%), thus making ecotourism prone to failure in the ecodestination.

**Keywords:** Yankari Wildlife Park, Biodiversity conservation, Ecological Politics, Ecotourism, Nigeria

## **1. Introduction**

Social animals such as Honey bees, ants, lion, Elephant, rhinoceroses and all primate species are organised and tend to protect their territories. The purpose for fighting for territoriality is to control available environmental resources. No species could actually live alone without co-existing with others, and neither can any individual of a species thrive well in an environment without the ecological role of others (Ijeomah and Nuga, 2011). Nevertheless, individuals/groups of same or different species have always fought for these resources. These resources could be space, shade, nesting grounds, nesting materials, mate, saltlick, water or food. Man as the social being with divine authority to name and control every species also compete with other species but has gone further in advancement to manage all these fighting and peacefully co-existing individuals and/or species together with the conflictous environmental resources. But even among men there are still conflicts of interest

concerning the management of wild resources. Because of the relevance of these resources to the survival of indigenous people, various tiers of government had to step into the management of wild resources to ensure that they are not selfishly exhausted by some individuals or groups (Ijeomah and Aiyeloja, 2010). Areas with unique, rare, endemic, and endangered resources were gazetted to form either game reserve or national park to offer them constitutionally recognised protection by state and national government respectively. The fact that there are other legally recognised governments in the society, with varying and sometimes conflicting interests has led to diverse forms of politics in the management of wild resources.

## **2. Antagonisms and Its Potential Socio Economic Implications on Tourism Business**

Tourism is one of the major ways of utilising wildlife resources. The tourism industry especially the environmental aspect is currently facing serious challenges of natural disasters such as flooding and drought caused by climate change; over utilisation of renewable natural resources and conflict of interests due to increased human population with its attendant economic pressures; and recently, the fear of attacks of popular destinations by terrorists due to disagreement with ruling governments, unacceptability of existing policies, vengeance and high level of intolerance caused by ethnic, racial, economic and religious chauvinism. These organised antagonisms in form of terrorism is aimed at heating up the national and international polity, distract governments, create confusions in various territories and bring about disruptions in business, which will negatively affect the economies of households, organisations, communities and nations. If the antagonisms are targeted at bringing about economic destruction, and creating confusion and violence among nations and people who have peacefully co - existed over time, it implies that terroristic tendencies are directly designed to destroy tourism. Plans should therefore be expediently made to ensure safety in tourism, the only market large enough to market every product on earth (Ijeomah and Herbert, 2012) but fragile enough to be destroyed by an ordinary rumour. Tourism is such a wide area with many sub sectors and linkages that it can hardly escape being affected in one way or the other when crisis occurs in an area where it is operational. Crises that did not directly affect a destination could affect tourists' accessibility to the site when means of transportation is destroyed or affected. Destruction of souvenir industry will affect tourists' satisfaction due to lack of items to reflect their experiences when need be (Ijeomah and Edet, 2011).

Inability to patronise souvenir sellers alters tourist' expenditure pattern and reduce their financial impact on the economy of host communities which they have the potential to stimulate. Destruction of banks and *Bureau de change* leads to inaccessibility of money by tourists especially the much targeted foreigners who should not be carrying huge sum of money (cash) about for security reasons. When lodges are attacked, tourists from far places especially foreigners will stop visit, occupancy of rooms in the lodges becomes zero, sales of food in restaurants reduce, revenues are lost and unemployment results with local economies negatively affected. Attacks on either air or sea ports and markets worsen the economies of organisations, local communities and households because foreign tourists will cease to visit, tour operators and tour guides lose patronage. Foreign investors will quit while local tourists and souvenir sellers become very cautious, too suspicious and ready to react at the slightest social instigation due to high level of tension in the society. Such case of over reaction of the public at a slightest inducement was once experienced in the economically busy and socially active city of Kaduna in Nigeria, where the sound of a bursting vehicle tyre induced the public to run for safety: many persons driving vehicles along the major road in the market hurriedly parked their cars and fled. Their fleeing induced buyers, sellers and passersby to run and the 'induced exercise' spread to many areas before some persons who expected to hear more of the sound in case it was an attack, but did not, traced to know the cause of the social disruption, and latter realised that the sound erroneously interpreted (by people far from the scene) to have emanated from a bomb blast was from an ordinary burst tyre of a vehicle in motion.

### **3. Security and Safety in Tourism Destinations**

Security is very essential in every aspect of tourism management: security of workers from zoonotic diseases and attack by wild animals; security of tourists, and security of eco-destination and biodiversity therein from encroachment and destruction. If an eco-destination such as a national park is destroyed by fire the attractive virtues of the resources that sustain tourists will be lost, and it becomes unpopular. Similar situation happens when an eco-destination is flooded. Flooding of a wildlife park destroys many faunas and negatively affects the landscape of the site, and tourists will be discouraged from visiting the destination (Ijeomah and Aiyeloja, 2011). Pandam Wildlife Park is not visited for tourism during the rainy season because of the flooded nature of the park, which hinders accessibility to the destination during that period (Ijeomah and Emelue, 2009). Consequence upon the Tsunami disaster as a result of the over flown Indian ocean the government of Sri Lanka complained of

lost of about 200,0000 jobs due to tremendous decrease in tourists visitation (Ashley, 2005). Though ecotourists prefer travelling to pristine areas for the sake of vivid experience in viewing of wild animals in their natural environment, mountain climbing, canoeing, walking along nature trails, studying endemic flora, hearing natural sounds made by wild animals and flowing water bodies, and interacting with existing cultural manifestations in a local setting, one of the management priorities of tourism outfits is to guarantee their security. Safety of tourists and security of tourism operations contributes immensely in guaranteeing visitation. Death of tourists makes an ecodestination unpopular as potential tourists feel unprotected. It also reveals management lapses as tourists are supposed to be properly guarded and guided to ensure their safety. Wide spread of infectious disease can kill herds of animals such as elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) and even affect domestic species (within the same family with the wild ones) that stray into wildlife parks. A zoonotic disease could be transferred to zoo keepers, and other persons that live in the lodges and enclave of ecodestinations (Eniang *et al.* 2011). Destruction of livestock of enclave and neighbouring communities by diseases could result in increased encroachment into the park by households to harness other non timber forest products for survival as livestock are highly valued as wealth and social capital among households living close to most protected areas of the world (Eniang *et al.*, 2011; Mwakatobe *et al.* 2013) . Killing of game guards and zoo keepers by wild animals apart from being loss of 'lives and experience' momentarily endangers tourists present within the destination at that time and disrupts tourism operations. The killing of the head of carnivores section of Jos Wildlife Park, in 1970s by a lion inside an enclosure threatened staff of the park, endangered tourists and park host communities as the entrance to lions' den was left open, and the four individuals of lion therein came out of their enclosure (Ijeomah, 2003).The destination was declared a danger zone until men of the Nigerian Police Force invited by the Plateau State Tourism Corporation arrived at the scene and shot them dead. Similarly, a lion has once killed a person at the University of Ibadan zoo in Nigeria. A onetime herpetologist at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria was killed by snake bite (Ijeomah, 2012).The nation (2013) reported of an experienced animal keeper killed in an old zoo (established in 1948) in Addisa Ababa, Ethiopia while the Telegram Media limited (2013) reported of an animal keeper in South Lakes Wild Animal Park killed by a Tiger. All these deaths were caused by human error notwithstanding that the deceased were 'well experienced' and worked with age – old wildlife/ tourism establishments. This implies that the management of eco destinations should as frequent as possible remind the animal keepers of the need to be very careful and cautious while opening animal enclosures, and also educate

the tourists through tour guides on the need to be escorted to the various parts of a tourist destination by tourism officials, and that animals have right of ways in wildlife parks. In the case of Jos Wildlife Park animal keepers were instructed to always lock themselves inside the enclosure while feeding faunas to avoid tourists becoming victims of their mistakes (Ijeomah, 2003). Adventure tourists want to be thrilled and perhaps frightened but not actually endangered (Cater, 2005). This study therefore examines the implications of the politics of dual management on Biodiversity Conservation and Ecotourism management in Nigeria's most popular (Odunlami, 2005) and most controversial ecodestination, the Yankari Wildlife Park.

#### **4.1 Methodology**

#### **4.2 Study Area**

Yankari Wildlife Park is located in Alkaleri Local Government Area of Bauchi State, occupies an area of about 2,244.10km<sup>2</sup> and lies on latitude 9<sup>0</sup>30<sup>1</sup>N and longitude 11<sup>0</sup> 00<sup>1</sup>E (Ubaru, 2000). The site was selected based on the following reasons:

It was the opening of the destination to the public in 1962 that marked the official recognition of ecotourism in Nigeria - Alarape (1995) emphasised that for whatsoever reason that prompted the opening of the Yankari Wildlife Park to the public in 1962, tourism must be inclusive. It has been the most controversial park in Nigeria as evidenced in the fact that it is the only national park in Nigeria that has been down graded to a game reserve. Yankari Wildlife Park is the most popular eco-destination in Nigeria and one of the most popular ecotourism destination in West Africa (Olokesusi, 1990; Odunlami, 2003).

#### **4.3 Data Collection**

Data for this research were collected through the use of structured Questionnaires, In depth interview and Field observations. Two sets of structured questionnaire were used for this research. The first was administered to 50% of the staff of the Yankari Wildlife Park who have worked in the park for a minimum of three years. The second set was randomly administered to forty tourists. Personal interviews were conducted with selected staff members who have worked with the Yankari Wildlife Park for a minimum period of four years and are therefore quite knowledgeable about the management politics existent in the park. Tourists were also selected at random and interviewed to complement the information

obtained through questionnaire. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics in form of frequency of counts and percentages.

### 5.1 Discussions

Table 1 presents the tourist attractions in Yankari Wildlife Park while Table 2 shows the effects of management politics on the activities in the park.

**Table 1: Attractions identified in Yankari Wildlife Park by tourist and staff respondents**

<b>Tourist attraction in Yankari Wildlife park</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Game viewing	100
Wikki warm spring	100
Other springs	100
Caves	100
Micro habitat of the environment	60.0
Hills	100
Rock paintings	100
Old iron smelting sites	100

**Table 2: Implication of management politics on conservation and ecotourism as perceived by staff and tourists**

<b>Perceived implication</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Indiscriminate hunting	100
Collection of fuelwood	85.0
Unregulated influx of tourists	100
Reduced quality of tourist experience	75.0
Difficulties by NPS in controlling the affairs of the park	90.0
Down grading of the park in 2006	100

### 5.2 Some Composition of the Park

The floral and faunal composition of the Yankari Wildlife Park are diverse and include mammals such as the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) which is always observed in herds; Lion (*Panthera leo*); African Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*); Roan antelope

(*Hippotragus equinus*); Western Hartebeest (*Alcephalus buselaphus*); Waterbuck (*Kobus defassa*); Bush-buck (*Tragelaphus scriptus*); Baboon (*Papio anubis*); Patas Monkey (*Erythrocebus patas*); Tantalus Monkey (*Cercopithecus tantalus*) and Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*). Also, many species of avifauna have been observed in the park. The diversity of these resources in their varied supporting micro habitats coupled with different and interesting behaviour by wildlife species tend to attract public attention. The higher chances of observing these unique, endangered and some abundant species in their natural near - grassland environment and at different water spots by tourists is one of the major sources of attractions of the Yankari Wildlife Park.

Another major attraction, the Wikki warm spring is the most popular spring in the ecodestination as it is the largest of the three warm springs therein and maintains a constant temperature of 31.1°C irrespective of the prevailing temperature of the macro environment. The spring flows from a hill into a depression; which the management redesigned to an attractive swimming pool through which the water flows to other parts of the park. The Wikki water looks bluish and flows consistently. The colour is different from the Farin Ruwa fall that is white in colour (Ijeomah and Alao, 2007). The Wikki warm spring is a recreation hot spot. These tourists attractions are known by many tourists and staff of the Yankari Wildlife Park (Table 1).

## **6. Effects of Politics on the Ecodestination**

Before 1991, an indigenous non professional was in charge of the Yankari ecodestination. When federal government of Nigeria took over the management of the park, there was mixed feelings. Some indigenes of host communities perceived it as a good development with the view that it would bring federal presence (including more development and employment) to the area. However, those interested in the management of the destination perceived that the federal government may bring in professionals from the National Park Service to manage the site; which may not favour their interests. The effects of the politics of dual administration with different objectives on Yankari Wildlife Park are many:

1. The Nigerian Park Service and Bauchi State government were issuing permits to use the resources in the park.
2. The Bauchi State government went ahead to build houses in the park. Governor's lodge was built close to Wikki spring, one of the core attractions in the park. Though the lodge was

built for the park but it was meant for only government officials who could not stay in the normal lodges.

The State government also issued license to a private water packaging company to tap the Wikki warm spring. The commercialisation of the Wikki warm spring generated a lot of concern to conservation experts. The company while using a machine to set pipes that would run to the warm spring generated noise that disturbed both wild animals and tourists. This generation of noise in a conservation area negates the principle of conservation and ecotourism as it makes the environment unnatural and frightens many wildlife species.

Fear could psychologically reduce the life span of these species. The noise makes animals restless and may induce abortion in pregnant animals. It was repeatedly experienced noise in the Kainji Lake National Park that led to the mass emigration of the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) to Niger Republic (Ijeomah and Emelue, 2009). Noise could also affect the behaviour of animals as it gradually makes them become habituated.

Reduction in the quantity of water that accumulates in the Wikki basin makes it less attractive to tourists. This would have affected visitation to the park as it is a major attraction. Animals which are also major attraction can only be observed by chance but the spring is an attraction that tourists could enjoy at any time due to the fact that it is stationary. If not for the revocation of the license, may be the Bauchi State Ministry of Tourism and Culture would have continued with commercialization of other core attractions.

Permits for utilising wild resources in the park were issued by the Bauchi State Ministry of Tourism and Culture whereas the park was managed by staff of the National Park Service (NPS). Visitors that actually obtained permit from the Bauchi State Ministry of Tourism and Culture were mainly indigenes of the State. With their permits they enter the park and start harnessing resources without consulting with the NPS staff. With this attitude and conflicting policies unauthorised visitors or poachers could as well enter the park unnoticed. It was on the basis of multiple authorities that the district head of Wikki, who is under the Bauchi emirate, with his administrative staff started residing inside the park. With his influence, health centre and school were built inside the park. Though staff of the park still use the facilities but they were built because of the district head. The presence of the district head in the park deforms the natural aesthetics of the park by making the destination look like a village due to the increased population of children therein. Children of these administrative staff frequently visit the warm spring. Tourists disliked and complained of the presence of many children in the Wikki warm spring, as they would have preferred interacting with nature and not persons in the ecodestination. Ordinarily, the presence of tourists in a

conservation area constitutes a challenge to park management as in most cases they destroy park resources when not properly controlled, and having them effectively controlled is more challenging when their population increases. Tourists are allowed just to generate money for conservation and impact host communities. Allowing many persons especially children to live inside a park (Yankari Wildlife Park) implies that the management is permitting destruction of biodiversity. This gradual destruction has manifested as households of the administrative staff of the district staff use his influence to harness fuelwoods from the ecodestination thereby altering micro habitats.

## **7. Protection from Rumour of Crises and Crises**

Cases of terrorism and threatening of tourists and tourism operations have not been experienced in Yankari Wildlife Park (Table). Tourists to the destination are satisfied with the level of cultural peace and safety experienced in the park irrespective of crises experienced in parts of the host Bauchi State and the neighboring Plateau State, with exaggerated occurrence of crises and rumors of crises always reported by foreign media.

One of the top management priorities of eco-destinations is to ensure that the park environment should also be protected from crises and rumors of crises. No matter the level of endowment with tourism resources, the packaging of the products and level of awareness created by tourism managers if the destination is not protected from the rumor of terrorism it will never flourish with inflows. The travel advisories issued by the United States, Britain and other western governments to their citizens against travelling to Kenya due to recent security challenges in the country has seriously affected international arrivals their globally unique and cherished destinations (Kuto and Groves, 2004).

Eco-tourists are more interested in forested and rocky areas; however, it takes concerted efforts to secure game reserves from operation of terrorists and militants in areas prone to attacks because the ecosystem provides varied and many microclimates for hoodlums to hide without being easily seen by security agents.

Allowing many people to live inside an ecodestination such as the Yankari wildlife park with diverse species of faunas constitutes a security threat to biodiversity, tourists and management of the park. Game guards find it more difficult to effectively secure such parks. Ijeomah *et al.* (2013) reported that the game guards at the Kainji Lake National Park of Nigeria find it very difficult to efficiently and effectively patrol and secure the premier

national park among other factors due to closeness of some ranges to host communities. The presence of many persons inside the Yankari wildlife eco-destination makes it difficult for the rangers to detect encroachments of host communities, terrorists or militants if it occurs. Early detection of encroachers facilitates their easy apprehension before they increase in population, settle in the park, become resident, dominate the area, start resisting arrest, overpower park management and become pronounced threats to both tourists and members of host communities. Encroachment and lurking of armed herdsmen in Pai River Wildlife Park of Plateau State, a destination that is unacceptably understaffed (by conservation principle) has led to frequent attacks of market women passing by the park area, and consequential withdrawal of the two game guards in the park by the Department of Forestry (of Plateau State Ministry of Environment) to save their lives (Ijeomah, 2012).

The terrorists that lurked in some isolated areas in Maiduguri overpowered the communities, seized and forced many beautiful teenage girls from those communities into marriages as their parents were compelled to accept 2000 naira bride price (equivalent of about USD12.00), and kept them in their isolated camp (which was their base of operation) to satisfy their sexual urges. The terrorists remained in the camps and held these abducted girls hostage for months until the federal government of Nigeria discovered the camps and intervened for their rescue through declaration of a state of emergency (in Borno State) – a condition that entails forceful ejection and destruction of the terrorists in all their bases of operation in the affected states in Nigeria using the military. Many destinations are destroyed after a rumour of crises or a crisis. It takes having large number of local tourists to sustain tourism in a destination that is prone to terrorism or had earlier been affected by crisis (Kuto and Groves, 2004). It is only a few destinations such as Jos Wildlife Park (Ijeomah *et al.*, 2011) and destinations in Sri Lanka (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), 2009; The New York, Times, 2010; Sri Lanka Treasury, 2011; Fernando and Shariff, 2013) that have exhibited resilience to effects of crisis. Many others take a very long time to recover – that is when the effects of the crises are no longer fresh in the minds of tourists.

The popularity of the Yankari Wildlife Park is still maintained as tourists are willing to repeat visits. Cases of disasters and deaths of tourists have not been reported therein. Terrorists attack have not been experienced in the park though high rate of poaching of animals has been experienced therein as also reported in other parks in Nigeria such as Kainji Lake national park (Ijeomah *et al.* 2013) and Old Oyo national park (Adetoro *et al.* 2011).

A wounded African elephant with arrow that was escaping from poachers was once observed inside the park. The freshness of the injury which was evident in the blood oozing out from the elephant body and the arrow it was carrying implies that the poachers that inflicted the wound on it might not be far from the park. In essence they may either be hiding in the neighbouring communities or be in the hidden parts of the park. There was high probability that households from the host communities to the park can harbour poachers since some of them have in one way or the other encroached into the park for various reasons. Besides, the host communities have severally complained of not really deriving benefits from the management of the park to compensate for their farm lands which they have been disallowed from using, and most of the developmental promises made by the governments towards empowering their communities are yet to be fulfilled. Similar situation of negligence to provision of alternative livelihood to destination host communities made some youths of host communities to Cross River national park told researchers that they would continue to avenge their anger on poaching of wild animals from the park (Ogunjinmi *per com*). These host communities to Yankari Wildlife Park therefore tend to be more loyal to the Bauchi State government that gives them permits to harvest some resources from the park than the National Park Service. Moreover, they are traditionally more connected to the district heads and the emir than the NPS officials.

## **7. Conclusion**

The politics of wildlife resources management in Yankari Wildlife Park has negatively affected both conservation and ecotourism development. Increased rate of encroachment in the park has been noticed as policies of the different authorities that managed the ecodestination conflicted. The differences experienced by the dual management of Yankari wildlife destination are in the area of perceptions, policies and control of resources. Though the politics is not quite beneficial to both the tourism value and the ecological status of the park, it is yet to stop tourists' visitation and has never reached the level of disrupting tourism operations and destroying investments through sponsored and targeted attacks as experienced in some destinations in other countries such as Kenya. The resources of the park can better be managed and given more protection by the National Park Service especially when its long desired ambition of being administered as a paramilitary organization in line with international standard, which has been approved, hopefully becomes implemented from January, 2014.

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