

► The West African Protected Areas Newsletter



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“Eco-tourism and conservation”



IUCN-PAPACO has launched a series of studies on conservation in West Africa: several of them are already online: contribution of community-based protected areas to conservation, Sahelo-Saharan dry areas' contribution to conservation, possible impact of the World Heritage label on conservation of protected areas, role of "big game hunting" in conservation, etc. The latest study was an attempt to assess the **role of tourism in conservation in Africa, particularly in West Africa**. This APAO newsletter presents some issues raised during the study.

All these studies can be downloaded at www.papaco.org, on publications section, page "our studies". The present study will be posted in extenso soon.

Eco-tourism in West African Protected Areas: how does it contribute to conservation?

■ Tourism in West African Pas: what does exist? ■

Ecotourism and community-based ecotourism are the kind of tourism that is expected within and at the periphery of parks and reserves, as they can be sustainable development tools. This kind of development means an economic development which is respectful of the environment and of the social context, and which takes into consideration current needs without jeopardizing needs of future generations.

Definitions

Ecotourism: today, a universal definition of ecotourism doesn't exist; however, the following dimensions can be considered as being the true essence of the concept: tourism focused on nature, an educative approach and the need to meet the criteria of sustainability - economic

development, environment protection and communities' well-being.

Community-based tourism refers to the form of tourism proposed and managed by local populations themselves; of course, community-based ecotourism also implies a commitment to the protection of natural resources and refers to the sustainable development concept.

This form of tourism can be managed either within a community-based PA, or at the periphery of a PA under the form of a community "micro-business". The principles of community-based tourism are based on the sense of ownership and community responsibility, with most of the benefits remaining for the community. Services' quality is one of the activity's requirements, even if the tourists' accommodations are generally more rudimentary than in classical "business tourism".

What about sustainability?

In West Africa, one mostly finds "nature tourism" which is an activity principally based on wildlife observation without any obligation for conservation or development. It is rather a tourism which "consumes the environment". There are other related forms of tourism in West African PAs: adventure tourism («conquest of nature»), sightseeing tourism, tourism which «consumes natural resources» such as hunting tourism or sport fishing... Most of these activities do not correspond to a sustainable approach, even if there are well managed in the short-term and try to be as durable as possible.

Community-based ecotourism is nevertheless becoming more and more important in West Africa, thanks to the multiplication of community areas, especially on the Atlantic littoral side with the creation of Community-based Marine Protected Areas. But « nature tourism » remains dominant in parks and reserves, without priority focus on sustainability criteria, and while ecotourism is recommended by all the actors involved in PAs at the sub-region level.



■ What is the importance of tourism sector at the sub-region scale? ■

Tourism, the world's first industry

A few figures to describe the situation:

- About 900 million international arrivals in 2007 (against 25 million in 1950);
- Between 4 and 5% annual growth, with an estimated projection of 1 billion arrivals in 2011 and 1.6 billion in 2020 in the world;
- 200 million direct jobs;

Therefore, tourism has an important development potential which is unfortunately unequally distributed. Tourism in Africa is quantitatively marginal compared to the European, American or Asia major destinations. A few indicators:

Africa receives only 4% of the world international arrivals, although it represents 22% of the earth's area and 15% of the world's population;

- West Africa receives only 10% of Africa tourism incomes;
- Tourism is very unequally distributed between African countries. On the continent, most of the arrivals are distributed between the two geographical extremes: Maghreb and Southern Africa;
- In West Africa, Nigeria and Senegal welcome the highest number of visitors, and yet, these two destinations are far to claim the rank of international destination (800 000 arrivals against 6 to 7 million in Tunisia and Southern Africa);
- However, tourism in Africa is increasing and in some countries, it has become a quite important source of incomes.

Tourism in parks and reserves follows the trend of tourism in the sub-region

It is very marginal due to a low number of visitors and a limited surface area of potentially interesting PAs (a small percentage of the national territory is really conserved). So that tourism in parks and reserves rarely represents more than 5% of visitors at the national level, with the exception of the Gambia where it reaches 33% of visitors, and to a lesser extent in Ghana. In all the other West African countries, seaside and business tourism are predominant in spite of an international demand which is more and more directed towards the discovery of natural environment.

With a few exceptions (mostly in Ghana), West African PAs rarely record more than 6 000 visitors per year. This figure only concerns famous big fauna parks. The number of visitors is very low, with a very limited stay length, and an activity which is very seasonal due to climate constraints.

As a comparison, a single park in East Africa such as Serengeti in Tanzania counts 160 000 visitors a year.

There are two main poles : sightseeing tourism dominates West Africa PAs landscape, mainly in savannah and forest parks and reserves (for big fauna); the other pole is the West African littoral side (for avifauna moreover).

Tourism has nevertheless become a strategic sector for governments who would like to use it as a sector of economic growth and of wealth creation for local populations. However, the orientation of West African countries towards ecotourism which could be a tool for parks and reserves' conservation is still not significant at the sub-regional scale.

■ Main assets and constraints of tourism in West African PAs? ■

The table below identifies the main factors limiting or favouring the development of ecotourism in West African parks and reserves.

Assets/ Opportunities	Weaknesses/ Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity of West Africa compared to the European emitting markets (about 5 to 6 hours flight) • Many ecotouristic potentialities still little exploited • Presence of exceptional sites, notably in terms if ornithology • Abundance of endemic species (pigmy hippos, manatees...) to attract a niche customers • Varied weathers which make it possible to extend the tourist period all over the year • WAPAs with very diversified ecosystems (including dry, forest savannah, littoral and wet areas) • Numerous cultural potentialities, which enable to make the distinction between West Africa and East or Southern Africa • Many classified sites • Presence of WAPAs near large urban poles, which might meet the needs of a clientele of expatriates • The existence of the foundations of an institutional framework to assure ecotouristic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong current seasonal nature of tourism (only a few months in the year) • Some environments are not very favourable to sightseeing (closed forests or savannah Sudano-Guinean areas) as opposed to large open areas of East Africa high plateaus for example • Very poor quality of infrastructures and services • Lack of qualified staff • No maintenance of access roads • Poor road network in protected areas • Little involvement of local populations • Few benefits for conservation and development • Little involvement of the private sector • Little control of the tourist activity in parks and reserves, which results in a negative impact on the environment • Absence of training in the area of ecotourism in the sub-region • Negative image of the countries: insecurity, armed conflicts... • Political instability • High cost of air transport • Tourist products not very original • Little promotion/ marketing of tourism • Absence of environmental programs or programs for interpreting the environment

■ How is ecotourism managed in West African PAs? ■

The forms of governance

They determine the way tourism is managed in a park or a reserve. The governance can be:

- **public:** however, the current tendency is to ensure that local communities will be associated. This “co-management” is supported by a growing involvement of local populations. Generally, PAs do not benefit from tourism incomes (which are deposited at the Treasury or the Central Administration). In most cases, the budget allocated to the PA is only sufficient to cover the operational and staff costs, and cannot contribute to the development of the tourist activity.

Nevertheless, when it takes place, this activity is often managed by a Service or an Office (included in the National Parks' Department), and sometimes there is a staff in charge of tourism within the PA (two out of all the PAs concerned by the study have someone in place specifically for this activity).

- **community-based:** a management committee composed of many stakeholders manages the tourism activity. These stakeholders organize themselves to offer tourist services such as accommodation, food, guiding, selling of craft and locally processed products... Most of the tourism incomes remain within the protected area and one part of the benefits is often allocated to communities around the PA via a community-based development fund, whereas another percentage is dedicated to conservation.

- **private:** this tourism mainly aims at enhancing the site, therefore the tourist incomes are used for this purpose. There are very few real private reserves in West Africa, and the few that exist are mainly zoos and not PAs.

Ineffective management systems

In a West African PA, the role of the parks and reserves department regarding tourism is to ensure the control and management of the activity (nomination of someone in charge), to secure, protect and maintain the PA, as far as possible. The private sector should take care of the welcoming, accommodation and food, whereas the local populations' organizations should more focus on basic activities (such as guiding). But, in West African PAs, almost no hotel concession is really granted to privates, with a very few exceptions, as in the W national park in Niger or the Pendjari NP in Benin, and some ongoing projects which still have not succeeded (as in Nazinga Reserve, in Burkina Faso).

Existing tourist infrastructures and services in West African PAs are usually as inefficient as management systems are

Most often, state-managed PAs have poor quality accommodation facilities. Due to lack of budget coming from the government, infrastructures are often getting old, are not fitted in the environment, and their negative impact on the environment (no water or waste management system, no incentive for “green” energy for instance) is not minimized.

Facilities in PAs are often very few, inefficient and their design may cause fauna disturbances. There are no mode for “interpreting the environment” for visitors, and the guiding services offered can rarely fill this gap.

Only certain private reserves, like the *Makasutu Cultural Forest* in the Gambia, or some community areas which benefit from a sustainable foreign support (Marine community-based PA

of Bamboung in Senegal for instance) or PAs which benefit from an autonomous financial system...can progress towards a better management of tourism, and therefore ensure the sustainability of the activity.

■ Which place for local communities in West Africa PAs ecotourism? ■

What about the involvement of PAs' riparian populations and co-management

Generally, the State is in charge of PAs' management, excluding any participation of local populations. However, the last two decades have seen the development of a more balanced mode of management: the participatory management or co-management which implies that populations' legitimacy in the management of the natural environment be recognized. Tourism will be identified as the « development-conservation » strategy which enables to reconcile the interests of the various stakeholders, development incomes for the ones and conservation for the others.

Populations' involvement in tourism management

Co-management implies the formulation of management plans according to a participatory approach, integrating authorities as well as populations living around PAs. The management of the ecotouristic activity can therefore be delegated to local populations within the framework of ecotourism inter-village committees for instance but other forms of local organization exist.



Level of involvement differs largely according to the kind of PA concerned

Populations can manage a touristic micro-business, either within a community area, or at the periphery of a PA, and/or provide services (guiding), activities (theatre, traditional dance) or products (craft). Populations will be more engaged for the conservation of a community-based protected area in which they manage and control the tourism activity.

However, their involvement will also be important in a state PA, if there is a will for co-management like for example in Pendjari, Benin, where specific measures of integration are applied (example of eco-rangers in Senega tool, recruited among riparian populations).

Support programs are essential for communities' integration in the management of the tourism activities

The ST-EP (Sustainable Tourism- Eliminating Poverty) Foundation, supported by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) plays a crucial role in West Africa: created to notably finance tourism micro projects, it intervenes in West Africa, in ten countries. The Netherlands development organization, SNV, is one of the key actors for increasing tourism impact on local economy, providing a technical and financial assistance to local communities.

All the PAs studied demonstrate also the interest of integrating surrounding areas in the development of tourism; but the global result is rather mitigated. Most often, there is a lack of sustainable technical and financial partnerships to ensure a sustainable and effective involvement of communities.

■ What is the potential contribution of tourism to parks and reserves' development? ■

Mechanisms for local development contribution

In community areas, a community-based development fund is generally set up, allocating about 20% of tourism income to development. No official mechanism is developed in state-managed PAs, with the exception of financially autonomous PAs such as the Pendjari national park where *30% of hunting incomes are allocated to local development*. However, alternative mechanisms can be set up by the parks' service or local stakeholders: donation boxes, circuits in the villages, payment of a percentage of the guiding costs to health services, education...

Inconclusive results in terms of economic development

Very few community areas draw profit from tourism. Few jobs are remunerated, with fixed salaries and full-time work. They are rather paid on a commission basis. In state-managed PAs, populations don't really benefit from tourism incomes because they are not enough involved. One of the reasons may be the management of the activity by foreign enterprises, like the receptive agency of Point

Afrique in Niger (W national park). The only direct benefits drawn from the tourism activities are the guiding costs which are directly paid to guides and the salaries paid to the populations working in the hotel; indirect benefits come from the selling of locally processed products. In these two cases, the jobs are mainly related to guiding, hostelry and catering sectors.

In bordering areas, craft is much marginalized in spite of the existence of many potentialities. However, populations are seldom well organized, with the exception of the Djoudj inter-village committee where the craft activity is profitable to the local women economic interest group and which benefits are equally distributed between the seven villages around the PA.

The results are also mitigated for community-based tourist micro-businesses where only those who benefit from a long-term support seem to be operational.

A more satisfactory contribution to the improvement of living conditions, but strongly concentrated in touristic areas

In all the PAs visited, signs of social improvement regarding the fundamental needs can be noticed due to the touristic activity: access to water, health and education. These supports are provided either:

- by the community-based development fund within the framework of community areas, or by private financial partners,
- through facilitations provided by the parks and reserves managers (free drinkable water, facilitation of transport, access to health...)
- by visiting tourists who make donations, and materially or financially support the community.

However, this contribution only concerns the communities directly involved in the touristic activity, and they are very few at the sub-regional scale.

■ What is the potential contribution of tourism to parks and reserves' conservation? ■

Resource-dependent populations

The vulnerability of riparian communities and their constant increase make them strongly dependent of natural resources for their subsistence. Therefore, they practice poaching, hunting, wild fires and pasture, and overexploitation of lands... All the West African PAs of the study, more or less, experience such pressures on their environment. Tourism has been identified as a tool which helps to fight against poverty and therefore, reduce the impact of pressures on the resources. While this is logical, it is quite difficult to demonstrate the real impact of tourism on conservation.

Mechanisms of contribution of the tourist activity to conservation

In community areas, a part of the tourism benefits is dedicated to the conservation of a natural area for which the community area has been created, contrarily to state-managed PAs where no mechanism provides for that because of low tourist incomes. However, the contribution can be done indirectly by the tourism stakeholders: hotel managers (funding the maintenance of trails, participating to reforestation campaigns for example), guides associations or ecoguards' economic interest group (a percentage of the benefits of their activity dedicated to conservation)

Local touristic jobs in favour of conservation

The involvement of local populations in parks and reserves tourism can have significant impacts on conservation. The employment of fishermen and former poachers is most in demand. In addition, touristic activity favours the employment of supervisors, salaried or paid on a commission basis, in all the PAs. They play a fundamental role of conservation ambassador with local populations. In most cases, changes of mentality are noticed among villagers and they become more environment-friendly.

The benefits for conservation are difficult to measure,

in absence of appropriate indicators. The impact is judged rather positive in some of the community areas studied, thanks to the involvement of populations and the percentage paid for conservation. The surveys show an increase of species and preserved biotopes. In parks and reserves managed by the state, it is difficult to assess the benefits for conservation. However, the touristic activity being globally weak, the benefits are almost inexistent. In absence of management and control of the activity, tourism can also be a source of wildlife disturbance, visual pollution (waste, non integrated hotel facilities), sound pollution (powerful engines, also causing wildlife disturbance), environmental pollution (no water and energy management, no waste sorting, and no environmental education programs).

The sustainability of the activity is under question

The issue of sustainability is important in West Africa PAs where tourism benefits are seldom enough important to contribute to conservation. Whichever the PA is, it lacks of financial means and competencies. Means, funds or norms for activities' monitoring and assessment are absent or insufficient.

■ A few ideas to improve the contribution of tourism to local development ■

A better involvement of peripheral areas in touristic activity cannot be achieved without enhancing the socio-cultural heritage valorisation

Identification studies of these potentialities should be carried out in the PA's surrounding areas to make them better known. Inventories of the material (archaeological sites...) and immaterial (local traditional activities, oral traditions...) heritage in each locality should facilitate the integration of communities according to their potentialities. Their enhancement can be done through the promotion of cultural tourism at the periphery of PAs. Agreements between the park managers and the communities can be made in order to integrate peripheral areas in the tours proposed to the visitors within the PA.

Developing new activities and diversifying tourist products

The realization of community-based micro projects in surrounding areas should continue to promote and offer, to the West African PAs' visitors, the inter-cultural discovery in addition to the discovery of the natural environment. Identifying potential service providers (craftsmen, artists, bee-keepers...) is a required preliminary before encouraging them to organize themselves, do their promotion and thus enhance these annex jobs.

Alternative discovery modes could be developed and offered to populations, and this would diversify the touristic offer, create more job opportunities for local residents and enable the fair distribution of wealth. Periphery discovery could be done on foot, on horseback, on camelback, in canoe, pirogue, bike... according to what is available.

Well organized craft is identified as a sector which might contribute to safeguarding riparian populations' cultural values and creating enough jobs and wealth, as proved by the organization of the economic interest group of the Djoudj women committee. PAs' peripheries and buffer zones are endowed with the non timber

forest products resources necessary for making art objects likely to be sold to tourists.



Supporting measures to assure the sustainability of the implication process

The success for integrating peripheral areas depends on a sustainable technical and financial support, as provided by SNV in the implementation of community-based tourist micro-projects around West African PAs.

In order to have the best protection against the negative cultural impacts of tourism, it may be necessary to raise awareness and educate all the stakeholders involved (communities, visitors, tour operators) through the development of tools, campaigns, agreements or codes of conduct...



■ A few key points to improve the contribution of tourism to conservation ■

Finding mechanisms for redistributing tourism incomes in the PA

Some West African PAs entry costs (notably those internationally known and thus easily valuable) could be increased and a percentage of the incomes allocated to conservation.

West African PAs pricing list could also be adapted, like for East African parks, in order to attract more national visitors. Agreements could be made with tour operators in order to pay a percentage of the stay cost to conservation. Many other alternative funding sources could be developed, such as ecovoluntary service programs funding conservation, the setting up of foundations or trust funds, the promotion of derivate products...

Encouraging public/private sector partnerships

Integrating private sector in tourism development is an important element of the economy which should help generating incomes for enhancing PA's protection. It is about developing applicable land tenure for the attribution of concession to the private sector, inducing the creation

of priority touristic zones. A set of marketable services (equivalent to marketable service provision: hostelry, food, guiding...) and non marketable could be conceded to the private sector.

Developing a tourism more integrated to the protected area concept

As far as touristic management aspects are concerned, it is important to better set up tourists management areas and define qualitative specifications for infrastructures, complying as much as possible with the norms of high quality environmental standard (HQE). No infrastructure should be constructed without conducting a preliminary

environmental impact study, which integrates the conservation of the landscape and defines a mode of operation limiting impacts on the environment (suggestion of energetic choices favouring the photovoltaic, waste and wastewater processing...). Welcoming and interpretation places should be created: park houses, information and direction signage, interpretative trails... Besides, environmental sensitization and education programs should be implemented to the intent of all stakeholders, provided with a range of tools (booklets, guides, brochures, interpretative tables...)

The touristic services provided within a PA should also meet strict environmental requirements in order to limit fauna pollution or disturbance.

The search for a naturalist tourism that is a scientific or ecological tourism should be widely encouraged - this clientele being more looking for a thorough discovery of the environment rather than comfort, and concerned about their impact on the environment. Tourism contribution to conservation cannot be improved at the institutional level without developing a consultation framework which enables to set up touristic activities to support and enhance conservation; nor without strengthening countries' management instruments (environmental and touristic).

■ What future for tourism in West African PAs? ■

Biodiversity, which is the main interest for visitors, is hardly seen in West African PAs

The state of conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity in West Africa Sahelo-Sudanian and Sudanian regions is in a critical state. The management and conservation of the biological diversity do not constitute a political priority, because of the poverty level in some countries and of lack of interest of most of authorities. The management level is rather low, even in the presence of projects funded by international donors or conservation NGOs.

Therefore, if the conservation of biodiversity, ecosystems, habitats and landscapes is not inserted in the general strategy for biodiversity conservation at the West African scale (fixing priorities such as the protection of certain emblematic species), visitors will turn away from West African PAs, this "tourism niche" will not be developed. Therefore, the PA's peripheries will not be able to attract visitors for cultural tourism, if organized, and this will jeopardize local economic development.



In some priority sites with high tourism potentialities, deadlock management factors might be removed in the mid-term

Some protected areas have been identified such as Djoudj/Diawling, W/pendjari, Niokolo/Badiar, the Transboundary Biosphere Reserve of Salom/Niumi or the river basins between the Gambia and Guinea Bissau. They host emblematic and/or diversified species, spectacular landscapes with a great cultural richness...

These protected areas seem to have a quite brilliant future compared to the other PAs of the sub-region, provided that a series of actions be undertaken to remove the development deadlocks (strengthening institutional and organizational capacities, human and financial means, improving communication, promotion...)

Tourism cannot be developed unless progressively removing the external and internal constraints related to the sub-region PAs.

With a few exceptions, globally the factors limiting tourism development are too much numerous for the West African PAs to quickly allow them to reach the level of East or Southern Africa parks and reserves. Some weaknesses will be progressively overcome according to the political will of each country and the involvement of donors...

If local tourism, adapted to an expatriate clientele seems to be the future for the majority of the protected areas, it will however increase and become profitable at the following condition:



strengthening public policies, upgrading equipment and facilities, developing an institutional information (updating the "interpretative" guides, editing documents on PAs, creating websites...) and integrating peripheral areas populations. In English-speaking countries, national tourism is also destined to play a key role, as it is already the case in Ghana and Nigeria.

**More information on:
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► **The APAO's newsletter** ◀

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