

ECOTOURISM POTENTIALS OF BUI NATIONAL PARK

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Abstract: The changing demands of tourism provide greater benefits to tourists and generate competitive advantages that develop diversity in tourism. Bui National Park (BNP) has a wealth of natural, cultural, historical and lately, recreational features. However, its location, and the creation of the Bui Hydro dam, has opened the area as a significant tourism area. This paper tries to evaluate the potential and possibilities of ecotourism in this protected area; using SWOT analysis to assess and evaluate the potential the area has for ecotourism in terms of sustainable development to provide useful ideas for further research. A sample size of 30 respondents was selected using simple random sampling method to answer a guided questionnaire for selected community members and staff of Bui National Park. The results revealed that the residents of Bui were positive about the idea of ecotourism in the area and showed interest in doing what they can to make it possible. The national park also showed great potentials for ecotourism which when well-developed will attract many visitors to the area; all these are geared towards improving the local and national economy. The management of BNP should make an effort to increase the public awareness of the park as a tourism destination, adding more activities to help immerse visitors into the community and involve the community members in decision making in such a way that could help boost their ecotourism potential. An ecotourism research unit, if established in BNP can do more research in the various aspects in ecotourism.

Keywords: Tourism, Cultural resources, Ecotourism, Community, Hydro dam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background:

International tourism has been a key industry in some favorably located less develop countries like Mexico, Turkey, the Caribbean islands for decades. These countries have benefited from international tourism as a result of being adjacent to the key generating countries of the Western Europe and North America. However, as the frontiers of international tourism spread from these places to more remote and less developed peripheries, these nations have since the early 1980s been losing part of their markets (Koutra, 2007). One of such remote periphery where international tourism is now experiencing impressive growth rates is sub-Saharan Africa.

Ghana is among the African countries where the tourism industry has suddenly moved from sideline to the center stage of economic strategies (Koutra, 2007). According to High Street Journal (1998), tourism is estimated to account for more than 16% of Ghana's total foreign exchange earnings, which places the industry as the third highest export after minerals and cocoa. It is indeed one of the fastest growing industries in Ghana as it has over the years become one of the key sub-sectors contributing to the Ghanaian economy.

According to Nadeem (2001) tourism encompasses everything from planning of a trip, travel to the place, the stay, the return and the reminiscences afterwards. It also includes the activities, which the traveler undertakes as part of the trip, the purchases and the interaction, which occurs between the host and the guest.

Ecotourism, as a more recent alternative form of tourism behavior, is gaining prominence as the sustainable option that may serve as a universal remedy for enhancing the developmental ills (example, congestion, pollution, inflation, loss of cultural identity) associated with traditional mass tourism (Butler, 1990; Gunn, 1991; Valentine, 1993; Wight, 1993; Allcock, 1994). Kang (2000) also claims that ecotourism; as an alternative tourism is evaluated as the optimal implementation strategy to guarantee the sustainability of tourism and is facilitating the booming of sustainable tourism all over the world. Also, Orams (1995) asserts that ecotourism consists of the following components: conservation benefits, the nature-based experience, the setting and economic and social benefits. Ecotourism should benefit conservation through improved management of visited natural areas. The core precepts of ecotourism according to Ah-Choy (2010) are conservation of natural and cultural heritage; empowerment and provision of financial benefits for local communities; minimal environmental impact; environmental and cultural education and respect for tourists.

Ghana in recent years has become a pioneer in the field of community based ecotourism, which majority aims in creating a beneficial mutual relationship between conservationists, tourists and local communities. Ecotourism also encompasses travelling to relatively undisturbed and uncontaminated natural area with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild (plants and animals) as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas (Fennell 2008). Ecotourism offers great opportunities and potentials such as employment and income to poor rural communities as well as improving infrastructure and balancing economic activities within the locality, when well managed (Bush, 2000). Studies by Kangas et al., (1995) suggests that ecotourism accounts for a large share of some countries gross domestic product particularly in developing countries, and contributes to the livelihoods of large segments of the population. In the same light, Hovengaard (1994) also indicated that ecotourism activities generate economic impacts on a global, national and local scale. Similarly, Israr et al., (2009) argued that ecotourism plays a key role in the economy of developing world by improving the economic conditions of the local communities and generating income for their livelihood.

Problem Statement:

Bui National Park, a unique area with amazing tourist attractions like hippopotamus viewing has not been generating income for the community members and the staff.

Due to the demand of electrical energy in Ghana, a dam was constructed across the Black Volta River. The reservoir flooded about 23% of the Bui National Park which caused an increase in the level of the Volta River.

The dam created on the river has created suitable habitats for hippopotamus and other aquatic wildlife.

The terrestrial habitats destroyed by flooding have created new niches for fishes suitable for spot fishing. This has created an alternative form of tourism potential in the BNP. There is no baseline information on the ecotourism potential since the construction of the dam.

Justification:

Ecotourism serves as a tool for conservation that seeks to help protect the natural setting of an area of visit; it also provides positive contributions to the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of destinations and to the local communities.

Bui national park is a reserve that seeks to maintain its natural environment and ecosystem in it whiles engaging in tourism activities that will bring more interested visitors to the place which can bring benefits to the local communities, the management and staff of the park and also contribute to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the nation.

Ecotourism is therefore the best option for Bui National Park to be a potential tourist destination in the country. Attractions like home stay, river skating, spot fishing, wildlife viewing and hiking on the mountains are all opportunities for the management to explore.

This research will identify the opportunities and strengths of the park as well as its weaknesses and threats in establishing ecotourism. This information will contribute to the management plan of Bui National Park, which is yet to be done.

Students will also use the information for more knowledge about the study area and also for further research purposes.

The information from this research will serve as baseline information for ecotourism development in Ghana.

Objectives:

The main objective of this research is to identify the ecotourism potentials in Bui National park.

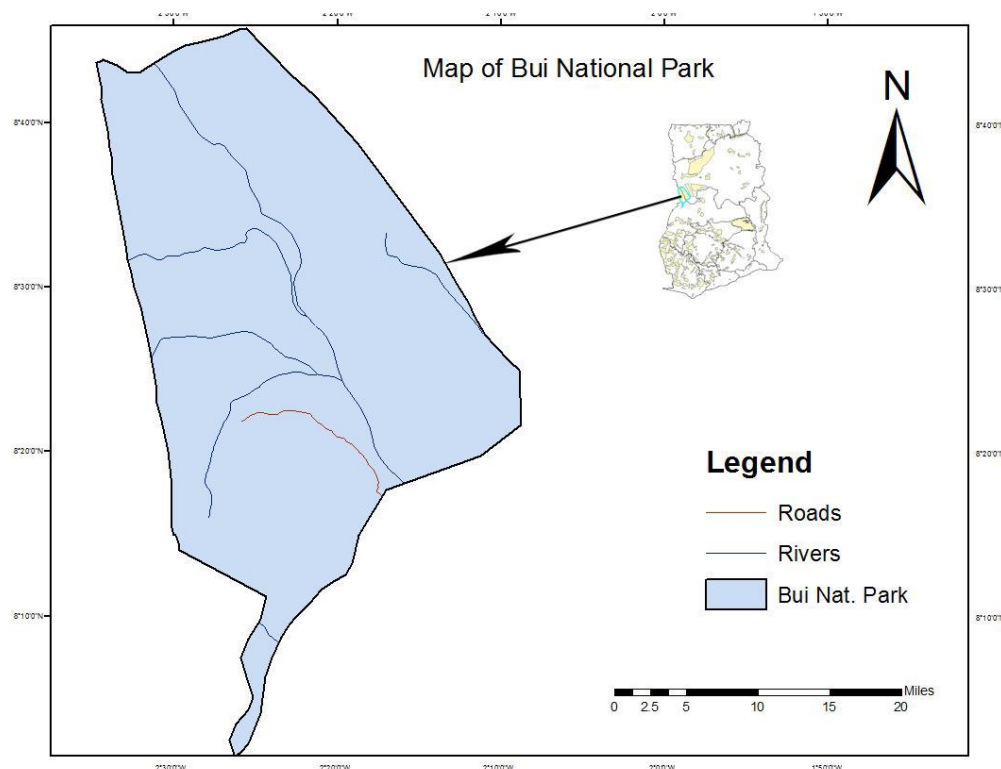
Specific objectives are:

1. To assess the potential of ecotourism development in Bui National park.
2. To identify the role of the communities in ecotourism development in Bui National Park.

2. METHODOLOGY

Study Area:

Bui National Park is the third largest wildlife protected area in the country. It is located on $8^{\circ} 23' 13.2072''$ N, $2^{\circ} 22' 43.9788''$ W, in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana (Figure 1). The park covers $1,821\text{km}^2$ and is bisected by the Black Volta. The vegetation type is in a typical woodland savanna zone, with spectacular gallery forests along river courses. The BNP is particularly notable for its resident Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibious*) population in the Black Volta. Primates like the endangered black and white Colobus monkey (*Colobus guereza*) and variety of antelopes (*Antilopinae spp*) and birds are also present. Fauna species occurring in the park are species typical of the guinea savannah ecosystem. Elephants are however absent in Bui National Park, this is because the terrain is dominated by hills and rocks, especially in the south. Large animals like Buffalos (*Bison bison*), Roan Antelopes (*Hippotragus equinus*), Water Bucks (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*), Bush Bucks (*Tragelaphus spp*), Kobs (*Kobus kob*), Duikers (*Alcelaphus buselaphus*), Warthogs (*Phacochoerus africanus*) and different species of Monkeys are all found in the park. Carnivores such as leopards (*Panthera pardus*), Civet cats (*Civettictis civetta*) and wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) are also found there.



Map of Bui National Park in relation to Ghana

Sampling procedure:

Bui, Dokokyina and Bator villages were purposively selected because they were directly affected by the overflow of the Bui dam and they had to be relocated, the research was targeted at the residents of these communities. A sample size of 30 respondents, 10 females and 10 males selected randomly from the various communities and 10 workers from Bui National Park were equally selected, using simple random sampling techniques. The key staffs of BNP, whose daily activities include patrolling of the Park, were contacted for clarifications and more information.

A well-structured interview guide (see appendix) was used to extract the information from the respondents. In each community, the identification of respondents (both male and female) was done using simple random sampling method. A respondent was selected randomly. The data collection took place within the month of July.

Research fatigue was observed among the respondents since several studies have been undertaken in the area and thus, the respondents' expectations in terms of incentives for their time in providing information was high. Some respondents, however, were willing to participate when informed that the study was for academic purpose.

Data Analysis:

SWOT analysis was used to analyze the information gathered. SWOT analysis is an acronym for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (Helms et al, 2010). It is a structured planning method that evaluates those four elements of a project. It involves specifying the objective of the project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favourable and unfavourable to achieve that objective. SWOT analysis groups key pieces of information into two main categories:

- Internal factors- the strengths and weaknesses internal to the organization.
- External factors- the opportunities and threats presented by the environment external to the organization.

Audio recordings from the interviews were listened to and relevant information needed for the SWOT was extracted from the information gained from respondents.

3. RESULTS

A SWOT analysis of Bui National Park with the community members and the workers of Bui National Park was collected and sorted into four categories. Strengths and weaknesses which generally come from factors within the organization that can help ecotourism, whereas opportunities and threats from external factors that impedes ecotourism development.

SWOT analysis of interviews by the staff of Bui National Park:

Strengths:

1. The National Park still retains in its natural character of the forest areas with uniquely beautiful and natural landscapes.
2. Ecosystem diversity and richness e.g. ; vegetation cover and presence of wild animals African Buffalo (*Bison bison*), Roan Antelope (*Hippotragus equinus*), Water Buck (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*), Kob (*Kobus kob*), Bush Buck (*Tragelaphus spp*), Red Flanked Duiker (*Cephalophus rufilatus*), Common Duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*), Olive Baboon (*Papio Anubis*), Patas Monkey (*Erythrocebus patas*), Green Monkey (*Chlorocebus sabaues*), Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibious*), African Wild Dog (*Lycan pictus*), Lesser Spot-Nosed Monkey (*Cercopithecus petaurista*), Mona Monkey (*Cercopithecus mona*) and Oribi (*Ourebia ourebi*).
3. Easily accessible due to its geographical location.
4. Offers many activities such as cave tourism, hiking, mountain sports, photo safaris, bird and butterfly watching, nature walks, study tours, skiing, game viewing, hiking, spot fishing, village visits, heritage sites visits are available in all seasons.
5. Available bus services from Techiman, Wenchi, Kintampo and Sunyani.
6. Availability of support services such as banks, accommodation (hotel).
7. Different lifestyles of the people at Bui.
8. Other attractions located close to the park like Banda historic cave.
9. The hills for hiking activities.

Weaknesses:

1. It cannot be adequately protected while people unconsciously exploit the natural resources.
2. Lack of social awareness about protected areas.

3. Inadequate qualified staff.
4. Low government funding.
5. Environmental, economic and social consequences which can lead to different results with the apparent lack of eligibility criteria of ecotourism activities.
6. The lack of an institutional structure for monitoring and controlling ecotourism activities consisting of uncontrolled entry.
7. Protectionist awareness of tourism is not developed well enough.
8. Poor advertising.
9. Lack of infrastructure and superstructure at the desired level could threaten ecotourism services.
10. Insufficiently developed public awareness of natural protection.
11. Lack of structure required to perform many of the top and bottom ecotourism activities.
12. Inadequate accommodation.
13. Poor linkages of access routes in the park.
14. Inadequate number of vehicles for patrols.

Opportunities:

1. Ghana's increasing demand for ecotourism
2. Ecotourism providing new job opportunities for local communities and generating revenue.
3. Unspoiled areas.
4. The creation of new investments in the ecotourism sector.
5. Different geographical structures.
6. Having a wide variety of different recreational and tourists activities.
7. Developing transportation facilities and development of long-distance travel opportunities.
9. Landscape beauty.
10. Increase the quality of natural areas protected by law.
11. The increased interest of the individual and the community in ecotourism
12. Rich in flora and fauna with natural structure.

Threats:

1. Exceeding the carrying capacity.
2. Solid waste pollution.
3. The corruption of cultural heritage.
4. Competition from other national parks.
5. The monotony of ecotourism activities can bring trouble everywhere.
6. Threats made for promoting ecotourism which led to excessive construction in natural areas of investment

SWOT analysis of interviews by the community members:

Strengths:

1. The flora and fauna diversity of the park are a heritage to the people.
2. Beautiful scenery of the park.

3. Good air quality due to the natural state of the park.
4. Good roads into the community from the park.
5. Cultural pride and respect of the people.
6. Serene Environment devoid of any form of disturbances.
7. Group of volunteers and other community representatives to enhance tourism.
8. Training for community volunteers.

Weaknesses:

1. Low level of knowledge in ecotourism of community members.
2. Long distance to the lake
3. Loss of the forest quality of some parts of the park due to illegal and excessive cutting of trees
4. Some fishermen in the community being attacked by poachers.
5. The change in the morphology of the water that runs in the park deters the fishermen from fishing since most of them are used to the shallow water (river).
6. Conflicts between poachers and the wildlife division.

Opportunities:

1. Inter community cohesion.
2. The Banda historic cave found in the park is a good site for attracting visitors.
3. An open lake recreation in the park for activities like boat cruising, fishing safaris, skiing, sport fishing.
4. Home stays facilities to tourists.
5. The Bui Hydro dam.

Threats:

1. Illegal and excessive fishing in the lake.
2. Excessive cutting down of the trees.
3. Robbery on the main road.
4. Charcoal burning inside the park which sometimes leads to bush fires.
5. Settlements found in the park built by outsiders.

4. DISCUSSION

There has been an increasing demand for ecotourism in Ghana as a result of its benefit such as improvement in local economy and conservation of the environment (GTB, 2008).

The result from the SWOT analysis indicates that the park has enormous potential that can be exploited in numerous of ways. The study shows that the park retains its natural character of the forest areas with uniquely beautiful and natural landscapes. This is a very important feature as natural settings are appealing to most tourists. This assertion is supported by Shrestha et al., (2006) who stipulated that more people visit natural areas for tourism and recreation purposes and as such its becoming increasingly important to understand the value they place on these natural resource settings of this sites. They stated specifically that tourists to Florida have been increasingly interested in visiting natural areas, forests and parks. The result also showed that the park has an appealing ecosystem diversity and richness which can attract many eco-tourists to the park thereby enhancing the park's ecotourism prospect and in turn generating revenue.

The study revealed that the park offers many activities such as cave tourism, hiking, mountain sports, photo safaris, bird and butterfly watching, nature walks, study tours, skiing, game viewing, hiking, spot fishing, village visits, heritage sites visits are available in all seasons. These features associated with the Bui National Park are very important features that can attract tourists if properly developed. The diverse nature of the park is a feature that most tourists hold in high esteem as they can possibly engage in several activities anytime they visit the park. Also a major advantage of the park is the readily available bus services from Techiman, Kintampo, Wenchi and Sunyani to the site. This is very essential especially among tourists as they usually do not come with their own transports thereby relying on public transport.

Aside the serene environment and the diverse side attractions associated with the parks, one very important add-on is the availability of support services such as banks and available accommodation although this could be developed in a far better way. This is a very important feature that could possibly guarantee the safety of tourist in situations they do not want to keep a lot of money on them but can anytime access if required of them. This important feature that is essential for any tourist site was echoed by Shrestha et al., (2006) who reported that, added infrastructure and easy accessibility can significantly increase visit to these sites.

Lastly, the result of the study revealed that there exist other attractions located close to the park like Banda historic cave. This is an important feature that could encourage tourist to visit the side in moments where they want to visit multiple sites at the same time. Tourists who are interested in this kind of sites are the adventure tourists. These type of tourists seek unusual, bizarre experience. They enjoy adventurous activities that may be dangerous such as bungee jumping, skydiving as well as rock climbing which is mainly done at the Banda historic cave.

It is evident that local communities play a vital role in the promotion of ecotourism. Ecotourism can be integrated with other sectors of the rural economy creating mutually supportive linkages between the site and the community members. According to Michael et al. (2013), communities can actively be participating in tourism through all forms of decision making. The study showed that the attitude of the host community was positive and it also showed that majority of the tour operators and tour guides have enough knowledge about ecotourism. The study revealed that the tour guides who take the tourists around are sometimes community members giving an indication of the essential role of the community.

Group of volunteers and other community representatives voluntarily take tourists on their boats for fishing, boat cruising, wildlife viewing. As these community representatives move around with the tourists, they seize the opportunity to talk about the history of the park and their culture. Although these volunteers are sometimes paid or receive gifts from the tourists in appreciation of their time and welcoming talks, the tourists in return gain knowledge and these in turn promote tourism at Bui National Park as they feel welcome, needed and appreciative.

Local communities help provide accommodation for tourists by agreeing on the idea of homestay. Homestay benefits both parties (tourists and community members) in most cases. This is because not only do the tourists get a place to stay but they as well get to consume locally prepared meal if they want to and also learn way of life of the people. On the other hand, the community members who made their homes available may also obtain some financial rewards and also learn different languages, lifestyles and others from the tourists. This role played by community members are essential and could be beneficial in attracting other tourist to the site if properly managed and enhanced. The management of the park offers training sessions for interested community members in tour guiding, boat/canoe paddling, communication skills, safety lessons and emergency first aid administration. The community member avail themselves for this exercise and by so doing they are able communicate and in some cases are able to single handedly take tourists on their tours without the help of the Bui National Park workers.

Tourists going to BNP's headquarters first have to pass through either of these three communities; Bui, Bator and Dokokyina. These communities are very quiet and peaceful making it safe for tourists. These communities being kept peaceful and safe by community members is a significant contribution to the success of the ecotourism site as it guarantees the safety of tourists and also encourages homestay.

The park itself due to its natural undisturbed nature is suitable for camping. It also has good air quality, beautiful scenery of amazing landscapes of which eco-tourists enjoy and take advantage of.

To increase the level of knowledge of ecotourism in the community members, training and education sessions as well as awareness programs are made available to them. They are educated on ecotourism, enlightened on the benefits they can gain from ecotourism, their roles they can partake to make ecotourism a successful one in their community. An awareness program to make them aware of the negative implications of destroying nature, how nature helps us in performing our daily activities and the need to protect and conserve nature. Training is an important tool in making the people

understands the nature of work done by the park management. It goes a long way to make the people appreciate what they have and do their best to protect it as the workers in the management of parks do. When the community members are trained and involved in the day to day activities of protecting and conserving the park they will be obliged to stop all natural and life threatening activities done to the park like hunting of animals, illegal and successive fishing activities done in the lake that's in the park, cutting down of trees, charcoal burning which can lead to bush fires that can eventually spread to neighbouring villages around the Bui National Park causing destruction to life and properties. Hence these training sessions and awareness encourage community members to partake in protecting the natural settings of the park and its preservation hence promoting a sustained ecotourism over time.

Community involvement and education will solve many problems. When the people feel like their inheritances are taken away from them and are not benefitting in any way from it they tend to become angry and sometimes violent. They move into the protected area and kill animals, cause destruction in the area. If they benefit from the park like being employed as tour guides, tourists purchasing souvenirs, food and other items from them when they are being consulted in decision making they will feel involved and thus protect the park this goes a long way in making the threats less likely to happen.

However, Haroon (2000) identified the following as the ideal role of communities:

- i. Keeps an eye on anti-nature activities;
- ii. Striving for mutual goal of the economically viable mode of tourism in their area;
- iii. Help nature to sustain;
- iv. Build pressure group to control activities of "outsiders" and;
- v. Feel and understand that their culture is indigenous and they should not act something contrary to their custom for pleasing "outsiders".

The results of the study show that there are some associated challenges with regard to the operations of the park both from management and the community members point of view. During the interviews it was discovered that the members of the communities had low level of knowledge in ecotourism but after an explanation to them about what it is they tend to like the idea and would like to do anything they can to develop it in their community.

The park officers as of now intends using the concept of ecotourism in developing its park but it faces a lot of challenges in achieving that. Some of the challenges discovered during the data collection were poaching, poor funding, lack of infrastructure, lack of logistics, poor advertisement, lack of social awareness of the park, uncontrolled entry into the park due to its size. When the local community know the relevance of ecotourism and the impact it can have on their community, they can volunteer to help the park management in its development. Poaching and other illicit activities can reduce. This can be done through education and public awareness. Social awareness of the park is very low. Advertising the park and its mission and vision, its ecosystem diversity and richness through the media showing documentaries, radio station advertisement, the use of brochures, through the internet, word-of-mouth advertising, newspaper ads containing very detailed information and pictures or videos. This can go a long way to make the park popular to the people of the country and the outside world and attract tourists and public/private investors.

5. CONCLUSION

The study sought out to identify the ecotourism potentials in BNP. It was ascertained that the national park has many potentials for ecotourism development which includes its beautiful and natural landscapes, ecosystem diversity and richness, the park also offers a variety of activities cave tourism, hiking, bird watching, nature walks, game viewing, village tours etc., the park also has good air quality due to its natural state and so on. The vegetation cover and animal species found in the area in particular are important and major source for ecotourism.

The host communities play an important role in ecotourism development in an area. Especially in community-based ecotourism where the community's role is vital for its tourism development. It was discovered that the host community had positive attitude towards the idea of ecotourism in the area. Most importantly they agreed on the idea of homestay, in addition to that some are employed as tour guides who take the tourists on tours. The results shows that BNP has great potential to become an ecotourism site and with good planning, management and development it will become a well-known ecotourism destination where visitors can come and fully enjoy, learn and patronize the services the park provides. However, certain illegal activities are affecting the reserve especially the animal species. These activities have driven and are still driving the animal species away reducing it ecotourism potential.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ecotourism depends on local guides who have been trained, educated and having languages skill and knowledge about the local environment and ecotourism. Therefore more training and education is needed for community inhabitants.
2. Government funding is very much needed if ecotourism is to be well developed in BNP. Funds from interested persons and other international bodies like EU are also appreciated.
3. The management of BNP should make an effort to increase the public awareness of the park as a tourism destination, advertising the various activities and constituents of the park. This will likely attract more visitors to the park and lead it to its optimum ecotourism use.
4. Community involvement is very relevant in the success of ecotourism of an area. Local participation in decision making is also important and should be encouraged.
5. Formation of a “Management Committee” that comprises of representatives from the traditional authorities, local government, Associations and groups, and the management to help collaborate in managing the reserve for the benefit of all.
6. Authorities and management should improve on security to reduce threats.
7. Authorities should establish ecotourism research unit to improve ecotourism in the park.

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APPENDICES-A

Appendix 1: Interview Guide for the Bui National Park Workers

1. Gender,
2. Age,
3. Education level,
4. How long has she/he lived and worked in the area.
5. What do you like about working at Bui National Park that has any ecotourism value?
6. What are your thoughts on ecotourism development in Bui National Park?
7. Do you think it is a good idea to try to develop ecotourism here?
 - (a) If no, then why?
 - (b) If yes, then what, in your opinion, needs to be done in order for ecotourism to be successfully developed here?
8. Why would tourists want to visit Bui National Park? In other words, what might attract visitors to the area?
9. What are the activities in Bui National Park that visitors would be most interested in observing or taking part in?
10. How could the community organize itself in order to facilitate ecotourism development?
11. What, in your opinion, would be the major restrictions to ecotourism development at Bui National Park?
12. Do you think you and/or your family could ever benefit from ecotourism development here?
 - (a) If no, then why?
 - (b) If yes, then in what ways could you and/or your family benefit?
13. Do you think your job would be affected if ecotourism were developed here? Why or why not?

Appendix 2: Interview guide for community inhabitants

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Education level
4. How long has she/he lived in the area?
5. Number of people living in the house,
6. What he or she does for work?
7. What do you like about living in Bui community?
8. What do you think are the most important economic activities of the community?
9. Are community members often away from the community during the day in order to take part in economic activities in other surrounding areas?
10. What are your thoughts on ecotourism development in Bui National Park?
11. Do you think it is a good idea to try to develop ecotourism here?
 - (a) If no, then why?
 - (b) If yes, then what, in your opinion, needs to be done in order for ecotourism to be successfully developed here?
12. How could your community organize itself in order to facilitate ecotourism development?
13. Why would tourists want to visit Bui National Park? In other words, what might attract visitors to the area?

14. How are relations between community members and the managers of Bui National Park?
15. Do you feel restricted in what you can and cannot do as inhabitants of the National Park?
16. How do you think the situation can be improved, if necessary?
17. What, in your opinion, would be the major anticipated restrictions to ecotourism development at Bui National Park?
18. Do you think you and/or your family could ever benefit from ecotourism development here?
 - (a) If no, then why?If yes, then in what ways could you and/or your family benefit?