

# ECOTOURISM MANAGEMENT IN FINIMA NATURE PARK OF BONNY ISLAND, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS TO HOST COMMUNITIES

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the challenges faced by ecotourism and management in Finima Nature Park, the benefits the households in the 'fishing settlements' bordering the park derive and expect from the ecodestination. Data for the study were collected through observation, in-depth interview and administration of questionnaire. The first set of questionnaire was administered randomly to 145 household respondents from five 'fishing settlements' bordering the park. The second set of questionnaire was randomly administered to 60 tourist respondents, while the last set of questionnaire was administered to all staff members of the park. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics while Chi square was used to test significance of associations. Inadequate finance (36.0%) and poaching (36.0%) were the major challenges faced by the management of FNP, followed by insecurity (12.0%) and inadequate facilities (4.0%). The settlement or community ( $\chi^2=109.003$ ); educational level ( $\chi^2=63.382$ ) and occupation ( $\chi^2=104.307$ ) of household members had significant association ( $p<0.05$ ) with their needs or expectations from the park management. However, employment, electricity and provision of bore hole were among the major needs identified in all the communities. With employment (50.6%) being the major expectation of households from the management of FNP, there are high chances of encroaching into the park by households. The sponsor of Finima Nature Park has provided good roads; constant and free electricity to Bonny; which is the indigenous community unlike in the fishing settlements (Agaja 1, Agaja 3, Lighthouse, Sebikiri and Finitisingi) that were non indigenous communities but allowed to operate in the environment by Bonny people. Although vital intangible benefits have been provided to these fishing settlements, their non empowerment is a threat to conservation of biodiversity in the park*

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Finima Nature Park, Benefits, Host communities involvement, Bonny Island

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2012) defines ecotourism as “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.” The success of ecotourism projects is dependent on the level of support from the host communities, and communities are known to support only projects that benefit them. A lot of importance is attached to benefits derived from ecotourism projects by communities bordering destinations (UNWTO, 2016; WTTC, 2016; CREST, 2016). This is because communities tend to desist from encroaching into protected areas (irrespective of its relevance to their survival), and encourage conservation of biodiversity when consistently compensated with an arrays of benefits. Besides, one of the major principles of ecotourism is to generate revenue for empowering local communities that host the destination (Scheyvens, 1999). This implies that any nature based tourism project that is not originally planned and designed to benefit local households is not really practicing ecotourism. Simply put, ecotourism is a kind of tourism that protects the environment and empowers local poor. It is a kind of tourism designed for conservation and promotion of welfare of host communities. However, it does not mean that any ecotourism project that benefits host communities and secures their support will not face some challenges. There are myriad of challenges in ecotourism as management of: environmental resources for sustainability; tourism staff with different demands; host communities of various educational background, occupation and beliefs; coupled with appropriate visitor management to generate revenue for both conservation and local empowerment could be quite problematic due to varying interests. Devising an empowerment project and revenue sharing formula for accrued benefits or revenue could also constitute problems because of differences in needs and expectations of host communities. Provision of a welfare project that is not suitable for a community is a waste of fund, and will neither be useful nor appreciated since it cannot empower local communities. The tangibility of benefits differentiates ecotourism packages from sites that are not used for ecotourism - An unmanaged or abandoned site such as a forest reserve or game reserve still provides some form of benefits - intangible services (even at its state) such as purification of the environment, erosion control or prevention of desert encroachment, although it may also harbour hoodlums which may constitute security threats

to the community (Ijeomah *et al.* 2014). Every ecotourism project is therefore expected to provide tangible benefits to host communities.

It is therefore imperative to evaluate the challenges of ecotourism practice and benefits to local residents of the destination host communities in Bonny Island of the Niger Delta, a region that has experienced a lot of militancy and struggle for rights due to several years of environmental destruction and impoverishment caused by many years of oil exploration without adequate compensation to host communities.

### **METHODOLOGY Study Area**

The study area was carried out in Finima Nature Park, located in Rivers State, Nigeria. It lies between latitude 7°3'0" and 7°16'30"E and longitude 4°21'0" and 4°30'0"N (Fig. 1a). The Park covers a land area of 1000 hectares of fresh water swamp forest lying along Nigeria's southernmost coastal area. The Park is located in Bonny Local government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

### **Data Collection**

Data for the study was collected through the administration of questionnaire, field observation and in-depth interview. Three set of questionnaires were administered during the study. The first set of questionnaires was administered randomly to 60 tourists to collect information on challenges and possible means of achieving ecotourism development in the park, but only 56 questionnaires were retrieved. The second set of questionnaires was randomly administered to 145 household respondents in five communities. The communities were selected based on their close proximity to the park. These communities were; Agaja 1, Agaja 3, Lighthouse, Sebikiri and Finitisingi. This set of questionnaire was used to collect information on benefits derived from the park. The last set of questionnaire was administered to all (18) management staff of Finima Nature Park to obtain information on the challenges faced by ecotourism and management in the ecodestination. In-depth interviews were conducted with experienced management staff and few community heads to complement information obtained through questionnaire.

### Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics in form of frequency, percentages, tables, pie charts and bar charts while associations were tested using Chi square test.

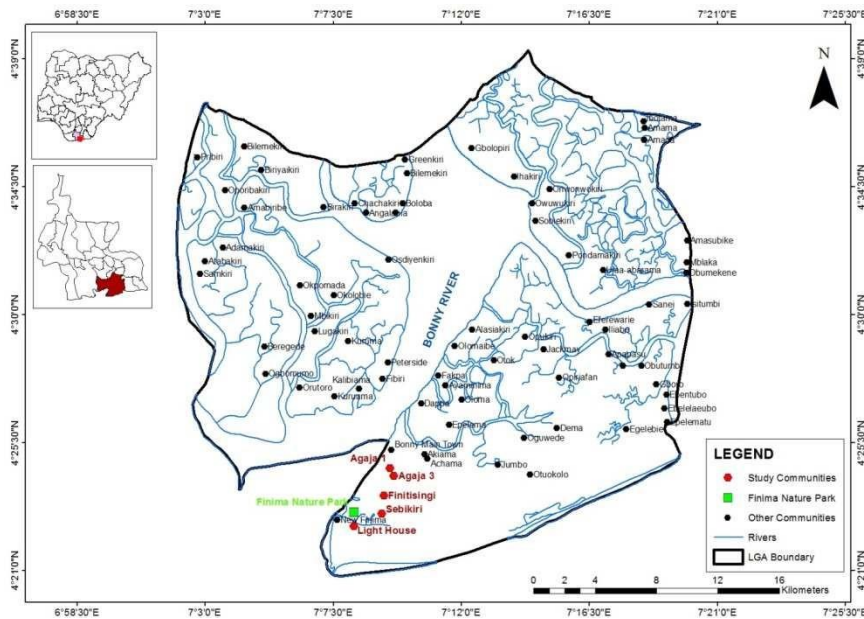


Figure 1a: Map of Bonny Island showing Finima Nature Park Source: Ijeomah and Duke, 2016

### RESULTS Benefits from Finima Nature Park

Results on benefits derived by communities bordering the destination are presented in Tables 1 to Table 4. Table 1 shows that a large percentage of household respondents (77.9%) have not derived any benefit from the park while Table 2 reveals that most household respondents (79.1%) complained that the benefits were not enough. Table 3 shows that employment (50.6%), assistance (12.5%) and supply of electricity (11.9%) from the park management were the major expectations or felt needs of communities bordering the park.

**Table 1: Benefits derived by households from Finima Nature Park**

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
None	113	77.9
Environmental purification	10	6.9
Employment	9	6.2
Fuel wood	5	3.4
Tourism	4	2.8
Passage to river	2	1.4
Shelter	1	0.7
Stove	1	0.7

Source: Field Survey, 2016

**Table 2: Household's complaints about benefits from Finima Nature Park**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Are the benefits enough?</b>	Yes	28
	No	106
<b>Complaints from household</b>	No employment	25
	No assistance	20
	Neglect	9
	Not enough	7
	No benefit	4
	Bias sharing of benefits	3
	Restriction to cut wood	2

Source: Field Survey, 2016

**Table 3: Expectations of households from the management of Finima Nature Park**

<b>Expectations</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Employment</b>	81	50.6
<b>Assistance/empowerment</b>	20	12.5
<b>Electricity</b>	19	11.9
<b>Water</b>	7	4.4
<b>No expectation</b>	6	3.8
<b>Security</b>	6	3.8
<b>Park promotion</b>	5	3.1
<b>Free zone</b>	4	2.5
<b>Road</b>	3	1.9
<b>Coastal erosion protection</b>	2	1.3
<b>Good relationship</b>	2	1.3
<b>Permission to collect fuel wood</b>	2	1.3
<b>School</b>	2	1.3
<b>Zoo</b>	1	0.6

**Source: Field Survey 2016**

Chi square tests showed significant association ( $p < 0.05$ ) between the sampled communities, educational level of respondents and occupation of respondents with their respective needs (Table 4).

**Table 4: Chi square tests of Association between community needs and demographic variables**

<b>Parameter</b>	<b>Calculated Chi square <math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>Degree of freedom</b>	<b>of P value</b>	<b>Significance Inference</b>
<b>Sampled communities versus need</b>	109.003 <sup>a</sup>	40	0.000	$p < 0.05$ Significant association
<b>Gender of respondents versus need of the community</b>	14.012 <sup>a</sup>	10	0.172	$p > 0.05$ No association
<b>Age of respondents versus need of the community</b>	16.484 <sup>a</sup>	30	0.978	$p > 0.05$ No association
<b>Marital status of respondents versus need of the community</b>	30.864 <sup>a</sup>	20	0.057	$p > 0.05$ No association
<b>Educational level of respondents versus need of the community</b>	63.382 <sup>a</sup>	40	0.011	$p < 0.05$ Significant association
<b>Occupation of respondents versus need of the community</b>	104.307 <sup>a</sup>	60	0.000	$p < 0.05$ Significant association
<b>Family size of respondents versus need of the community</b>	23.428 <sup>a</sup>	30	0.797	$p > 0.05$ No association

**Challenges Faced in Finima Nature Park**

Results on the challenges faced by ecotourism and management of Finima Nature Park are presented in Tables 5, 6 and 7. Tables 5 and 6 show that insect bites (43.3%), frequent rainfall (40.0%), slippery

walkway (3.8%) and inability to sight games (1.9%) are the major challenges encountered by tourists, whereas inadequate finance (36.0%) and poaching (36.0%) are the challenges encountered on the part of management. Consistent patrol around the park (42.3%), constant awareness creation (26.9%) and maintenance of park facilities (26.9%) are among efforts made by management of the park to address some of the challenges faced by ecotourism (Table 7).

**Table 5: Challenges in Finima Nature Park as identified by staff respondents**

<b>Parameter</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency Percentage (%)</b>	
<b>What challenges do tourists experience in the park?</b>	Insect bite	13	43.3
	Frequent rainfall	12	40.0
	Long distance	1	6.7
	Insecurity		3.3
	Slippery walkway	1	3.3
	Lack of convenience	1	3.3
<b>What challenges are encountered by the management of the park?</b>	Inadequate finance	9	36.0
	Poaching	9	36.0
	Insecurity	3	12.0
	Inadequacy of means of transport	2	8.0
	Coastal erosion	1	4.0
	Inadequate facilities	1	4.0

**Source: Field survey, 2016**

**Table 6: Some challenges in Finima Nature Park as identified by tourist respondents**

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nothing	23	44.2
Insect bite	7	13.5
Fear of snakes	4	7.7
Long distance of travel	3	5.8
No stores	3	5.8
Slippery walk way	2	3.8
Swampy ground	2	3.8
Difficulty in visiting the divisions of the park	2	3.8
Inability to sight games	1	1.9
Fear of poisonous plant	1	1.9
Improper management of whale skeleton	1	1.9
No relaxing spots	1	1.9
Insecurity	1	1.9
Polluted canal	1	1.9

Source: Field Survey, 2016

**Table 7: Efforts made by the management to resolve challenges faced by ecotourism in Finima Nature Park**

Efforts	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Consistent patrol	11	42.3
Maintenance of park facilities	7	26.9
Creation of awareness	7	26.9
Arrest of poachers	1	3.8

Source: Field survey, 2016

## **DISCUSSION          Benefits of Ecotourism**

Majority (77.9%) of the households in the fishing settlements bordering the park complained that there was no form of benefit derived from the park (Table 1). This was evident in the fact that communities have no electricity, good road and potable drinking water with high level of unemployment unlike the situation reported by Eshun *et al.* (2014) in Bobiri Sanctuary and Forest Reserve, Ghana where members of the community benefited from school renovation, electricity distribution and the construction of borehole.

The communities, however, have derived some intangible benefits from the park. Finima Nature Park by its establishment protects the area from

major flooding as a result of the effect of standing trees that hold the soil together and reduce coastal erosion caused by the ocean. The trees in the park purify the atmosphere and provide a sink for carbon which is emitted on a daily basis during preservation and drying of fish by more than 50 fishermen who go on fishing trips. The park conserves the plants and animal species that are found in that area by preventing the removal of forest cover. The park educates the community members about the environment and the resulting consequence of degrading it.

The park provides protection for neighbouring communities based on the fact that the ranger's camps are built in each of the community and serves as the nearest security service post. They help maintain law and order within and between bordering communities. The reason for this vital social service is that the park management could have felt that provision of security and effective maintenance of order should be well cherished among communities in the Niger Delta – a region where restiveness is a common occurrence. Besides, non provision of adequate security in the park environment could lead to the lurking of insurgents, herdsmen or other hoodlums therein as reported in some game reserves, forest reserves and national parks in Nigeria and other countries in Africa (Musa, 2010; Madu-West, 2012; Aduge-Ani, 2014; Bakare, 2014; Ladan, 2013; Ladan, 2014; Bashir and Suwo, 2014; Aju *et al.*2015). Communities like Sebikiri that forms an enclave of the park still source their fuel wood from fallen branches and dead logs in the park.

Households appreciate benefits that are tangible. The park management provides job slots for these communities bordering the park but oftentimes households' level of understanding of the park environment and attitude as evidenced in their performance during recruitment interviews hinder their employment. Even when unemployed members of the communities are reached they reject the job based on the prevailing perception that employment with the park is low-paying and therefore can hardly take care of their needs. They prefer to embark on menial jobs which they believe will earn money that is higher than the amount offered by park management. This can be attributed to the low skilled nature of jobs often given to community members.

Households from most ecotourism destinations are always less educated due to the rural nature of the communities and therefore hardly offered jobs at the management cadre which have

high incentives. Kamuoro (1998) obtained similar report among the Masaai people of East Africa. Rejection of jobs will also be attributed to the relatively high cost of living in Bonny environment due to the presence of petroleum companies especially the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) company in the area that pay relatively high attractive salaries to their employees. Residents of every part of Bonny therefore need jobs that can enable them cope in an area where most occupants are rich and buy items from the same market. However, seventeen members out of the eighteen staff of the park management are indigenes of Niger Delta.

Only 20.9% of respondents from the communities perceived that the benefits derived from the park are sufficient. These respondents may be those that have high value for conservation and security. It can also be ascribed to the fact that little tangible benefits are provided, and these could be the few who benefitted from the mosquito nets and stove that were once distributed by the management of the park. The stoves were distributed through the village heads, but the numbers were relatively very low and therefore could not reach many members of the communities. The idea of providing the stoves was to discourage household members from felling trees in the park for fuelwood. Apart from the fewness of the stoves, the supply could not be sustained. Respondents always notice and regard tangible benefits than non-tangible ones. Moreover, the benefits from the park have not spread to most respondents. Most respondents complained because the benefit provided by the park is below the expectations of the community members. Similar complaints were made by households in host communities to many national parks in Nigeria (Ijeomah *et al.*, 2015).

### **Expectation of the communities**

Cumulatively, most households (50.6%) from all the communities in the fishing settlements expect to be employed by the park management. Employment was therefore ranked first among other needs in all the communities (Table 3). This shows the high level of unemployment experienced in all parts of Nigeria. It also confirms that the rejection of employment offers by individuals in an environment where many persons need jobs must be due to the relatively poor incentive from the job. Similarly, Ijeomah and Emodi, (2012) reported

that employment was ranked first among other needs by households in all the communities bordering Pandam Wildlife Park of Plateau State, Nigeria. Every member of the community cannot be directly employed by the park due to economic reasons but the management of Finima Nature Park can create markets that could indirectly provide incentives to many respondents on sustainable basis.

Electricity is needed by the communities because it is a basic necessity especially when it is being freely supplied to Finima town and other indigenous communities in Bonny Local Government Area by NLNG, the sponsor of Finima Nature Park. The park has electricity in the residential areas but the fishing settlements have no electricity. Electricity would have served as a source of power bringing about development in the communities, which are occupied by relatively people of low social status in Bonny Island. It can be used to power refrigerators for preservation of fish and other perishable goods including some items for sale. It can be used to power kitchen and office/business appliances, indirectly reducing the pressure on the park as a source for fuel wood. The indigenes of Bonny accepted NLNG to keep the park as a 'living laboratory' to conserve the biodiversity and through the sponsorship of NLNG Bonny households have tangibly benefitted through construction of good roads and supply of free and constant electricity unlike many areas of Nigeria. Similarly, the management of Assop Falls in Plateau State supplies free electricity to households in the host community (Ijeomah, 2007). The respondents- occupants of the settlements are not indigenes of Bonny but mostly from Andoni and Calabar (Ijeomah and Duke, 2016 ) and do not have the legal right to fight for provision of tangible benefits. Bonny indigenes only allowed them to settle in the environment, practice fishing and supply fish to Bonny market and Nembe waterside. And even some of the respondents relocate to Bonny when their economy improves. However, if Bonny community should be hospitable enough to allow the respondents settle in their environment, NLNG, as part of their corporate social responsibility can as well supply them with electricity.

Demand for assistance, which is also a form of empowerment or informal employment was also high (12.5%). Household respondents perceived that equipment such as fishing nets, hooks, net buoy, mosquito nets and alternative source of energy were supposed to be

provided by the park as compensation for restricted access to park resources.

Borehole is considered very essential by communities to avoid health risk from water borne pollutants. The settlements lack a potable water source (bore hole). Respondents drink from the ocean and dug well. The only bore hole in existence in the environment was sunk for commercial purpose. Expectation of good road network is to facilitate easy and safe movement to and fro the communities. Demand for building of schools or the upgrading of few existing schools in the communities is to encourage the education of the younger generation in the communities. Outside conservation education which is extended to the fishing settlements, the park management has not devised any means to help bordering communities be a part of conservation and tourism activities in Finima Nature Park whereas involvement of households in destination host communities is a major requirement of ecotourism. The concept of ecotourism encourages tourist to spend and contribute to the development at eco-destinations, with the view that the multiplier effect of tourists' expenditure will create additional economic activities which increases the income and cash flow into the local economy of destination host communities (Honey, 2008). In other words, the park management could provide an outlet where tourists can be encouraged to purchase local products as souvenirs or be involved in cultural displays for the entertainment of tourists ( in a way that will not negatively affect conservation) but this is yet to be experienced in Finima Nature Park.

Chi square test of association between households 'community and needs was significant at  $p < 0.05$  ( $\chi^2 = 109.003$ ) (Table 4). Communities such as Sebikiri, Agaja 1 and Finitisingi had employment as their greatest need because of the high level of unemployment in there. For Agaja 3, schools and electricity topped their need list. This can be ascribed to the absence of schools and the presence of stores that can make more returns when electricity is being supplied. Also, Agaja 3 specifically demanded that a blocked creek along the community should be opened for the fishermen to move directly from their communities to the river instead of going a long way to the beach. In the case of Lighthouse their major need was electricity as households of the community felt that a community bearing lighthouse should at

least reflect its name by having constant electricity not just in the lighthouse mounted in the area, but for the community as a whole. This variation amongst needs of the communities was also reported by Ijeomah and Emodi (2012) in Plateau State.

Chi square test of association between households' occupation and need was significant at  $p < 0.05$  ( $\chi^2 = 104.307$ ) (Table 4), even though employment was a constant for all the communities; for the fishermen electricity was of uttermost importance to help prolong the shelf life of their produce until they are ready for consumption or sale to customers. The traders prioritised good road network after employment. They perceive that having good road network will make accessibility to communities and marketing of produce easy and at the same time reduce high transportation cost usually experienced due to bad road.

Chi square test of association conducted between the educational level of respondents and needs of the community was also significant at  $p < 0.05$  ( $\chi^2 = 63.382$ ) (Table 4). Household members with lower education requested for more basic needs like water and employment while those with higher education requested for social needs such as good roads, schools and market facilities. This shows that the level of education attained affects their need. An increase in educational level causes a shift from more basic and security needs like employment to a higher social need like schools. This agrees with Abraham Maslow's theory of need that an individual's motivation is strongly affected by their needs at that particular time.

### **Challenges Faced by Ecotourism and Management in Finima Nature Park**

The most critical challenges faced by the management of Finima Nature Park are inadequate finance and poaching (Table 5). Finima Nature Park is managed by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) working under the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG). Often times when request are made the bureaucratic procedure for disbursement of funds takes a very complicated and long time to get to the project managers and field supervisors. The funds even when provided are usually not enough to meet the demands of the park. Lack of finance is a setback that limits the efficiency of management

policies. Similarly, several studies (Idumah *et al.*, 2009; Ijeomah *et al.*, 2015; Ijeomah and Okoli, 2016) have implicated poor funding as a major challenge to both conservation and ecotourism development in Nigeria.

The park is a home to Mona monkeys (*Cercopithecus mona*) that attracts poachers who set traps at strategic points to get game. The fact that the animals are being quietly poached with traps makes the activity difficult to notice unlike when guns are used to kill the animals sound of guns from poachers threaten wildlife species and make them to become scattered at little incitement. The unnoticeable use of traps to poach in the park could be the reason Ijeomah and Duke (2016) reported that Mona monkeys in the park move freely and very noticeable in groups due to limited poaching. Apart from poaching of wildlife species trespassers enter inside the park to obtain materials like fuel wood, charcoal, fruits of *Nypa fruticans*, wood, leaves, thatch for constructing roofs, snails etc. Poaching has become a global challenge and is experienced in most parks in Nigeria such as Kainji Lake National Park (Ijeomah and Ogbara, 2013), Cross River National Park (Ijeomah *et al.* 2015) and Yankari Wildlife Park (Ijeomah and Odunlami, 2013).

There is inadequate means of transport to convey tourists and staff within the park. This is very challenging especially when there are cases of encroachment or poaching in the park, as they are always likely to engage the rangers in physical combat except when taken to the rangers' camps that serve as a correctional facility. Facilities which can increase tourists' experience are also inadequate. The fear of being kidnapped or harassed hinders some potential tourists from visiting the park. The constant inflow of water from the ocean tide creates an environment that does not encourage the set up of structures as the floor is partially submerged in water affecting both the park management and bordering communities (coastal erosion). Although efforts have been made by the management through consistent patrol to arrest poachers and prevent encroachers from entering the park, poaching and encroachment into the park still continues at a declining rate. The high level of rainfall experienced in the environment is because the destination is in an island. Insect bite is always experienced in most ecodestinations in the Niger delta region of

Nigeria (including Cross river National Park and Okomu National Park) because of the wetness of the environment. The fact that some tourists (Table 6) had no challenge in their visitation to the park shows that they have good understanding that ecotourism is a kind of low impact tourism on the environment, and tourists are expected to be satisfied in ecodestinations but not at the detriment of biodiversity conservation. This class of tourists who are adventurers may have considered what other tourists may have perceived as challenges to be a form of excitements and experiences in an ecological destination.

## **CONCLUSION**

The sponsor of Finima Nature Park has provided good roads and constant and free electricity to Bonny. It has also provided some vital but intangible benefits to the fishing settlements (Agaja 1, Agaja 3, Lighthouse, Sebikiri and Finitisingi) that border the park. Provision of free electricity should be extended to the fishing settlements by NLNG as that can stimulate and energise production processes at reduced cost thereby creating employment opportunity at the informal sector. Alleviating the poverty of households through this means will also reduce encroachment by respondents to collect fuelwood from the park. Though the Bonny indigenes supported the establishment of the park as a ‘living laboratory’ of the Bonny island biodiversity, economic challenges on residents of the bordering fishing settlements have been stimulating respondents to encroach into the protected area. Households of communities bordering the park should be encouraged to support conservation of biodiversity in the park and tourists are also expected to be satisfied in ecodestinations but not at the detriment of biodiversity conservation. Efforts should be made to create souvenir outlets for indirect employment of many respondents. Visitation of tourists to chiefdoms in Bonny should be incorporated as part of tourism package to increase incentives for respondents.

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