

The Role of National Park Development in 'Recovery from Disaster'

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1. Introduction

- The 'National Park' of *Semienawi & Debubawi Bahri* Green Belt Area (Eritrea), found in Great E. African Rift Valley, has an area of 129,000 ha (40,000 ha enclosed)
- The term 'National Park' needs international criteria
- The 'Author' had participated in study tour and proposal (1999) of the National Park Green Belt Area, and endeavors to explore its gaps
- The paper discusses the role of sustainable national park development, as an intervention for 'recovery from disaster'

2. The Rationale for National Park

- A century ago, 30% of Eritrean land was covered by forests, 11% in 1952, 5% in 1960, & 1% or less in 1995
- Sahara Desert is pushing southward, and is expanding
- Climate change and habitat loss are becoming threats to wildlife
- It is home to some of the last highly diverse range of globally unique remnant tropical coniferous and broad-leafed forests and mammal and bird species
- Thus, this alarming trend has to be reversed or at least checked

3. National Park Defined

- **National parks:** ‘large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species & ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally & culturally compatible, spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational....opportunities’ (IUCN, 2002)
- **Criteria:** must be designated, legally declared, enclosed, have own park mgn’t/rangers, adequate budget, sufficient staff, etc

4. Purpose of the Research

- As a learning process: personal interest to identify the gaps of the Eritrean National Park & contribute towards its appropriate dev't
- Study global Protected Areas (national parks) & ecotourism dev't and their relevance to Eritrea

5. Findings at Global level

- National parks need to have International criteria
- Need regular training, education & awareness -raising
- Need research and dissemination of findings
- Need sustainable BD (indigenous & global species)
- Ecotourism is essential for sustainable national park
- Hot springs are useful for therapeutic recreation, ecotourism and national park dev't
- Need of innovative park mgn't for sound ecotourism & communities' socio-economic benefits

6. Findings at Local Level

- National Forestry and Wildlife Authority put in place
- BD conservation, a Gov't priority area since independence
- Nurseries of indigenous & exotic species established
- Modern poultry and bee-keeping introduced
- Plant quarantine proclamation in place
- Law on environment issued
- Tradition of soil & water conservation practices
- Coffee & citrus fruits plantations
- Banning cutting of trees & killing of wild animals need to be supplemented with alternative energy sources for cooking & construction

- ‘National park’, short of international criteria, a critical factor
- The Green Belt is suitable for ecotourism
 - Two rainy seasons- evergreen
 - Spectacular land scenery with diverse flora & fauna
 - ‘Outstanding spot for bird-watching’
 - Impressive weather, with low-lying summer fogs
 - Availability of hot springs for therapeutic recreation & ecotourism
 - Historic Monastery of Debre-Bizen (1361)

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion: The Green Belt Area National park dev't critically needs relevant policies, legal declaration, designation & demarcation, own park mgn't & rangers, adequate budget, etc.

Recommendations include:

- Competent & innovative park mgn't
- Continuous training, education & awareness-raising
- National park & ecotourism need to address the livelihood (improvement) of the local communities
- Need harmonious co-existence of BD conservation & ecotourism development

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