

## SUCCESS STORY



# ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCES IN THE GAMBIA

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### Summary :

1. [Income Potential](#)
  2. [Rural & Cultural Benefits](#)
  3. [Elasticity of Demand, Substitution & Competition](#)
  4. [Image of The Gambia](#)
  5. [Ease of Implementation](#)
  6. [Product development in neighbouring countries](#)
- [Information sheets and/or books](#)
  - [Marketing](#)
  - [Policies/Proposals & Plans](#)



For the tourism industry, ecotourism is the fastest growing market segment. Interpreted merely as a product, however, it may be ecologically based but not ecologically sound, responsible or sustainable. To incorporate these vital characteristics, ecotourism must adhere to three essential principles. The first is perhaps the most obvious. As an industry based on the beauty and diversity of nature, it is evident it should not deplete or degrade those resources and thus prejudice its own future. Ecotourism must therefore be ecologically sound, requiring a two-way link between itself and environmental conservation. To consider nature without recognising the link with people will however, compromise sustainability. It is now widely recognised that conservation cannot be divorced from development issues. The second principle is therefore that ecotourism must be responsible paying regard to local needs and improving local welfare. However to be truly sustainable, ecotourism needs to fulfil the ambitions and expectations of all interests. The third principle then is to consider not only the interests of tourism enterprises but also visitor satisfaction, the needs of tourists.

If ecotourism embodies these essential principles, symbiotic relationships between varying interests should follow, with environmental protection resulting both from and in enhanced standards of living for local populations, continued profits for the industry, sustained visitor attraction and revenue for conservation. Tourism income may be captured locally through revenue sharing schemes, through entrepreneurship and labour. Tourism can also act as a catalyst and even provide finance for improvement of essential services. It has been recognised that as people realise the benefits of ecotourism, support for conservation increases. This was shown for example, in a study by WWF in Belize. This found that the designation of Hol Chan Marine Reserve met with the approval of 63% of nearby residents of San Pedro. 44% of residents received direct economic benefits from tourism.

The advent of ecotourism provides the conservation community with an opportunity to demonstrate first hand to a growing audience the connections between the health and preservation of protected ecosystems and the global environment. Knowledge of these operative systems and the issues surrounding their support is crucial to their survival. The ecologist David Orr refers to the ability to

distinguish between health and disease in nature systems and their relationship to health and disease in human ones as "ecological literacy", a literacy that is more effective when acquired out of doors where it can be driven by a sense of wonder.

Greater local involvement makes practical sense as improved understanding of local circumstances is likely to improve project efficiency. Indigenous use of local building materials has practical implications for more appropriate forms of development, reduces leakages, lowers costs and enhances local multiplier effects. Local involvement is not without its problems though. Revenue sharing schemes may neither benefit the most needy nor those most adversely affected. Beneficiaries may often be passive recipients, rather than active participants. The emphasis must be on participation rather than patronisation if traditional livelihoods are removed; they must be replaced with others. Local participation however often consists of employment rather than entrepreneurship where constraints of costs of entry, language, education and skills operate.

There are however many practical and institutional obstacles to effective ecotourism management, not least of which will be the problem of vested interests who are more concerned with short term profits than with the long term. Another dilemma is the sheer numbers. Rapid growth rates imply inevitable change. Psychological carrying capacity as well as other types of carrying capacity will probably be breached and visitor satisfaction compromised. This is especially true when visitors are concentrated in space and time. Over 60% of birdwatchers visiting Abuko Nature Reserve for instance are concentrated in a four-month season. However much a principled definition of ecotourism is advocated, it must be recognised that so called ecotourists are not a homogeneous group. The spectrum of participants embraces hard core nature tourists through to casual day visitors. Their behaviour and consequent impact will vary accordingly. It is essential therefore to attempt to match numbers and types of ecotourists with destination characteristics.

In terms of price elasticity, ecotourists are an almost homogeneous group. Willingness to pay surveys of ecotourists across the globe shows a consistent response of \$10 as a reasonable visitor's fee. Certain unique sites or those harbouring more charismatic species can support higher fees. The mountain gorilla preserve in Rwanda charges \$170, the Galapagos Islands \$80. Indeed, the pricing mechanism may be used to regulate numbers. Tourists visiting Bhutan, limited to 5,000 per year must spend \$200 per day. The major role players in ecotourism all have a stake in its sustainable development. The grand challenge is to reconcile sometimes complementary but often conflicting interests. The essential dilemma is to balance demands of ever increasing tourists escaping from the confines and pressures of urban life and reacting against the characteristics of mass tourism with environmental needs, the aspirations of the industry and the basic needs of the local population.

Although a win win scenario, where all interests gain is the ideal, there will often be situations where one interest gains at the expense of another. For example, at Lao Pako ecotourism lodge in Laos, the cost of installing environmentally benign solar panels together with imported maintenance free heavy duty batteries, could have employed 2 locals for ten years to maintain a more conventional generator. It is necessary to recognise conflicts and identify relative costs and benefits. Arriving at the most sustainable outcome is likely to involve trade offs. Environment is not just about animals and trees. It is about the liveability of human habitat. We need to look no further than London's West End in the summer months to see that truth. It all boils down to a question of numbers. Good practice is not enough. There must be limits to growth. To paraphrase Gede Ardika, head of the Bali Office of Indonesia Tourism, the partnership between conservation and tourism is not a marriage of love but an arranged marriage that must be managed with great care.

The Gambia lies at 15°W longitude and 13-14°N latitude, midway between the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer. It is surrounded on three sides by Senegal and coasts the Atlantic Ocean on the west. From the coast to the eastern border is 480km with the north to south width of the country ranging from 24 to 48km. The total area is 11,300km<sup>2</sup>. The country skirts the lower reaches of the River Gambia which flows through Senegal from Guinea. The Gambia is a flat country which does not exceed about 50m above sea level at any point. The coast consists of a long beach which is occasionally interrupted by low cliffs. Lying in the Sahelian belt, The Gambia has a rainy season from June to October and a long dry season from October round to June. Annual rainfall ranges from 800mm in the east to 1700mm in the west. During the last 15 years drought has been creating erratic rains with a general reduction in rainfall. A slight raise in temperature and reduction in rainfall have been recorded over the past 40 years of climate records. The natural vegetation type of The Gambia is Guinea savanna woodland graduating to open Sudan savanna towards the east. The country can be divided into roughly three natural regions: sandstone hills with savanna; river flats; and mangroves.

The Guinea savanna woodland is characterised by areas of fairly open woodland of low deciduous trees with a dense understorey of tall grasses and shrubs. In the coastal area the woodland tends to be denser with higher trees. In the dry season most trees are leafless and grass fires clear the understorey, sometimes with devastating effects. During the wet season the growth is dense. Very little of the savanna remains in its natural state due to the influences of shifting agricultural practices. Some of the trees often seen include Baobab, Silk-Cotton Trees, Acacia species, African Locust Bean, Fig species, Mango, Oil, Coconut and Rhun Palms, among others. The river flats are more or less flooded during the rains forming extensive swamps. These areas are utilised for rice growing. Mangroves occupy the edges of the river up to Kaur, 150km inland where the river water is still brackish. The most common species are Red and White Mangroves. The fauna of The Gambia includes 540 species of birds either resident or Palearctic migrants. Characteristic species include many Cormorants, Herons and Storks such as African Darter, Goliath Heron and Hammerkop. Raptors include Palm-nut vulture and River Eagle. Others are Abyssinian Roller, Pied Kingfisher, Grey Plantain-Eater, Senegal Coucal, Grey Hornbill, Long-tailed Glossy Starling, Red Bishop and various other Warblers, Weavers, Sunbirds, Plovers, Owls etc. etc. There are no large mammals in The Gambia, the most commonly encountered are primates such as Green Vervet, Red Colobus and Red Patas. Primates also include Western Baboon and Bush Baby. Carnivores include Jackal, Clawless Otter, Mongoose, Hyena, and Leopards. Others include Warthog, Antelope and Aardvark. Manatees can be found in the lower reaches of the river with Hippopotamus upriver. Reptiles and amphibians include turtles, crocodile, monitor lizards and geckos, snakes including pythons and cobras, various frogs and toads. On the mangrove shores are found Mudskipper (fish) and Fiddler Crab (invertebrate). Other invertebrates include large centipedes and millipedes, insects such as Praying Mantis, crickets, dragonflies and various butterflies, ants and termites, scorpions and spiders. There are presently six areas protected under the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management (DPWM), covering an area of 39,236 ha which represents 3.4% of the total land area of The Gambia. The DPWM aims to have 5% of the land area protected in the future.

The first tourist flight arrived in The Gambia from Sweden in 1965. Since then, tourist arrivals to The Gambia have grown steadily to a high of more than 100,000 in the 1990's. The Gambia has traditionally been promoted in its target market of Northern Europe as a destination for those escaping the long and cold European winter. However, in recent years there has been a subtle change in the direction of the industry. According to the Ministry of Tourism, the mission of the sector is to provide a diversified, quality product and to shift emphasis from the mass charter tourism to the sale to and attraction of high spending individual travellers and special interest groups. This change in policy has been reflected by new initiatives in both the private and public sectors. These include setting up ecotourism development units in the DPWM (Abuko & Kiang West), an ecotourism advisor working at the NEA and tour operators offering more up country and tailor made tours. As well as the public sector initiatives, charities such as Tourism Concern have highlighted the need for development to take place in line with community development and environmental protection measures.

The protected areas of The Gambia have the potential to attract eco-tourists. This potential could be exploited to the fullest if sufficient resources are provided to improve park infrastructures and services, train personnel and retain a portion of revenue generated for reinvestment into the Wildlife Department. This should be supported by a multi-disciplinary and all embracing tourism promotion outside The Gambia. Like many countries around the world, the Gambia's protected areas are managed and administered by the public sector and not run as private concerns. In the Gambian context the most overriding effect of this is that revenue generated by the protected areas is recouped back to central government, and budgetary allocations bear no relation to the economic performance of the department.

The true economic potential of the protected areas has to date remained untapped. This has mainly been due to insufficient financing and resources allocated to the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management. These resources are necessary if the protected areas are to be developed to a standard that will enable them to maximise these benefits.

Abuko Nature Reserve is currently attracting up to 30,000 tourists per year. The remaining four protected areas of the Gambia have the potential to attract at least a percentage of these tourists. If the visitor figures for these areas were 5,000 per annum each, this would constitute an extra 20,000 visitors per year, which at an average spend of D20 would yield additional revenue of D400,000. When added to the revenue accruing from Abuko this makes the total revenue generated by the department almost one million dalasis. With the necessary support, resources and funding the department could realistically achieve this level, and thereby increase the economic benefits of the protected areas significantly.

One of the most serious problems facing The Gambia at present is the increasing migration of people from rural to urban areas. The percentage of the population located in the urban area (Banjul and Kanifing) has grown by 19% in the past 21 years. This has caused over crowding which contributes to environmental degradation and lack of employment opportunities encourages petty crime and other anti social activities. This phenomenon also has an adverse effect on rural areas as the migrants to urban areas are for the most part young adults who are traditional income generators. Because ecotourism development centres around rural and less developed areas, this brings income generation and employment opportunities that previously were unavailable. This would go a long way in reducing the current rural urban drift and may even result in migrants returning to rural areas as employment opportunities increase.

A healthy ecotourism industry can also encourage people to see the value of their natural resource heritage. If communities benefit economically from ecotourism activities, it will encourage them to value and protect the biodiversity of the area and desist from harmful activities such as hunting and tree felling.

The World Tourism Organization has identified increased diversification of tourism in established destinations as a major trend. All over the world, traditional sun-sea-sand destinations are actively developing other aspects of their country's attractions. Examples of countries promoting secondary tourist activity development are Spain (winter sports, cultural heritage), Mexico (natural and historical resources) and Fiji (flora and fauna, traditions). The challenge for the traditional destination such as The Gambia is two fold - to develop facilities away from the coast and to convince international markets that the country offers more than coastal resorts. In other words, to change perceptions and to translate these new perceptions into actions. For The Gambia to respond to these new trends, ecotourism presents much potential. There are a number of reasons to justify my choice.

## **1. Income Potential**

The single motivating factor for developing any kind of tourist product is to get money, particularly hard currency into the country. But why ecotourism, why not concentrate on the existing market? There are a number of reasons. Firstly, you are appealing to a broader market segment. There is very little overlap between the ecotourist and the sun/beach markets. Also ecotourism products in other countries have resulted in non-charter tourists spending more money. Eco-tourists spend more. They're not on holiday in the traditional sense of the word - it's their interest or in some cases their obsession they are pursuing. Whether it is birds, wildlife or flowers these people will spend money to see it. Ecotourism is not highly seasonal. In fact for many (particularly those interested in birds, butterflies and flora) the traditional low season of May to October is the ideal time of year for them to pursue their interest. The low season in The Gambia has a negative effect on the economy to say the least, when you consider that each tourism worker supports an average of 9 people directly. The number of people who visit to do bird watching is difficult to quantify as these visitors tend to be absorbed into the traditional charter tour market.

## **2. Rural & Cultural Benefits**

There has been a lot written about the negative effect of tourism on Gambian culture, particularly its effect on the youths of the country. Does tourism necessarily have to result in a payoff between improving the economy at the cost of local culture and rural development? Not at all. Ecotourism has a different impact. Firstly, it would bring visitors to the wetlands, mangrove swamps and guinea savannah of The Gambia, thus generating income and employment in these areas as guides, birdwatchers, boat crew etc - skilled, well paid work. The natural progression of this would act as a catalyst for rural development. These people would need places to stay, to eat, boats and equipment to hire. Why would a young villager want to take his chances on the TDA beaches when he can earn D150 per day taking nature lovers up and down the bolons? Soon, he can buy another boat and employ some locals. A pipedream? Not at all - a very achievable objective. Finally ecotourism has been shown to have a less negative effect on a country's culture and traditions because ecotourists tend to be more culturally aware and are attracted by a non westernised society and the reduction in concentration in particular areas as discussed above will also serve to dilute any possible negative effects on local cultures and traditions.

## **3. Elasticity of Demand, Substitution & Competition**

Sun/beach tourists tend to have a high elasticity of demand. In other words, it takes only a slight shift in any of the determining factors they employ in choosing a holiday resort for them to switch product. They are not loyal and their choice of holiday destination is often highly income sensitive. When you add to this the factors of competition and substitution one can see how frighteningly fragile the industry we operate in is. The determinant factors for a holiday in The Gambia are climate, value for money and exotic location. This instantly puts The Gambia in competition with the Southern Mediterranean, The Canary Islands, The Caribbean and a growing number of Asian resorts. A change in any of the three factors will have a dramatic effect on the tourist industry, as there is scope for substitution. So how do you solve the problem of high elasticity and substitution? The solution is applicable to any industry. You market your product/service on the basis of a unique selling proposition. If there is demand for a product that only you can supply, to people who are not highly income sensitive, your customers will be loyal, their demand inelastic and if there is little or no competition, there will be less possibility for substitution. In the case of The Gambia, there are very few countries so easily accessible to Europe that could boast of the rich bird life that The Gambia has. This is a unique selling point. Allied to the flora and rich cultural traditions, it behoves us to market these things in a responsible and sustainable manner.

#### **4. Image of The Gambia**

The tourist industry of The Gambia has suffered a serious image problem in the last few years. It is associated in Northern Europe as a bumster ridden country and a destination for middle aged women looking for African romance. Whether this is the case or not is irrelevant. The mere existence of these perceptions is damaging enough. Ecotourism could do a lot to counteract these images - a strong ecotourism marketing programme would do much to shatter this image and would lead to more positive perceptions and attitudes among potential visitors. A concerted effort to change the image of The Gambia from "The Smiling Coast" to perhaps "The Nature Lover's Paradise" would attract renewed interest among travel media and commentators. This brings us back to the issue of developing a USP. Whilst the Gambian tourist industry chases the same market as the rest of the sun/beach destinations worldwide, it cannot be expected to generate much interest in the travel world.

#### **5. Ease of Implementation**

As the tourist industry has been long established and developed, the structures for implementing a marketing programme are already there and would need minor adjustments to appeal to this new and valuable market segment.

#### **6. Product development in neighbouring countries**

This is an area that needs further investigation. However, it is apparent that some of The Gambia's close neighbours (especially Senegal) are working in the development of an Ecotourism Product. If other countries in the region are successful in marketing themselves as ecotourism destinations, The Gambia will find itself quickly labelled as the Costa del Sol of West Africa, a frivolous image it will find far harder to shake off when neighbouring countries are being perceived as serious destinations. If The Gambia stands on the sidelines while other countries take the initiative, it has little or no chance of ever gaining a foothold in this lucrative market. As well as the above reasons, The Gambia will be perceived as merely jumping on the bandwagon and having no serious commitment to ecotourism.

Gazetting of nature reserves and other protected areas is a brave and far sighted move by any government, but particularly in a country like The Gambia, where the majority of the population are dependent upon agriculture. To date, more than 3% of the land area of the country has been set aside as national parks or reserves, and the current wildlife policy aims at increasing that to 5%. However, just because an area in The Gambia has been set aside as protected it does not necessarily follow that it can no longer be seen to have any value to the community. This is where the link between tourism and the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity comes into play.

Tourism can also act a valuable tool in promoting the exchange of ideas between countries and cultures. Many ecotourists are people with a strong interest in the environment and its protection. They will be interested to learn about conservation methods in the country that they are visiting and compare these with what takes place in their own countries. These tourists can be a source of information to us and may also provide the means of setting up links between the Gambia and other communities. An example of this is the Tanji Birders, a group of British ornithologists with a special

interest in the Tanji Bird Reserve. Not only have the Tanji Birders sponsored many projects in the reserve but they also through their activities promote the reserve and The Gambia as an ecotourism and birdwatching destination.

To take a look at 3 examples from the Department of Parks & Wildlife, I intend to examine the potential for ecotourism in two of the national parks, Niumi, Kiang West and one of the reserves, Bao Bolon. Niumi and Bao Bolon are incidentally classified as Ramsar sites. Ramsar is the international convention on important wetlands as habitat for waterbirds, which was ratified by the Gambian government in 1996.

Niumi National Park occupies the coastal strip of the north bank of the River Gambia and covers 4,940 ha. It was gazetted in 1986 and encompasses a mosaic of wetlands and vegetation types. A wide variety of fauna is found here, the greatest diversity of which is found within the avi-fauna, which is composed of both resident and palearctic migratory species. The waterways are home to one of the regions rarer aquatic mammals, the West African Manatee. Crocodiles are also resident with Atlantic Humpbacked Dolphins. Clawless Otters, Leopards, Serval and Hyena have also been reported.

One of the main potential areas for economic development within the context of Niumi's wetlands lies in the expansion of the tourism and recreational use of the area. This potential is one of the main focuses of the Department's integration of local communities into the benefits to be derived from the presence of the park. Opportunities exist for guiding services, creek trips, dolphin and manatee watching, sports fishing and the development of subsidiaries such as local crafts and cultural displays. These activities function to provide revenue direct to the communities as well as serving to highlight and underline the value of local culture and traditions.

Niumi National Park has for the past 2-3 years been the site for a bird ringing initiative from the UK based British Ornithological Trust with participants from all over the world. This brings in high spending, ecologically minded tourists.

To fully balance the economic exploitation of natural resources with conservation ideally requires a cost benefit analysis. This is beyond the scope of this presentation and currently beyond the scope of the Department. As a sound policy upon which to assess the values and demerits of any management strategy, sustainability can be taken as a key concept.

Bao Bolon Wetland Reserve is located on the north bank of the River Gambia, approximately 52 nautical miles from the river mouth. The site covers a number of wetland types from high mangrove to seasonal freshwater marsh. The avifauna of the reserve includes a number of regional rarities such as Pel's Fishing Owl and the Brown Necked Parrot, an IUCN threatened species. Manatee, crocodile, Clawless otter and marsh mongoose are found in the permanent creeks. Sitatunga is present in the south. There are five species of primate, along with bushbuck, warthog and hyena. Tourism already has a foothold in the reserve with boat trips from Tendaba Camp and day trips from Kiang West National Park. The trips have a high popularity with tourists due to the diverse and dramatic bird and animal life which is present. There is considerable potential to develop access to the mangrove belt from the north bank and thus open opportunities for involvement by local communities in the provision of boat and guide services, as well as other ancilliary services. Katchang and Salikene are well situated to avail of such developments. Walking tours also have considerable potential in the drier parts of the reserve and the bases from where such activities could start and finish would open opportunities for other ancilliary operations to be established (drinks and snacks, local crafts, overnight accommodation etc).

The area of Kiang West National Park is approximately 11,500 ha and it is one of the most important reservoirs of wildlife in The Gambia. It was established in 1987.

It is situated in Lower River Division in the Kiang West District. The major part of the park is dry deciduous woodland and guinea savannah and there are also extensive stretches of mangrove creeks and tidal flats. West African Manatee and Nile Crocodile are here, with African Clawless Otters and Sitatungas. The park possesses an impressive range of avi-fauna; over 250 bird species have been checklisted to date. Warthogs are abundant and Spotted Hyenas are common.

Most important in the planning of the Kiang West National Park Project was the Ecotourism Programme. General project goals for this programme are (1) conserving and rehabilitating park biodiversity through resource restoration and protection and (2) implementing development projects in the surrounding communities to replace lost resources due to the creation of the park.

Ecotourism is one of the programmes designed to generate benefits for local communities. Its goals

are (1) developing an ecologically sound and culturally sensitive tourism programme that maximizes benefits to local villages and (2) developing a programme that finances a portion of park operating costs through visitor fees, donations, and the sale of merchandise in the park visitors centre.

A recent assessment identified several ways for an ecotourism programme to carry out the goals of aiding community development and generating funds for park management. The assessment recommends :

At national level, the promotion of up country tourism, specifically promoting the country's rich bird life and cultural history. This includes - publishing and distributing information on the park and up-country attractions, organising press and familiarization trips and publishing and distributing bird watching information to tour operators, guide books and interested groups in Europe and the United States.

At the park level, developing tourist infrastructure and efficient park management operations. This includes developing a group of trained park personnel, a fee policy that enables management to retain a portion of the funds for use in the park a park concession policy that includes a boat touring concession and a system to monitor visitor use patterns and impacts.

At the village level, carrying out a series of tourism related economic development programmes. These include:

- organising a village crafts industry
- developing a group of trained local wildlife guides
- establishing an African style village run camp offering tourist accommodations and
- creating a village development fund established from park fees

The park has yet to officially open but has been receiving visitors since the completion of its infrastructure in the last season. Along with Bao Bolong, Niumi and the other parks of the Gambia, Kiang West has received extensive and complimentary coverage in a range of independent and nature travel books this year We are hopeful that with some good publicity and careful management, the protected areas of the Gambia can become another asset in the ecotourism industry that is developing in The Gambia.

The "pay to stay" argument has been applied to many aspects of environmental conservation, where established thinking in the past regarded human population as a negative factor. For example, all over Africa in many instances local people were excluded from parks because it was assumed they damaged natural resources. Many conservationists now argue that communities should always be included in environmental planning and management. Parks and reserves cannot succeed in the long term unless local people see real benefits from them. Put simply, most protected areas contain wildlife or habitats which people are willing to pay for to visit. If local people can develop enterprises and benefit from this, there is an incentive to conserve. Here in The Gambia, local people have been employed where possible at several national parks and at Kiang West, activities such as cattle grazing and rice growing are permitted in a sustainable manner. At Kiang and Niumi, community groups have been established which give local people a voice in the park management structure so they can benefit from the sustainable use of the resources within the park.

A protected environment is an attractive one. For many people in the West, who have chosen industrial development at the cost of their environment, an unspoiled landscape is a huge attraction. Tourism development and biodiversity conservation should not be seen as mutually exclusive activities. There is a growing awareness of the potential for a close relationship between the nature and tourism sectors. This has resulted in an increasing drive for co-operation between the two in many parts of the world. What now needs to be seen are more practical measures taken to firmly cement this relationship for the good of the environment and in the interests of developing a sustainable tourism industry, one which benefits the hosts as much as the guests.

Ecotourism and Community Wildlife Management Unit (Jackie and I), Department of Parks and Wildlife Management has produced a number of information sheets and books as well as established contacts with relevant stakeholders within the tourism sector in the past two years.

## Resources

- Individual guides to each of the six protected areas (2 pages A4 with maps and graphics).
- A guidebook to the protected areas of The Gambia (32 pages, A5 with maps, colour illustrations). This has been distributed through the protected areas to date.
- Guides to best practice in ecotourism. Two versions of this guide were produced with an accompanying flyer. The guide dealt with best practice in construction, design and maintenance of ecotourism businesses with reference to recycling, energy use, water use etc. One comprehensive guide of 65 pages (A4) with a full reference section was produced and distributed to policy stakeholders for ecotourism. A shorted guidebook of 20 pages (A5) was produced and distributed to existing ecotourism businesses. Both of these guides were accompanied by a flyer detailing the main principles that should be adhered to and whom to contact for further information. The guides may be a project for The Gambia's contribution to UN International Year of Ecotourism – 2002.
- A guide to communities and tourism in the Gambia was produced. This short guide (A5 doublesided) was produced at the Unit to raise awareness of issues visitors and potential investors should bear in mind with respect to communities and tourism. It has been distributed through ASSET, Tourism Concern and ecotourism businesses. A set of travellers' tips to The Gambia was produced and distributed to a number of tourism businesses for their customers information. Dealing with areas such as the need to spend money locally, respect local customs etc, it is again one that is worth distributing on a regular basis.
- A series of film and press guidelines were produced by the Unit and distributed to the international and local media as there was an increasing problem with the unauthorised filming of wildlife in The Gambia and no revenue accruing to the Department from this. Meetings were held with air and ground operators who are responsible for hosting such media visits. Meetings and familiarisation trips were held for visiting media operators.

## Marketing

- A comprehensive database of 89 UK based ecotourism operators was completed. Few of these operators currently have a programme in The Gambia and the Unit has undertaken a mail shot to them with some of the guides already mentioned to let them know what The Gambia has to offer.
- A co-operative marketing plan for the protected areas of The Gambia for the next 5 years has been produced. This plan was produced as a reference tool for all future marketing activities in the Department. It is also hoped that it may act as a funding tool for certain initiatives that central government may not be in a position to provide for i.e. infrastructure requirements such as those required for increased ecotourism visitors.
- A number of logos and brands were produced for the protected areas and wildlife ecotourism. These are used in all Department communications and promotions in conjunction with the recently developed slogans.
- On-going market research at Abuko has been undertaken for the past 2 years. This has dealt with areas such as additional visitor requirements, price elasticity etc. The results should allow us to plan better for the future in Abuko.

## Policies, Proposals & Plans

- One of the most pressing needs the Department had was for a strategic plan. This has been developed by the unit with a full budget and it is suggested that the plan is distributed to other government departments, funders etc with a view to identifying areas stakeholders wish to be involved in and/or fund.
- At the end of 1999, the Unit took over responsibility for the national ecotourism strategy. A number of meetings were held with stakeholders and the ecotourism task force. A final strategy was produced in March 2000 and the strategy is with Ministry of Tourism awaiting implementation. The strategy will be either implemented as a separate programme or better still as part of the enhanced new tourism strategy for The Gambia.
- The Unit has been involved in The DFID Tourism Challenge Fund Application in The Gambia. The project focuses on poverty alleviation through crafts diversification, improving agricultural links into the tourism sector and the diversification of rural economies for ecotourism.
- The Unit applied to DFID directly under the Civil Society Challenge Fund in partnership with the Living Earth Foundation UK. The application is still at the first stage of application. The project proposed is specifically focused on Kiang West National Park and it aims to create benefits for the local communities in Kiang through initiatives in ecotourism, community development and conservation agriculture.



- The Unit has provided much technical assistance to tourism Ngo's, public sector initiatives and small tourism businesses in The Gambia. This is a role we would like to see continuing as it provides the Unit an opportunity to work as part of a wider group in tourism and to influence policy making directly with other stakeholders.