

## **MANAGING MOLE NATIONAL PARK IN GHANA FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

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### **Abstract**

*The aim for the study is to investigate managing “Mole National Park” in Ghana for sustainable tourism. The specific objectives are to assess the current brand of Mole National Park and to determine the international tourists’ expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. Although Ghana possesses diverse variety of potential attractions including national parks, key to success of these in attracting tourists is their proper development and management. Tourism is a fiercely competitive business and for Ghana to remain competitive, it needs to manage its stock of natural, historical, and cultural resources wisely. To achieve the research objectives, the study adopted qualitative interviews together with documents as data collection instruments. In this regards, 6 people, including someone from northern regional tourists’ board, mole national park, some communities fringing the park, and some international tourists were interviewed. The findings of the study revealed strategies which have been used to manage the Park to meet the tourists’ expectations. Some of the strategies include: The Park has been placed under the watch of Ghana government with some support from interested nongovernmental organizations; the park focuses only on wildlife as its key attraction for the tourists. It uses word of mouth, brochure, CDs, and web site as the main promotional tools to get messages about it to the target markets. The findings could help Mole National Park, and the rest of the national parks in Ghana to be able to overcome problems regarding how best the parks could be managed to maximize tourists’ visitation.*

*Keywords: Sustainable Ecotourism, Attractions, National Park, Tourism Destinations, Current Brand, International Tourists*

## INTRODUCTION

The development of tourism in Ghana is comprehensively aimed at a broad and appreciable range of domestic, sub regional African and international tourists. And, to achieve this comprehensive aim requires pursuance of quality tourism development and management that is internationally competitive and compatible with Ghana's social value and environmental settings to ensure that only tourists who show respect for the country's history and environment are attracted.

Apart from generating foreign exchange earnings and revenue for the government of Ghana, tourism has the potentiality of becoming a powerful tool in pro-poor development strategies. It has the ability to create jobs and wealth for local economies, as well as contribute to conserving natural resources. Tourism is a combination of visitors' consumption of goods and services which include transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, recreation and entertainment, travel and tour operations, and souvenirs (MoT/DR Policy paper, 2006:11). Tourism in Ghana has largely been dominated by the public sector until Government relinquished all interests in many commercial enterprises during the early part of the 90s. Since then, the private sector has been expected to lead the tourism industry to greater heights. But, it has not been able to take full control of the sector, partly because of challenges, especially operational standards requirements that have not been adequately addressed by public policy.

Movement of tourists into a destination, as (Smith 2003:55) claims, has the tendency of changing the culture of such a destination to western culture as majority of the tourists have very strong desire for the western-style of life. Such strong desires have the effects of not only creating economic leakages but also threats of the production of the local goods, especially if the local people develop a desire for Western-style products as well. Ensuring sustainable tourism, asserts (Weaver & Lawton 2006:343), calls for a tourism managed in such a way that the carrying capacity of any given destination in relation to its environment, social, cultural or economic is maintained since destination seems to be sustainable only, and only if it is in line with best practice knowledge.

Pursuance of sustainability is incumbent upon organizations in the sense that societies expect ethical behavior from entities that have power over the environment and culture. This sort of makes management to have the conviction that inability to behave ethically will result in a negative public image (Weaver & Lawton 2006:346). Thus, ethical management of destinations contributes greatly to responsible consumption. And, such ethical management of destinations can only be achieved through good community relations. Positive community relations, postulates Weaver & Lawton 2006, create a friendly tourist-host interaction that enhances the

quality of the vacation experience for tourists, thus encouraging repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth publicity (Weaver & Lawton 2006:348).

Tourism destinations are multi-service products which are often of great interest to a wide range of consumer divisions. These are considered audiences and are grouped under headings such as tourist segments, corporate segments and organic influencers (Gunn 1997 as in Hankinson 2007:249). The tourist segment may include both leisure and business tourists, the corporate segments may include both tourism-related organizations and nontourism-related organizations, and the organic influencer segment comprises organizations and groups of people who can have serious influence on the destination's brand image through their respective communication role, especially the media. Therefore, to manage a destination for sustainability, serious cooperation is required between the managers of a given destination and these segments so that effective cordial relation can be assured (Hankinson 2007:249). Furthermore, successful management of destinations also depends on effective partnership and collaboration between public and private sectors. This partnership, postulates (Hankinson 2007:249), occurs in several forms and embraces a variety of practices, but the most thing common is compatibility that leads to mutual benefits.

Ghana has many national parks including Bia, Didya, Nini-Suhien, Mole, and Kakum national parks among others, and since each of these parks has the unique way it is managed, this study would generally focus on managing Mole National Park for sustainable tourism. The study specifically seeks to explore how the Mole National Park be branded to meet the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. It would further explore into features that characterize sustainable eco-tourism destination and the strategies to be adopted to manage the brand identity of the Mole National Park to maximize international tourists' visitation to the park. The coming section discusses problem statement.

### **Problem Statement**

Ghana, though, possesses a diverse variety of potential attractions including the Natural environmental heritage, Historical heritage, Cultural heritage, and other man-made attractions, the key to success of these features in attracting tourists is their proper development and management. Tourism is a fiercely competitive business and Ghana can become, and remain competitive, only if it manages its stock of natural, historical, and cultural resources wisely, complemented with adequate and innovative man-made facilities. The question that usually surfaces is how is this stock of diverse resources wisely managed? And the answer certainly lies with effective brand identity and image establishment and its positioning on the minds of tourists to facilitate repeat visitation. (Morgan & Pritchard 2001) postulate that in a society so

saturated with diverse marketing communication, it is important that a distinctive product image is created in the minds of consumers since positioning is not about what is done with the product but what is done with the minds of whoever is likely to consume the product. The use of a product attributes to position it is of no so much meaning to the consumer. What is so relevant, they further assert, is the ability to increase the average net value of the brand by way of an extent to which the consumers will like the brand and the ability to increase the brand distinctiveness by developing its appeal to those consumers it is suited (Morgan & Pritchard 2001:247). This however needs to be done with carefulness in order to avoid what (Kotler et al 1996 as in Morgan & Pritchard 2001:248) claim to be positioning error including: under positioning, over positioning and confused positioning. Under positioning occurs when a company lacks clear vision of its product's unique qualities, over positioning is where marketers become so focused on one aspect of a product or destination that they project far too narrow an image of it to the consumer, and confused positioning always leaves consumers with an unclear image of the product.

In the tourism and leisure industries, many organizations are yet to fully engage with the marketing opportunities branding presents. It is always incumbent that destination managers establish strong destination brand identity and positioning to be well known outside in order to capture the international market. The destination managers should ensure that they do not become focused on one aspect of the destination in their quest to branding it so that they do not build narrow image about the destination to the consumer. There are instances where consumers are left with an unclear image of a destination especially messages that switch between price-gear appeals and more emotionally based branding positions. Such lack of cohesion, assert (Sheena et al 1999) as in (Morgan & Pritchard 2001:248), leaves consumers with poorly defined images of tour operator brands and does not encourage strong brand loyalty.

Furthermore, place branding involves multitudes of stakeholders and accompanying interests including national, regional and local authorities, private sectors and local population unlike products and services although companies may be operating based on complex organizational structures which involves numerous interests (Anette & Henrik 2004:4). Branding a place is much more involving and complex since a lot of consultations have to be held in order to arrive at a given branding strategy that would maximize the desired market share. Conflicting messages may be advanced by actors who may not be involved in the branding process but located at the place. It is in the light of this that this study is conducted to look at how the Mole National Park be branded to meet the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination.

## **Purpose of the Study and Study Questions**

The main aim for the study is to gain insight and understanding on how the management of the Mole National Park manages the current brand of the park and, through this understanding gain further light as to how the park be branded to meet the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. It intends focusing on the manager of Mole National Park to gain insight into the brand of the park, focusing on the Regional Tourist Board to gain shared understanding as to the available planned initiatives for the park, focusing on the tourists to be able to gain light into their expectations of sustainable ecotourism destination, and focusing on the local people to find out the extent of cooperation between them and the state and/or the management of the park. It would further explore into features that characterize sustainable eco-tourism destination and the strategies to be adopted to manage the brand identity of the Mole National Park to maximize international tourists' visitation of the park.

The study has decided focusing on the management of the Mole National Park, the Regional Tourists Board, the Tourists and the Local People because this category serves as the main body for effective management of the park. They are more or less the stakeholders in the running of the park. The Regional Tourists Board representing the state more or less formulates tourism policies, the management of the park understands and implements these policies, the tourists and the local people are affected by these policies. It is an obvious fact that poor collaboration of the management and the local people can pose serious management challenges which in turn may lead to negative image for the park thus, lowering down the visitation rate of the tourists to the reserve.

It is against this background that the study seeks to address the following objectives:

- ❖ To assess the current brand of Mole National Park in Ghana
- ❖ To determine the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination.

## **Significance of the Study**

Although there have been a lot of studies conducted in the field of destination management. But then, it looks as if not so much work has been conducted about managing the brand of the Mole National Park. Strategic destination brand management process brings about a clear understanding as to what the brand would represent and how it should be positioned in relation to the competitors. (Keller 2003:45) asserts that brand position is no any other thing than creating brand supremacy in the minds of consumers. This by implication means that to position a brand is to convince consumers of the benefits they stand to gain from the destination in relation to the other competing destinations. Mole National Park, as one of the several national parks of Ghana, needs to have its brand well managed and positioned taking into cognizance

international standards to be able to stand tall in the competitive international environment. On this basis, the significance of the study can be viewed from the angles of individuality and collectivity.

- ❖ Individually, the researcher through interacting with different people from different cultural background throughout the interview processes makes it possible for him to gain experience of working with diverse people, critically discuss ensuing challenges and opportunities, and thus learning a whole lot of lessons from that.
- ❖ It is also possible for the researcher, through the study, to explore and gain an understanding as to how natural parks are managed by participants.
- ❖ Collectively, the researcher through the study would be able to find out the relative gains that any natural park stands to chalk if it succeeds in effectively branding itself as a sustainable ecotourism destination.
- ❖ Finally, the researcher would be able to explore how the final data construct could be useful

### **Limitation of the Study**

The limitation faced is the relatively small size of the study. It would have been desirable if the study was extended to cover especially all national parks in Ghana so that the results would have been readily generalised. Notwithstanding this, the semi-structured interviews conducted with the Northern Regional Tourist Board, management of the Mole National Park, the local people and the tourists provided a realistic insight as to how best the park could be branded to meet the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. The next limitation is that the sample size did not extend to include so many agencies that matter most in the tourism industry especially agencies such as the travel and tour agencies, the hotel and restaurant operators, car rental agencies, and the like. Only the views of the deputy manager, Northern Regional Tourists Board, deputy manager of the Mole National Park, few local people and some randomly selected few international tourists were sought, without anybody especially from the travel and tour agencies, hotel and restaurant operators, and among others being interviewed. However, a future study could be conducted to explore the point of view of the other operators within this industry including a wide range of the people of the local community and the international tourists.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The quest to researching in order to understand how Mole National Park in Ghana is managed for sustainable tourism, has led to some literature review in Tourism management. Tourism management is very broad. This is due, in part, of the broad nature of the subject. However, this

section of the review would focus on four areas: The first part of the review begins with a look at destination brand management. This will examine brands/branding, brand's importance, brand image, brand identity, brand positioning, brand value and destination or place branding. The second part will review literature on market segmentation/target market. The third part will review literature on promotion. The final part of the review will look at general literature on sustainable tourism.

## **Destination Brand Management**

### ***Brands/Branding***

The concepts brands/branding are considered subjective, and vary across people in the environment of tourism management. American Marketing Association (AMA) as in Keller 2003 looks at a brand to be *"a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition"* (Keller 2003:3) . This technically then means that whenever a marketer brings about a new name, logo, symbol for a new product, the implication will be that he or she has brought about a brand. But, brand has travelled far beyond this. It should be looked at in terms of something that creates a certain amount of awareness, reputation and prominence in the marketplace. Simoes & Dibb 2001 as cited in Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005 rather consider brand *"to embody a whole set of physical and socio-psychological attributes and beliefs which are associated with the product"* (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005:508). This by implication means that brand is more than the shaping of distinctiveness. It is a product, claim Hankinson & Cowking 1993 as in Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005, made distinctive by its positioning relative to competition and by its personality, which comprises a unique combination of functional attributes and symbolic values (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005:508). Branding is the deliberate process of selecting and associating the attributes that are assumed to add value to the basic product (Knox & Bickerton 2003 as in Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005:508).

### ***Importance of Brands***

In today's competitive world, the importance of brand and branding cannot be neglected. Branding and marketing of places have grown for some decades because those activities are now regarded as required marketing interventions. Branding is beneficial not only to a particular brand but also to its consumers. Various brands, claims (Keller 2003), give specific image to people, signal of quality, and in this sense can be a risk reducer. Brand is a source of competitive advantage and financial returns as well as means of identification on the market (Keller 2003:9-11). Stephen & Connel 2006 with similar view point on the issue assert that

branding allows consumers to identify with the place or product, helps to develop or create desirable image of the product or service and at the same time raising its visibility and competitiveness (Stephen & Connel 2006:335). Branding can help destination to reach various markets. It strengthens image and adds prestige to the destination.

### **Brand Image**

The review is focusing on the brand image because the study is among other things trying to find out the extent to which the tourists' expectations have been met with the brand management of Mole National Park, and this is precisely what brand image tries to do. In brand image, consumers can find the meaning of the brand.

Brand image is all about how brand is perceived. It is the perception of the brand in the minds of people.....it is what people believe about a brand- their thoughts, feelings and expectations (Bennett 1995 in Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005:509). Brand image contains the meanings of the brand for the guest. Brand image determines the uniqueness of a brand and sustains its equity through brand loyalty. Strong brand image is tantamount to the sum of strong and consistent brand associations (Keller 1998 in Cai & Hobson 2004:199). People make decision about brands for many reasons they do not tell others about. Therefore, in branding, consideration has to be given a brand's total takeaway and how it fits into the consumer's reference.

### **Brand Identity**

The relevance of brand identity in this review cannot be underestimated in the sense that it is through brand identity that effective differentiation can be possible in the arena of competition, and since the study is about branding, there is the need to review brand identity to be able to come up with a differentiation strategy that could stand competition.

Brand identity is all about how owners of a brand will want the brand to be perceived. Any branded product needs a brand identity, a brand differentiation and a brand personality (Aaker 1996 in Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005:509). But, these are not so much separate attributes. They are re-statements of the same features from different perspectives. Identifying and clarifying the brand identity is in itself an instrument of differentiation of one product from another. Brand- identity "*is the creation of a relationship between the brand and the customers with a value proposition that consists of functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits*" (Kapferer 1992 in Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005:509). In the brand identification process although branding activities are performed by the producers for their benefits but it also serves the interest of consumers by speeding up their decision making.

### **Brand Positioning**

One major aim for brands is to differentiate a product from the other similar products, but product differentiation is not possible if the brand is not well established in the minds of the consumers. Therefore, the review deems it necessary focusing on brand positioning to see how it can be effectively done.

Brand positioning is about designing whatever an organization has to offer the market and its image in order that it will occupy the target customer's mind. The goal for brand positioning is to locate the brand in the minds of consumers such that the firm will be able to maximize the potential benefit (Keller 2003:44-45). Fundamentally, brand positioning involves convincing consumers of the good side of a brand in relation to that of competitors, while at the same time minimizing concerns of the disadvantages of it. Positioning is looked at as the essence of the marketing mix. It conveys '*the concept or the meaning of the product, how the product meets a consumer needs, and different consumer meanings, or product images can be assigned to the same product*' (Morgan & Pritchard 2001:247). In this way it can be positioned differently to appeal to different audiences and it can be repositioned for the same audience. Positioning is not what is done with the product, but what is done with the mind of the prospect. That is, with effective positioning strategy, the target prospects will necessarily patronize the offer made to them by the producer.

### **Brand Values**

On the issue of brand values, they are the set of abstract associations in the forms of attributes and benefits that characterize a brand (Keller 2003:45). Brand values go hand-in-hand with what is called brand mantra, or brand essence, or core brand promise. Brand mantra is a short expression of the most important aspects of a brand and its core brand values. It can further be seen as the most important aspects of the brand to the consumer and the company. Thus, it makes Keller 2003 to assert that the core brand values and a mantra are seen to be an articulation of the heart and soul of a brand (Keller 2003:45).

To conclude on the review of the literature on brands/branding, it is an apparent fact that organizations will survive ostensibly in the arena of keen competition provided that they have been able to build a strong brand identity, brand positioning, and brand image which eventually leads to strong and viable brand value for it. Therefore, the coming section looks into destination/place branding.

### ***Destination/Place Branding***

Countries and cities are competing world-wide not only for tourists but also for export markets, business investment and skilled migrants. To be able to meet tourism, business and population objectives, destination managers are now applying branding principles, derived from product marketing and branding to establish their destinations as brands. The nature of the tourism product is an experience of place (location and people) at a particular time (Wheeler 1995). The tourism product has been conceptualized in many different ways making Palmer & Bejou 1995 to observe that the total product offer of a tourism destination is complex, with both tangible and intangible dimensions. Tangibility is provided by the physical stock of hotels, visitor attractions, means of access, parking facilities etc. Intangibility is provided by the image of an area, augmented for example with historical associations. The complexity of the marketing task is compounded by the fragmented nature of the stakeholders who are responsible for components of the total offer (Palmer & Bejou 1995). This definition of the tourism product as an amalgam of different elements produced by different stakeholders leads to the understanding of tourism marketing and destination branding within it as substantially different from traditional product marketing (Cooper et al 2005). Destination branding is much more of a collective phenomenon than is normally found in the generic branding situation.

Furthermore, Hankinson 2007 adds that *“vision together with a set of core brand values is a vital precursor to a wider debate about the brand strategy with potential partners who will eventually help to push the strategy forward”* (Hankinson 2007:247). Therefore, the key role of the Destination Management Organization (DMO), and in particular the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) as brand champion, is to establish a clear vision for the destination brand and to develop a set of core brand values which link positive aspects of the place’s heritage to a realistic vision of what can be achieved in the future. Place is not a single standalone product, it is amalgamation of individual services, such as shopping and sports centers, theatres and museums as well as infrastructural services such as roads and rail networks (Sleipen 1990 in Hankinson 2007:242). Therefore, the place product is co-produced by multiple of autonomous organizations, both public and private. Unlike mainstream marketing, which begins with new product development, place marketing begins with an old product, the design of which has had little or no marketing influence. Places are not only co-produced but also co-consumed. As a result of this, the benefits which the place consumer experiences are mediated by their interaction, either passive or active, with other consumers, who may not be seeking the same bundle of benefits (Langeard et al 1981 in Hankinson 2007:242).

Also, *“place branding like place marketing in general, is impossible because places are not products, governments are not producers and users are not consumers”* (Kavaratzis &

Ashworth 2005:510). However, the contention is that place branding is not only possible but has been practiced for a long time as cities have competed with each other for trade, population, wealth and prestige or power. A place needs to be differentiated through unique brand identity if it wants to be recognized as existing, perceived in the minds of place customers as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors and consumed in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place.

Concluding on the literature review on destination/place branding, it is important to understand that proper application of destination/place branding has the tendency of helping to create and maintain the desired image of the destination; it can attract visitors based on perceptions of the brand and resulting changes in behavior; and through measuring of brand perceptions, destination branding can help Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) to measure success.

### **Market Segmentation/Target Market**

Marketing is strongly based on market segmentation and target marketing. Market segmentation is the process of taking existing and/or potential customers/visitors (market) and categorizing them into groups with similar preferences referred to as market segments, selecting the most promising segments as target markets and designing marketing mixes or strategies which will satisfy the special needs, desires and behavior of the target markets (Edward & Gary 1987). Furthermore, market segmentation represents an effort to uplift a company's targeting precisions (Kotler 1997:250). Markets could be segmented based on consumer characteristics in the forms of geographic, demographic, and psychographic as well as consumer responses to benefits sought, use occasions or brands (Kotler 1997:256). Segmentation based on these features helps marketers to examine whether these customer segments shows different needs. Who then assesses whether people who want quality as compare to price in buying a product differ in their geographic, demographic and psychographic makeup. Also contributing to the point, (Weaver & Lawton 2006:175), assert of eight factors that have to be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of market segmentation in any given situation. These include *measurability, size, homogeneity, 7compatibility, accessibility, actionability, durability, relevant*. Ultimately, the appropriateness of particular segmentation criteria to a destination or business will depend so much on the conclusions reached in the evaluation of the factors stated above.

In essence, the research is to find out how to brand the Mole National Park to meet the international tourists' expectations of sustainable ecotourism, but to effectively brand a given destination to achieve a desired result calls for the need to put the market of the destination into categories to facilitate targeting precisions, and the different needs likely to be revealed by

various customer segments, the destination will take advantage of it, thus the need to look into factors to consider in evaluating the effectiveness of market segmentation and patterns of target market selection.

Concluding on the literature review on market segmentation/target markets, it is claimable that it will be useful for the segment identification process to result in segments that suggest marketing efforts that will be effective in attracting those segments and at least one segment will be large enough to justify these specialized marketing efforts. It is also often wiser to target smaller segments that are presently not being served, or served inadequately, than to go after larger segments for which there is a great deal of competition even though competition is a necessary phenomenon in the arena of effective marketing management. But target markets can only be better informed about a destination's offer through marketing communication, which is what the next section looks at.

### **Promotion/Marketing Communications**

Promotion provides target audiences with accurate and timely information to help them decide whether to visit a community or business. Developing a promotional campaign is not a science with hard and fast rules (Edward & Gari 1987). Making decisions regarding which type or combination of promotion types to use (personal selling, advertising, sales promotions, or publicity) is not always easy. If, however, you follow a logical process and do the necessary research, chances for success will be improved. Promotion tries to increase demand by conveying a positive image of the product or resort to potential customers or visitors through appeals to the perceived demands, needs, taste, values and attitudes of the market or particular target market segment (Weaver & Lawton 2006:223-4). Information and, to an extent, image constitute the bulk of travel products and transactions. Furthermore, 'tangibilising the intangible', according to (Levitt 1981 as cited in Kotler 2000 in Bolan & Williams 2008:383), to engage target audience is understandably complex. However, availability of visual images has been recognized as being part of the solution.

Concluding on the promotion part of the literature review, it is worthy to emphasize that tourist destination brand image, claim (Hanlan & Kelly 2005 in Bolan & Williams 2008:383), is a major influencing factor in traveller's destination choice. Therefore, for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) to enjoy full advantage of this, global tourism promotional messages should contain features (actors and information) in them that may go in some way to enhance the appeal of destinations to target markets to ensure sustainability which the next section tries to consider.

## Sustainable Tourism

Most of the definitions of sustainable tourism highlight socio-cultural and environmental preservation, a high level of community involvement and planning that considers present and future use (Liu, 2003; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Some other definitions also advocate that sustainable tourism have to contribute to the economic stability of the host region or community (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Twining-Ward & Butler, 2002). Sustainable tourism is all about economic, social and environmental sustainability, and is dependent on all three areas (Mbaiwa 2005). Sustainability, postulates (Pigram 2000), is multi dimensional and as a result, it requires its application in all human activities and development. Since uncontrolled tourism development will impact negatively upon the environment, it is crucial to focus on sustainable tourism in all aspects of management. One such management tool, argue (Weaver & Lawton 2006), is zoning regulation, districting strategy that designates special urban or rural landscapes for focused management or planning that seeks to preserve the special historical, natural or cultural properties of these places (Weaver & Lawton 2006:364). Developing sustainable tourism always presents a process that is unique for the area, due to multiple stakeholders and interest involved. However, in such a unique process, declares (Kernel 2005:152), there is no standard procedure to structure the problem solving.

In conclusion of the review of literature on sustainable tourism, it is worthy stressing that in order to conserve the natural resources and preserve cultural heritages, long-term economic sustainability is essential for all tourism destinations, particularly in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) where the economy depends on tourism.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Approach: Deductive Approach

Research approach can be deductive or inductive (Bryman, 2004). The deductive approach defines the relationship between theory and social research. The deductive approach demonstrates the process whereby hypotheses are deduced from existing theories and these then guide the process of data collection so that they can be tested. The research adopted both deductive and inductive methodological approaches. The deductive aspect of the research is linked to the literature and theories used in connection with managing Mole National Park for sustainable tourism development. In the process to explain the deductive approach, Bryman, 2004 states that “*the researcher, on the basis of what is known about in a particular domain and of theoretical considerations in relations to the domain, deduce a hypothesis (or a hypotheses) that must then be subjected to empirical scrutiny*” (Bryman 2004:8). In this sense, the known domain of the study is managing Mole National Park for sustainable tourism, and the literature

and theoretical considerations both on destination brand management, market segmentation/target market, promotion/marketing communications and sustainable tourism. The deduced objectives have been to assess the current brand of the Mole National Park in Ghana and to determine the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. These objectives are regarded as the unknown realities, and to make these unknown realities known or understood, the research has employed interviews and secondary data.

### **Research Approach: Inductive Approach**

The inductive approach is based on empirical findings and seeks to generalise findings of the studied phenomena to laws and theories. (Bryman 2004:9) explains that with the inductive approach theory is the outcome of research. In this sense, the process of induction involves drawing inferences that can be generalized out of observations. The inductive approach involves weaving back and forth between data and theory. The inductive part of this study is based on the in-depth semi-structured interview conducted on the deputy manager of Northern Regional Tourists' Board, Deputy Manager of Mole National Park, some of the local people of the fringing communities to the park, and some international tourists in connection with managing Mole National Park in Ghana for sustainable tourism.

### **Qualitative Research Strategy**

The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is frequently highlighted in the literature on social research (De Vaus 2001, Kvale 1996, Bryman 2004). The distinctions constitute two different ways of generating empirical knowledge. The quantitative research method is usually associated with the natural sciences, and emphasizes on quantification in the production of empirical data, knowledge, and stressing on measurement (Bryman 2004:19). On the contrary, qualitative research strategy seeks to explain and understand data, and it usually associates itself with the generation of knowledge and empirical data through interviews, participant observation, and so on. Qualitative research strategy also supports an induction approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which emphasis is placed on the generation of theory (Bryman 2004: 11). The focus of this kind of study is on the ways which individuals adopt to interpret their social world. It also embodies a view of social reality as a constant shifting emergent property of individuals' creation (Bryman 2004: 20). This research has adopted the qualitative research strategy because the purpose of it is to use the Social Constructivism and Objectivism epistemological and ontological positions to assess the current brand of Mole National Park in Ghana and to determine the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination.

## Case Study Research Strategy

There are many strategies available for doing research. Researchers are often confused as to the kind of research strategy best suited for specific study because of the availability of alternative research strategies. (Yin 1994) postulates of five different research strategies. These include: Experiment, survey, archival analysis, history and case study. This study has adopted the case study research strategy. Case study, as defined by Bryman and Bruggess1999, is “*a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single setting*” (Bryman and Bruggess, 1999: 138). According to (Hamel 1993), the case study has proven to be investigations of a particular case. The case study typically examines the interplay of all variables in order to provide a complete understanding as possible to an event or a situation.

The case study, as a research design, has long been under much criticism from the traditional science, but has often been seen as appropriate for conducting pilot studies, followed by a more scientific research design, which could confirm or disconfirm the findings of the case study. For example, case study does not provide a solid ground for scientific generalisation. However, the case study research method has proven its worth over the years and produced deeper insight into social phenomena, which had previously been scientific dominant. Yin 2003 further maintains that a case study excels when investigating “*.....a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context, are not clearly evident*” (Yin 2003: 13). The case study is especially advantageous when “how” and “why” questions are asked about events over which the researcher has a limited control.

(Yin 2003) states that there are two type of case study; the multiple-case and single-case study. The single case design means only one unique case is being studied and investigated in order to have a critical test on an existing well formulated theory. On the other hand, the multiple case designs are applied when the research study contains more than one single case. (Yin 1994) further identifies four different sub-categories within the two main distinctions, between single and multiple case studies. These include: Single-case holistic design, single-case embedded design, multiple-case holistic design, and multiple case embedded designs. The distinction between a holistic and embedded design is that: Whiles a holistic case study takes only one unit of analysis with a global approach, the embedded case study involves multiple units of analysis with the same case.

This research would use the holistic-single case design. In this sense, the study would try to answer the research problem using Mole National Park in Ghana as a case study. The study has chosen the case study strategy because the aim of the study is to assess the current brand of Mole National Park in Ghana and to determine the international tourists’ expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. In order to achieve the objective set above, the study

focused on the analysis of interviews conducted with some of the key stakeholders of Mole National Park in Ghana.

### **Case Selection**

The resource base of Ghana's tourism, as stated in the early parts of this piece, is great and diverse to include features such as national environmental heritage, historical heritage, and among others. Feature such as national environmental heritage has resulted in diverse national parks in the country examples of which are Kakum National Park, Mole National Park, Bia National Park and the like. Mole National Park had been chosen for this research because it is the park amongst the parks that has the widest range of wildlife in Ghana and is also the largest and frequently visited in Ghana. And, since tourists' expectations are paramount in so far as visitor's numbers are made mentioned of, and the possibility that this could be compromised, has necessitated this research on the Mole National Park to find out how best it could be managed or branded to meet the expectations of the tourists, particularly, those of the international arena for sustainable tourism. Particularity has been given the international tourists because they form the core of the visitors to the park. In the course of the interviews, the major problems that were observed which need attention include the relationship between the management of the park and youth in some of the fringing communities. In fact, the relationship is not the best and needs some urgent attention for the park to achieve sustainability in its management. There is also the issue of logistic constraint to the effective management of the park, and the like.

### **Triangulation**

To ensure validity of the findings, the study has applied triangulation approach. Triangulation entails "*using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena*" (Bryman 2004:275). This is a technique that uses multiple sources of data, methodologies and theoretical perspectives. Triangulation is also used to cross check research findings (Bryman, 2004:275). Denzin 1997 in Mathison, 1988 claims four different types of triangulation. A data triangulation, including personal, time, and space. B, investigation triangulation, C, Methodological triangulation, and D, theoretical triangulation (Mathiason 1988:13). In relation to data triangulation, aside the interviews with the study participants, the research also used official documents from ministry of tourism, the Ghana tourists' board and the brochure of Mole National Park. For methodological triangulation, the research combined different methods of data collection such as interviews, and documents. Whether planned or unplanned triangulation exercise is undertaken and the possibility of corroborating findings always exists (Bryman

2004:275). The research also used triangulation of investigation. During the process of the interview, the researcher probed the interviewees to get as much information as possible. The essence of using triangulation technique is that, the weakness of one method could serve as strength of another method. In this sense, combining the different data collection techniques helped the research to establish whether the information on the different sources of data points at the same direction.

### **Validity**

The notion of validity appears to carry connotation of measurement, and since measurement is not a major preoccupation among qualitative research, validity would seem to have some bearing on the study. A number of different stances have been taken by qualitative researchers concerning validity. (Mason 1996 in Bryman 2004:273) argues that reliability, validity and generalisation are different kind of measuring the quality, rigour and wider potential of conventions and principles. Validity according to (Mcburner 2001:169) means an indication of accuracy in terms of the extent to which a research conclusion corresponds with reality. This indicates whether the research's conclusion is correct. Validity in qualitative research is divided into two: internal validity and external validity. Bryman, 2004 explains that "*internal validity is a method where there is a good match between researchers' observation and the theoretical ideas they developed*" (Bryman 2004:273). This by implication means that for there to exist internal validity, there must be agreement between concepts and observations arrived at. In the first place, the research applied the criteria of internal validity. It gives detailed description of the relevant theories on destination brand management, market segmentation/target market, promotion/marketing communications and sustainable tourism. This then follows an interpretation of interview transcriptions, and official documents from Ministry of Tourism, Ghana Tourists' Board and Mole National Park. As a result, the interview data together with the theoretical foundations on tourism destination management would be analysed to generate a shared meaning, which subsequently would result in the conclusion on the current brand of the Mole National Park in Ghana and the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination.

External validity, on the other hand, is another criterion for evaluating qualitative research. External validity refers to the extent to which findings can be generalised across social settings (Bryman 2004:273). This means that whether the findings of the research could be generally applied to the national parks across Ghana. For example, whether the results of the study of managing Mole National Park could be applicable to managing other national parks such as Kakum National Park and the like in Ghana. The research is not intended to use the

criteria of external validity. This is because it will not be possible to generally apply the findings of the research to other national parks all over Ghana.

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks used in this research are theories of destination brand management, market segmentation/target market, promotion/marketing communications and sustainable tourism. The term theory is used differently in different disciplines. According to Bryman 2004, theory means “*an explanation of observed regularities*” (Bryman 2004:5). Theory covers a wide range of knowledge. In an attempt to distinguish between grounded theory and middle-range theories, Merton 1967 as in Bryman 2004 explains middle-range theory as “*the intermediate to general theories of social systems which are too remote from particular classes of social behaviour, organisation and change to account for what is observed and to those detailed orderly descriptions of particulars that are not generalized at all*” (Bryman 2004:5). On the other hand, grounded theory is theory derived from data which is systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process. This by implication means that in the process to generate meaning, data collected and analyzed must repeatedly refer to each other. This research would apply the middle-range theory because the purpose of this research is not to develop or generate new theories in the field of tourism. The main objectives of the research are to assess the current brand of the Mole National Park in Ghana and to determine the international tourists’ expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. In this sense, the analysis would be based on the theories of brand/branding, destination/place branding, market segmentation/target market, promotion/marketing communications, and sustainable tourism. This is intended to generate a shared understanding or meaning through the interview data, official documents from ministry of tourism, Ghana tourists’ board and Mole National Park, and the theories used in the research.

The theoretical chapter will be based on the works of personality such as Mihalis Kavaratzis & G. J. Ashworth’s theory on City/place branding. This is because city is regarded as destination for whoever is visiting it or has a plan to visit it and an opportunity for the investor; therefore, it will be good to apply the postulations that they make in relation to city/place branding to the study. Other theories also in use are Graham Hankinson’s theory on the Management of destination brands, K. L. Keller’s theory on Building, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity, P. Kotler’s theory on Marketing Management, P. Kernel’s theory on Creating and Implementing a Model for Sustainable Tourism Enterprises, and David Weaver & Laura Lawton’s theory on Tourism Management. One claim among the claims of Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005 is that “*a place needs to be differentiated through unique brand identity if it*

wants to be recognised as existing, perceived in the minds of place customers as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors and consumed in a manner commensurate with the objectives of the place” (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005:510). This by implication means that places can be accepted as brandable products provided that their intrinsic and distinctive features as place products are understood and a special form of marketing developed to accommodate and utilize these features. Their theoretical framework is applied to throw more light on how touristic destinations are branded to win the patronage of place customers like tourists. This theory will be useful in this study because through that so much emphasis is placed on the need for a place to be differentiated using unique identifiable features to be seen to possess high valued qualities in the minds of those who are aimed at, which is the tourists in this case.

Furthermore, in relation to destination brands management, one postulation Hankinson 2007 made has been that “*through a process of training and monitoring, the beliefs, values and behavioural norms associated with the destination brand must be embedded in the hearts of the DMO’s employees*” (Hankinson 2007:247). The brand embedded process may be aided by recruiting and rewarding staff who can demonstrate values and behaviours which support the brand. The theory is important for the research because it demonstrates that no matter how good brand may appear to be, requisite staff needs to be trained and rewarded alongside it in order to complement it especially in any given destination management.

Also, K. L. Keller who has written extensively on brands and brand management in one of his claims stresses that “*by creating perceived differences among products through branding and developing a loyal consumer franchise, marketers create value that can translate to financial profit for the firm*” (Keller 2003:8). The fact remains that the most valuable assets firms can boast of may not be their tangible assets such as equipment and real estate, but their intangible assets such as management skills, financial and most important, the brands themselves. This theory is important for the research because it shows the valued nature of a brand as an intangible asset to an organization and the need for the organization to handle it with much care for survival in the competitive arena.

Finally, in relation to sustainable tourism, one assertion among the assertions of Weaver & Lawton has been that “*the fostering of positive community relations may create a friendly tourist-host rapport that enhances the quality of vocation experience for tourists, and hence encourages repeat visitation and positive word-of-mouth publicity*” (Weaver and Lawton 2006:348). This by implication means that the ability of the destination managers to create consultations among members of the fringing communities in matters relating to the development of the destination helps in no small way in creating a congenial environment for

the tourists to enjoy their stay in the destination. The theory is useful for the research because it stipulates the guiding principles of sustainable tourism development which happens to be the major concern for this research.

## **Data Collection Methods**

### ***Primary and Secondary Data***

They are different kinds of data collection methods and each method has its own merits and demerits. Data collection for a research can consist of the collection of primary data, secondary data, or a combination of the two.

Primary data are collected for the specific research when the data available are not sufficient for the analysis. There are several forms through which primary data can be collected. These are interviews, Participant observation, focus group discussion, and so on. Secondary data are data that have been previously collected and published. It often consists of articles, books, newspapers, internal and external case, company materials, and internet materials (Bryman 2004).

This research has adopted both primary and secondary data. The primary data was based on interviews with the deputy regional tourists' board, Tamale, deputy manager, Mole National Park, chairman for tourism committee, Mongnori, one of the fringing communities of the park, and some few selected tourists to Mole National Park.

The secondary data, on the other hand, were generated through literature, and articles on tourism management, and official documents from ministry of tourism, Ghana tourists' board, and mole national park. One advantage of primary data is that it is more reliable because they are data that are originated by the researcher for a specific purpose of addressing the problem at hand. The problem, however, with it postulate (Weaver & Lawton 2006:385), has to do with the high cost in relation to time and money. Also, concerning the advantages of secondary data, (Kumar 2000) thinks that secondary data may be seen as second hand considering that the data have been generated in older projects which will be in a new project. However, the use of secondary data may have some limitation. This is because it has been collected for other purposes than the problem at hand; hence, their usefulness may be limited in several ways.

### **Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews**

The research used semi-structured interviews, except on one occasion when group interview type was employed to deal with some respondents (tourists) who were friends, as one of the sources of empirical data for the research. Kvale 1996 defines interview as "*a specific form of human interaction in which knowledge evolves through dialogue*" (Kvale 1996: 125). There are

many ways of conducting interviews among which are face-to-face, conversation, telephone interview, internet interview and so on. However, narrowing it down to semi-structured interview, Kvale 1996 defines semi-structured interview as an “*interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewees with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon*” (Kvale, 1996: 6). In this form of interview, it is flexible in its methods of data collection such that the interviewer has several questions in general forms organised in an interview guide. In the course of the interview, the interview guide serves as a guide to cover the list of the themes itemised in the guide such that several wide range of sub-questions are covered in the interview. In this way, some questions can be ignored to avoid repetition while some additional follow up questions can be asked during the interview process. Talking about group interview, Bryman 2004 looks at it as a “*situation in which members of a group discuss a variety of matters that may be only partially related*” (Bryman 2004:113). This type of interview has the tendency of so many respondents having the opportunity to take part in the interview process.

The interview guide was developed in line with the theoretical model of Mihalis Kavatzis & G. J. Ashworth’s theory of city/place branding, K. L. Keller’s theory on brands and brand management, Graham Hankinson’s theory on the management of destination brands, P. Kotler’s theory on marketing management, P. Kernel’s theory on sustainable tourism enterprises and David Weaver & Laura Lawton’s theory on sustainable tourism management. The interview guide was also developed to challenge participants to be able explore and reflect on how the Mole National Park be branded to meet international tourists’ expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination.

Interviews, in general terms, form an important tool or technique for data generation. Interviews give the interviewer or the researcher the opportunity to directly experience the interviewee’s point of view (Kvale 2006). In this sense, the direct conversation with the interviewee reveals lots of things such as implicit body language, and emotions. Specifically, Semi-structured interviews are very useful because interview questions may not follow an exact pattern the way it is outlined in the interview guide.

### **The Interview Setting**

Six interviewees were involved in the research. They were the deputy manager, Northern Regional Tourists’ Board, the deputy manager, Mole National Park, chairman for the Tourism Committee, Mongnori (fringing community of the park), member of Larbanga community (fringing community of the park), tourists from Denmark and United State of America randomly selected. At the start of the research, an email was sent to the deputy manager Northern

Regional Tourists' Board and the manager of the Mole National Park giving them the general information concerning the purpose of the research. This was meant to seek their consent and approval. When the approval was given, the first data collection interview followed with the deputy manager, Northern Regional Tourists' Board which lasted for about 60 minutes. This interview was designed to gather the initial set of general data concerning managing tourism activities in the region. The second interview which was initially planned to be held with the manager of Mole National Park finally followed rather with the deputy manager of the park upon having been delegated by the manager, who was tasked an assignment outside the park for some time, to have the interview with me. The interview lasted for about one and half hours (1hr, 30minutes).

The other interviews followed, each lasting for about 30-45minutes. Before the interviews were conducted, an email was sent to some of the interview participants explaining to them the essence of the interview and what the information was going to be used for. Also, the interview guides were sent to the interviewees to give them idea of the interview questions. All the interviews were conducted via face-to-face interviews. This method is beneficial because it guarantees much more quality data than data obtained from the telephone interviews. It is also possible for the interview to be held for much longer time compared to the telephone interview. Finally, the interviewer has the opportunity to engage in observation of signs of puzzlement or unease on the faces of the respondents when they are asked a question unlike the telephone interview. However, the interviewer will have to spend a great deal of time, energy and money travelling between respondents compared with the telephone interview.

At the beginning of each interview, the problem field was explained to each of the interviewees, and as well as the purpose for which the study was conducted. The reason for the explanation was first to seek the consent of the interviewees and also give them insight of what the study was about. The research used open-ended questions in a semi-structured dialogue format to get the respondents' views concerning some research areas: Brand of Mole National Park, target/market segmentation, management problems of the park, security of the tourists, tourists' expectations of ecotourism destination and tourists' perception. It was important to gather the respondents' perspectives on how the Mole National Park be branded to meet the international tourists' expectations of sustainable ecotourism destination. During the interview processes, the researcher did everything possible to minimize any personal comments about answers or responses that were given by the respondents. Every precaution was taken that allowed the respondents to be free to answer all the questions without any guidance except where there was the need for clarification of the posed question to the respondents.

## Selection of Interview participants/Respondents

The table below is an illustration of the interview participant/respondents

Table 1. Respondents' Profile

| Respondents | Department/Place                   | Position                         | Work Experience  | Role  |
|-------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|---|
| TB          | Northern Regional<br>Tourist Board | Deputy<br>Manager                | 10 Years         | - Policy implementing<br>agent<br>- Marketing and<br>promotion of Tourism<br>industry domestically<br>And internationally |
| PM          | Mole National Park                 | Deputy Park<br>Manager           | 5 Years          | - Ensures cordial<br>relationship Between<br>the park and the key<br>Stakeholders (Liaison<br>officer)                    |
| CC          | Mongnory                           | Tourism<br>Committee<br>Chairman | 10 Years         | - Coordinates tourism<br>activities In the<br>community   |
| CM          | Larbanga                           | Tourism<br>Committee<br>Member   | 29 Years         | - Local tour guide  |
| DT          | Denmark                            | Tourists                         | One Time Visitor | Game Viewing  |
| AT1         | American                           | Tourists                         | One Time Visitor | Game Viewing  |
| AT2         | Exchange                           |                                  |                  |   |
| AT3         | Students                           |                                  |                  |   |

Selection of respondents for the interview was based on those who are either directly or indirectly involved in managing the day-to-day activities of Mole National Park. In all six respondents were selected for the interview, comprising respondents from the tourists' board, mole national park, communities fringing the park and the tourists. TB, the deputy manager, Northern Regional Tourists' Board was interviewed. TB has worked with the board for 10 years. TB is very experienced with his job. TB started as an officer and then rose to now the level of chief officer or as an assistant/deputy manager of the regional tourists' board. TB was selected for the interview because he is the next leader of Northern Regional Tourists' Board. In this case, he is the implementing agent of the policies formulated by the Ministry of Tourism in the region. Also, he is involved in the marketing and promotion of tourism industry both domestically and internationally.

Again, PM was also interviewed. PM is the deputy manager of Mole National Park. PM has worked with Mole National Park for five years. PM is responsible for ensuring that there is

good cordial relationship between the park and the key stakeholders such as traditional authorities, fringing communities, NGOs, and among others. PM was chosen for the interview because he is more of a liaison officer between the park and the infringing communities which matter most if management of the park should be successful. CC is the chairman for tourism committee in Mongnori, one of the fringing communities of Mole National Park. CC has lived in Mongnori for 10 years. CC was interviewed because he is one of the members of the communities fringing the park, and has some direct contacts with the management of the park as a local tourism committee chairman. CM is a tourism committee member in Larbanga, another infringing community of Mole National Park. CM has lived in the community for 29 years. CM has been working as a local tour guide. CM was selected for the interview because as a local tour guide he might have some contact with the management of the park. DT is a tourist from Denmark. DT has visited the park for only once. DT has been selected for the interview because, as an international tourist, she was believed to have enough experience to bear on the management of the park's brand for their future benefits. AT are American tourists. They are students on exchange programme in Ashiesi University, Accra. They came to the park on vocation. They were three of them (AT1, AT2 & AT3). AT were selected for the interview because as adventure tourists, it was felt that their input could help a lot since they were believed to have some expectations and perceptions of their visit to the park.

## **Secondary Data**

### ***Documents***

The research has used some documents as a source of data. Documents cover a wide range of sources among which are: Personal documents both in the forms of written and visual (Bryman, 2004). Documents may include: State documents such as public inquiries or private sources such as documents produced by organisations. In this context, among the above mentioned sources of data, the research only used official documents from ministry of tourism, Ghana tourists' board, SNV Ghana and mole national park. These documents included: National Tourism Policy 2006, National Tourism Marketing Strategy 2009-2012, SNV Briefing; The Savannaland Destination Towards pro-poor tourism development in Northern Ghana, and discover more of mole national park.

## **Data Analysis Methods**

In order to generate new reality of the research problem, the research used the thematic analysis approach. (Bryman, 2004:412) explains the thematic analysis approach as the process where the data analysis focuses on what is said rather than on how it is said. This technique of

data analysis is relevant because meaning is generated through content of the interpretations of the interview data. On the basis of this, therefore, the focus of the analysis would base on shared reality or meaning of the interviewees understanding of how the Mole National Park be branded to meet the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination.

### **Synthesising Collected Data and Building on Shared Meaning**

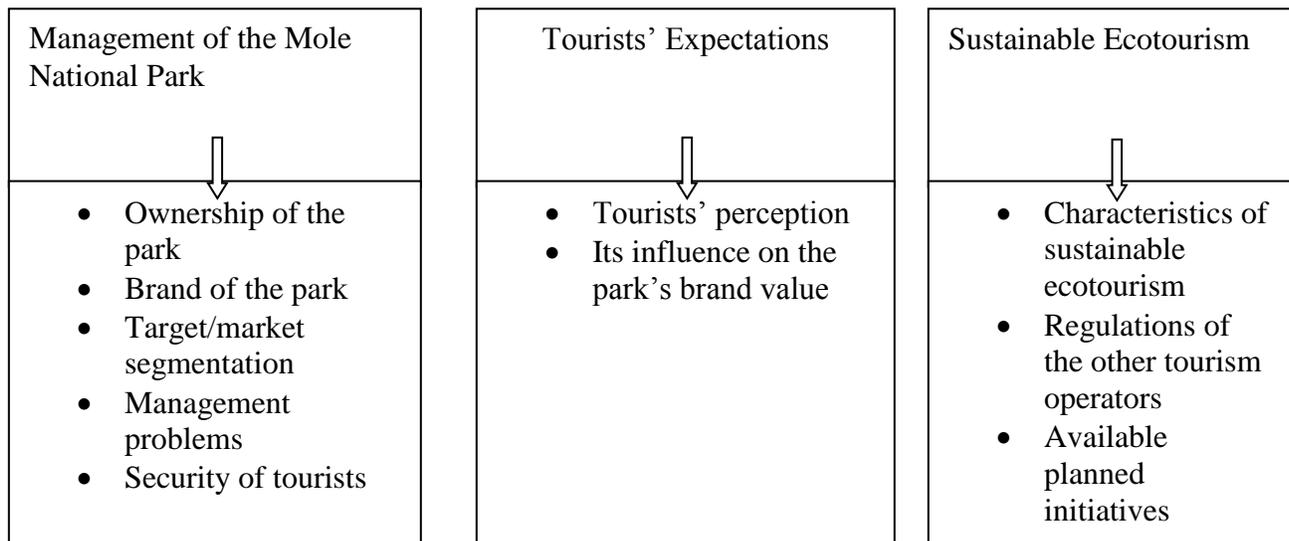
The research data were collected through interviews with management of northern regional tourists' board, management of mole national park, some of the people of the fringing communities of mole national park and some international tourists, and as well as official documents from ministry of tourism, Ghana tourists' board, SNV Ghana and the mole national park. The data were synthesized and established a shared reality or understanding on how the mole national park be branded to meet the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. The data analysis involved the following activities:

- ❖ Each of the participants' interviews was transcribed using computer software called "Soundsciber". During the transcriptions process, editing took place to eliminate errors; the English language applied was also corrected to make the narratives more readable. However, no changes were made to the primary content or the intent of the narratives.
- ❖ From the interview transcriptions, the research determined general themes from the categorized data. With this foundation, the interview data, official documents from ministry of tourism, Ghana tourists' board, SNV Ghana, and Mole National Park together with the theoretical foundation of the research were applied to generate shared meaning and understanding on Managing Mole National Park for sustainable tourism. ( See Chapter six for more details).
- ❖ The research also used the relevant sections of the narratives relating to the research questions. Each of the transcripts was coded as: TB, PM, CC, CM, DT and AT. All representing the respondents who took part in the interviews. These initials were used because the research wanted to maintain the anonymity of the participants/respondents. This was also meant to maintain confidentiality concerning all participants/respondents involved in the research.
- ❖ Finally, the international tourists who were selected for the interview were selected randomly and as well, their number was regulated in order that transcription would not pose much problem for the researcher and also, to make it possible for the data to be very much regulated and organized.

## ANALYSIS

The analysis has been divided into three broad themes including: Management of the Mole National Park, tourists' expectations and sustainable ecotourism. Each of these broad themes is further divided into sub-themes. Themes which would be discussed under management of the Mole National Park are: Ownership of the park, brand of the park, target/market segmentation, management problems, and security of tourists. For tourists' expectations, the sub-themes to discuss include: tourists' perceptions and its influence on the park's brand value. Finally, sub-themes that would be considered under sustainable ecotourism are: Characteristics of sustainable ecotourism, regulations of the other tourism operators, and available planned initiatives. The diagram below illustrates this:

Figure 1. Analytical Themes

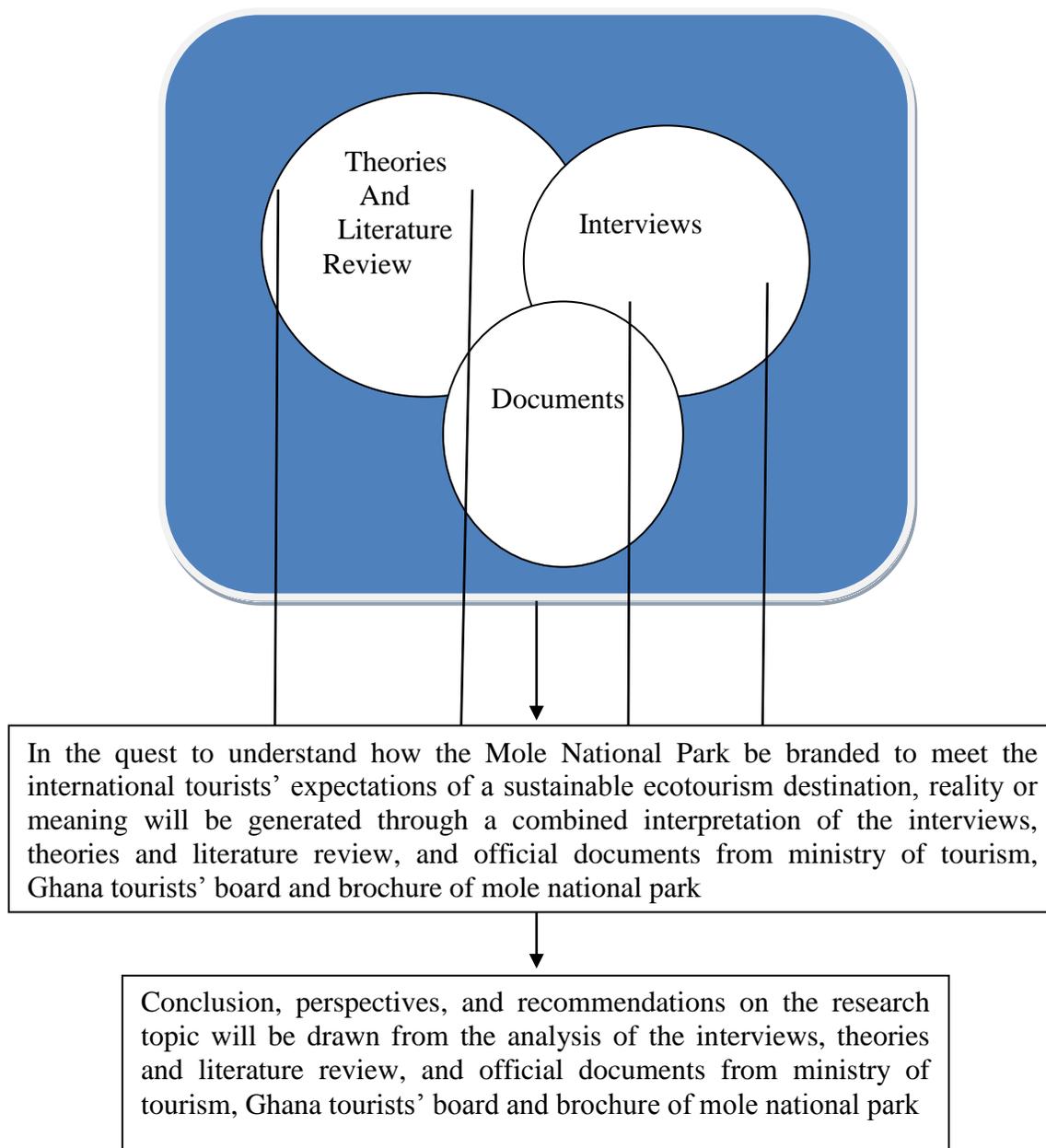


Further, each broad theme will include sub-questions intended to help the reader to understand the direction and focus of the analysis. As stated in the methodology chapter, the analysis is mainly data driven, and guided by a social constructivist and objectivist approaches. However, it is important to note that the study has rejected the notion of "tabula rasa" since researchers often have a pre-understanding of a social phenomenon before going into the field. Further, since the interview questions were generated based on the researcher's interest in the destination brand management, repeatedly observed and analysed the data which lead to the formulation of models that linked these observations in a meaningful way, and as well as began with the existing models and applied them to particular situations to see whether they are valid

in that case makes the study to be considered as a combination of inductive and deductive approaches.

The analysis is based on combination of the contents of the interviews, official documents from ministry of tourism, Ghana tourists' board, brochure of mole national park, theories and literature review on destination brand management, market segmentation/target market, marketing communication/promotion and sustainable tourism. All this is intended to generate a shared understanding on how the Mole National Park be branded to meet the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. The diagram below is an illustration of this:

Figure 2. Investigational Approach



## Management of the Mole National Park in Ghana

This part of the study seeks to interpret the interviews data together with official documents from Ministry of Tourism, Ghana Tourists' Board, brochure of Mole National Park, and theories of destination brand management and sustainable tourism to create an understanding of how the Mole National Park be branded to meet the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. Destination branding has grown significantly in recent times. Many cities, regions and countries are now actively marketing themselves using techniques normally associated with the establishment of classical product brands. This has manifested itself in several ways with varying degrees of success. Such marketing campaigns have transformed places into brands and as a result brought considerable everlasting cultural and social benefits. The main focus of this part of the analysis is to highlight on *ownership of Mole National Park, brand of the park, target/market segmentation of the park, management problem, and security of tourists*. The questions the section seeks to answer are:

- What is the current brand of the Mole National Park?
- How has the brand been promoted to the international markets?
- Which international market is the brand targeting at?
- How is the brand different from the brand of other competing national parks?

## Ownership of the Mole National Park in Ghana

Throughout the interviews, it was revealed that Mole National Park is a state-owned entity. It is an entity under the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission. The government is responsible for the provision of the necessary resources for the management of the park even though there could be some donor projects aimed at supporting some specific areas of the park. The interview data also indicated that there are some other organizations that are also interested in the management of the park, and therefore indirectly assist in the parks management. For instance, according to TB:

*"It is a state own facility which is under the forestry commission and the forestry commission is under a ministry which is I think is it environment and science?"* PM further maintains that: *"Is government that is really providing for us apart from what, from time to time, when we have maybe donor projects coming in to support specific areas even with that still, government still pays staff salaries and, other activities are still provided by government. You know, all donor funds there is supposed to be a counterpart fund from government and, staff salaries, our logistics like uniforms, and other things all still have to come from government so, I would say is a government institution supported by government legally, financially and what have you".* CM on the other organizations interested in the Mole National Park states that *"We*

*have SNV, which is in partnership with the community and in collaboration with the Mole park, we also have one organization called AROCHA, which is also in partnership with the community and then Mole National Park and then we have this Water and Sanitation Project Agencies around who are also in collaboration with the park and then the community of Larbanga”.*

By this it means that even though Mole national Park is owned by the state, which sees to the provision of the necessary resources for its effective management, the role played by other organizations in its management cannot be downplayed as can also be found in SNV Briefing (2009:1), which has engaged with Ghana Tourists Board, Mole National Park and other stakeholders with the aim of further raising the number of visitors and as well as increasing income and employment of the local population by way of supporting Mole National Park in the implementation of projects started by the Wildlife Division aimed at upgrading facilities within the reserve. Therefore, the government of Ghana as a central pillar is being assisted by these organizations that have the vested interest in the Mole National Park to manage it for the wellbeing of the local people particularly, mole national and the state Ghana, generally. Indeed, for the park to operate efficiently, there is the need for it to be placed under the care of both the state and the private interest so that the two will pool together sufficient resources to manage it. Without support from the government and the donor agencies, facilities such as accommodation, etc. in the park would suffer a setback in terms of upgrading them to enable the park to operate effectively. Also, basic logistics such as uniforms, boots, etc would be in short supply, and this could affect the work of the anti-poaching squad to check the activities of the poachers from the fringing communities. The net effect of this is that sustainability of the park cannot be assured since the existence of the animals in the park would be threatened.

### **Brand of Mole National Park in Ghana**

On the question of whether *the park has a brand*, the interview data has revealed that in terms of marketing, Mole national Park has not been really branded as PM states: *“For now in terms of marking I think this is mainly a marketing issue the park has not been really branded to be frank with you”*. The park can only boast of nature base tourism, as a resource serving as a pull factor which attracts the tourists to visit it. According to PM: *“I would say the product that we have here is mainly, I would say, game viewing or nature base tourism and for now when you look at the whole country, Mole is the park where when you visit the likelihood that you will see wildlife is so high”*. This means that the park is dealing in the viewing of wildlife as its product offer to its visitors, and they even have an urge over the other competing protected areas as to the availability of these animals for the visitors to have a feel of anytime they visit the park unlike the other national parks in the country. It also has waterfalls like Posin and Kparya waterfalls as

well as slave raiding camp at Samoli. This highlights what Kavartzis & Ashworth assert of a brand that it embodies a whole set of physical attributes and beliefs which are associated with the product (Kavartzis & Ashworth 2005:508). This by implication means that brand is more than the shaping of distinctiveness: It is the forging of associations. It is also a product which can be differentiated by its positioning relative to competition and by its personality, comprising a unique combination of functional attributes and symbolic values. Mole National Park can provide add on to the products that have been categorized above to achieve further successes in their competitive environment by choosing brand elements, as (Keller 2003:45), claims such as logos, symbols, trademarks, slogans, and the like. The choice of brand elements is relevant because it enhances brand awareness or it facilitates the formation of strong, favourable and unique brand association.

In relation to the *current brand of the park*, the interview data revealed that in order not to lose focus from the aims of the park for maintaining the integrity of the place by keeping it in its naturalness, the wildlife remains the key attraction, which the park is dealing in. PM on this states that *“For now we don’t want to maybe lose focus. So, the wildlife really is our key attraction all the others mentioned are just add on so that we may not also lose focus of our aim and our key aim of maintaining the place in its naturalness and then the integrity of the site as well”*. This means that the park does not exist in a vacuum. It operates based on some guiding principles among which includes to ensure that everything in the park is kept intact. However, even though it has aims that it operates with, nothing stops it from being innovative to improve upon activities that will make it more competitive. PM also adds that *“but one thing I would like you to note is that although Mole, as I said, in terms of development is not developed to that level where we can take full maybe advantage of these attractions”*. That is, apart from the fact that the park is operating to maintain the naturalness of the park, it also operates based on the strength of its resource base. It does not have enough capacity to fully tap the benefits that the other attractions such as the waterfalls and the slave raiding camps would have had to offer it. But, Mole National Park stands to benefit greatly if it could diversify its product line by developing the other attractions to be able to meet the varied expectations of the tourists.

On the question of how has the *current brand been promoted*, it was revealed that the brand of the park until recently was not so much promoted because of the reason that it concentrated its efforts on issues of protection and conservation. Tourism was seen as a byproduct, so there was no plan of promoting the park. According to PM that: *“Initially, it wasn’t even promoted, tourism wasn’t even promoted and we even initially what I heard from I think our pioneer staff was that they were even happy if they see people here to visit the park and people came in virtually free”*. This by implication means that even those who heard of the park and

visited the park were visiting it freely without paying anything to the park. That is, tourism was not given that much attention not to talk of giving it much publicity. The park only had promotion in recent times, which is even not on a large scale as PM states *“currently, Mole is not really promoted I would say on the large scale, the main promotion we do from the surveys that we have done probably is by word of mouth, people who come here and go back they meet their friends and their relations and they tell them about Mole and they come here”*. That means, the park does not put in much effort to promote tourism activities in the park but rather depends on the remarks visitors would make about the park to their friends, and this explains (Bolan and Williams 2008:386) assertion of word of mouth as an external factor that influences holiday decision making process. This looks good for the park since it may be the cheapest promotional tool one can talk of in terms of cost but its ability of sending the message to farther and wider places is limited. PM further says:

*“It was just recently that I think we are looking at developing something like destinations, where I think with the assistance of UNWTO I think a website has been developed thus Savannahtourism.com, and Mole is there so, through the website, although before then I think FC, the Forestry Commission also had the website where you could get some small information on Mole and what not but for now I think Mole mainly has been promoted by word of mouth I think mainly”*.

This by implication means that aside the word of mouth, the park also relies on tools such as website to get its brand promoted, but the most serious well used tool through which the promotion is done is by word of mouth. But on some occasions, the park is promoted through brochures as TB mentions:

*“When the board is undertaking any promotional activity, being it domestically or internationally, all our attraction sites are packaged so we have a brochure, comprehensive brochure that has all the major attractions in there so if you go for world fairs, international fairs, we exhibit whatever they have”*. TB further maintains *“we have developed a number of CDS on promotional activities within the country and Mole is also featured on all of them, so, like I said, every single promotional or marketing activity that we are undertaking, Mole National Park has been featured both locally and internationally”*.

The park by this is also promoted through other nonpersonal channel of communication such as CDs and the like, which highlights the emphasis of (Kotler 1997:619) on effective selection of communication channel, especially that of the nonpersonal channel like CD ROM, audio tapes, newspapers, magazines, and the like for brands of any destination like Mole to be promoted to the target audience. In essence, Mole National Park aside all this can still get message about its brand across to the target audience by trying other promotional mix such as

advertising through other media such as television, and newspapers and magazines, sales promotion, public relation, and the like as espouses (Kotler 1997:622) that it is possible to achieve a given sales with varying promotional mixes. That is, it always pays in terms of sales volume to vary the promotional mix.

In relation to the *brand identity of the park*, it was revealed that the park's brand identity is in the elephants in Mole National Park. According to PM "*the key this thing that draws people here is the elephant to Mole here and how, I would say, the behavior of the elephants as well not being so aggressive*". He thinks that the difference between Mole National Park and the other parks all over Africa lies in the elephants that they have in Mole National Park. The elephant is the key drawer of visitors to Mole National park, and as well is noted to be so less aggressive as compared to the elephants in the other national park, like East and Southern Africa. It is possible, according to him, to get closer to an elephant up to 50 meters. But PM quickly to adds "*that doesn't mean that if you get so close to the animal it might not harm you but what I am saying is that comparatively like you are saying comparatively they are not that aggressive like we find in other parks where you go you hear that oh elephant has even killed park staff, rangers or whatever here we have never had that experience so the elephant is the key species that draw people to Mole*". This implies, the elephant may be dangerous though despite it being less aggressive, but it has never harmed anybody like it is heard of from other national parks, thus making visitors to always troop into Mole to watch them. This highlight the claims made by Kavaratzis & Ashworth that a place needs to be differentiated through unique brand identity if it wants to be recognised as existing, perceived in the minds of place customers as possessing qualities superior to those of competitors, and consumed in a way that matches with the objectives of the place (Kavaratzis & Ashworth 2005). In fact, the less aggressive nature of the elephants in the Mole National Park has given it some differentials from the other parks, positioning it in the minds of the visitors, and therefore raising its image as a nice place to visit. The only thing the park further needs to do is to be strategic in selecting the promotional mix (Kotler 1997) to get this message travel as far as possible to the wider target audience. Therefore, Mole National Park has to strengthen its promotional mix strategies to reach out to wider markets to maximize visitation.

### **Target/Market Segmentation**

With regards to *the international markets that Mole National Park targets at*, the interviews revealed that the park targets at people coming from Northern European Union nations such as the Netherlands, Germens, the British and then the Scandinavians. It also targets at the Americans and the Asians. According to PM "*Dutch are one of the key people who visit here,*

*that is the Netherlands, Germans, the British, I think in Europe these are the key before maybe you look at maybe this Scandinavian countries and others also coming in and then you go to if you look at it in bulk the EU is the highest before the Americas that is US to be specific, and then the third might be the Eastern Europeans and the Asians*". Those that visit the park most are from the EU countries, the next being the Americans and then the Asians, highlighting claims made by Weaver & Lawton of geographic segmentation, which takes into account the country of birth, nationality or current residence of the consumer. Place is the oldest and most popular basis for segmentation. Most destinations and businesses of late prefer to differentiate by country of origin having realized the simplistic and misleading nature of such generalizations (Weaver & Lawton 2006:176-7). Therefore, Mole National Park could concentrate its differentiation effort on rather individuals' country of origin to be able to free itself from any possible clash of such misleading generalization. Again, it could also explore other new areas to serve with its brands since it pays off to be able to explore new markets for existing and new products.

In relation to the *international population visiting the park*, the interviews revealed that the bulk of those who visit the park are basically the young guys ranging between 18 and 30 years with few in the middle income class and on retirement. According to PM:

*"Really those visiting Mole, the bulk of them are these young guys I would say something like volunteers and backpackers. These young guys and maybe probably 18, 25, 30, they are the bulk of visitors who come to Mole. We have a few of, I would say something like, middle income who are also visiting and those who have also gone on retirement but if you look at the bulk, is these volunteers, the backpackers and other things who are on holidays*".

In essence, these young guys category, the middle income and those on retirement constituting the bulk of these international tourists is an attestation to (Weaver & Lawton's 2006) claim of *Sociodemographic segmentation* as a major segmentation criterion, which variables include gender, age, family life cycle, household education, occupation and income. Such variables are popular as segmentation criteria because they are easily collected and often associated with distinct type of behaviour. There are also volunteers, backpackers and those on holidays who visit the park, which also highlights *Behavioural segmentation* criterion where the tourist markets are identified on the basis of activities and other actions undertaken during the tourism experience (Weaver & Lawton 2006). In essence, this employs the outcomes of destination buying decision as a basis for market segmentation, and therefore omits the non-travelling component of the population, unless no-travel behaviour is included as a category.

## Management Problem

In relation to the *problems encounter in the management of the park with regards to logistics, transportation, etc, etc*, the revelation had from the interviews is that management of the park has been very adaptive and working with the few logistic the park has in terms of vehicles, staff accommodation, and the like. However, the major problem confronting management is accessibility within the park. PM on this states:

*“The main problem that we have is how to really improve on our accessibility within the park like I mentioned because when visitors come they would want to move out to see what is in there especially around this time during the rains, the rains also even compound the problem, roads that we even worked on are now cut off so, just after the rains we have to do a lot of maintenance work which requires resources which I think is really one of the challenges”.*

Accessibility has always been a major problem in Ghana. The road networks within the country is not in the best of shapes, especially those ones that lead to the hinterlands where we have most of the major attractions situated. This highlights National Tourism Marketing Strategy (2009-2012) which states that although progress has been made in the construction of roads, the access to and from many tourist sites outside major cities remains poor. The situation even escalates as soon as the rains start to come. Even though is by itself of interest to the adventure tourists, and since not all tourists are adventurous, the inaccessibility of the roads leading to these major attractions does not augur well for any effective tourism development. Therefore, the park can do better to its image if improvement is made to the roads by way of putting them in the best of shapes. He further states that *“the staff needs something like uniforms, boots and other things they are provided but we would need more we would need more because if in a year looking at the nature of the work we do if you have even two uniforms by the time the year ends, they are all worn out, boots and other things they are all worn out so they need to be replaced quite frequently, tents, and then our sacks and all those other aspects”.* The problem of logistics has been raised all over in Ghana among organizations. Logistics have always been inadequate in virtually every organization one can think of, which is not the best in the face of effective management process. Place like Mole National Park needs adequate supply of the needed logistics such as boots, uniforms and the like for the staff to be able function effectively. Another *problem encounter in the management of the park has to do with poaching into the park by people of the fringing communities to hunt the animals for meat.* According to PM:

*“The resource is, I think, the key thing that really draws people in, sometimes when people come here and even we don't have the infrastructure and the other facilities and they even see only the animals, you know they become so happy and they begin to even forget about the problems they face like I said you come to Mole oh you want to see an elephant and*

*you move on this road and get here and you see the elephants you become so happy that immediately you forget about the road. How to effectively protect and conserve the resource is what really, really, really is a problem to us, and like I said all the illegal activities are perpetrated by human beings”.*

These people usually poach the park to kill the animals and this sometimes breeds confrontations between them and the anti-poaching squad of the park sometimes leading to exchange of gunshots and even deaths as was confirmed by the conversation had with a tour guide that a 35-year-old man bled to death after he was shot at the Park. These hunters believe that the animals in the park are meant for human consumption and cannot understand why they should be prevented from killing them to eat. They also think that the park and all its composition including the animals, they believe they can get their food from, belong to them. The anti-poaching squad on its part seeks to control the activities of these hunters by making sure that they do not kill the animals to ensure their perpetual existence in the park for generations yet unborn. This usually breeds contention which sometimes even results in loss of lives. This indeed is serious and needs to be dealt with urgently so that it does not negatively affect the image of the park. The park needs to continuously educate the people, as (Hankinson 2007) claims, on the need to conserve the resource in the park not only for them alone but for generations that would come after them.

Regarding the question of *how management of the park is relating with the local people*, the interviews revealed that management relates with them in so many ways including:

First and foremost, through Community Resource Management Committees (CRMCs), the park has about 30 communities fringing it, and to improve the relations within each of these communities and the park, there is CRMCs, which is serving as a direct link between the park and the communities. It is made up of opinion leaders and key persons from identifiable groups within the communities. According to PM:

*“The CRMCs are made up of opinion leader and key persons from identifiable groups within the community so we meet from time to time is a platform where issues of concern to them are raised if they think some of our activities are impacting on them negatively, they are encouraged to freely speak out if we can address it we do that those that we can’t address where we have to refer them to the appropriate authorities”.*

This means that at the CRMCs level issues that are of significant to both the communities and the park are discussed in order to get lasting solutions that will interest both of them. This, in essence, is highlighting claims made by (Hankinson 2007:248) that developing agreement about the place brand value can be achieved through establishing committees and working parties in which individual partners are represented. The CRMCs serves as platform on

which matters concerning the management of the park are deliberated to ensure that the park's operations are not to the detriment of the fringing communities and vice versa.

Secondly, the management relates with the local people through promotion of the community base natural resource management in the various communities. This is called Community Resource Management Area (CRMA), whereby authority in relation to management of the natural resources within the locality of each of the communities is given to the local people to decide as to how to manage those resources. For instance, PM states:

*“The wildlife division divorced management authority to the community as I said, if you want to hunt now, you have to get license from the Wildlife Division but with the CRMA, that authority is given to the community, so they decide those who would hunt within their area not in the park within their area and what fees they have to pay. They can also decide that maybe we are going to use our resources there for tourism”.*

The implication with this is that with CRMA, the respective communities have been given the authority by the wildlife division to decide what to use the resources they have within their catchment areas outside Mole National Park for. If they want to hunt with this, they do not have to get license from wildlife division. It is the community that will decide who should hunt, and whatever is accrued out of that belongs to the community. The communities could also decide to use the resource for tourism activities, and whatever would have come out of that would belong to the communities.

Other areas the management relates with the local people includes promotion and support of community base livelihood activities such as bee keeping, craftsmanship, sheer butter processing, and the like. PM on this mentions *“we are also promoting and supporting community base ventures or livelihood activities, key among them is the bee keeping and with this bee keeping we have over 250 bee keepers in 14 communities they are having over 750 hypes”*. The local people are supported with all these things with the aim of keeping them employed to be able to earn their livelihood. He adds that *“we also have the art and craft you go to the information center we have the craft shop over there the main idea behind it was to provide an avenue for artisans fringing the park from the communities to sell their art and craft to tourists who visit here”*. That is to say, the park has a department that is meant to create market for the products of the artisans from these communities to be able to sell their craft to the visitors to the park. The park is working with the communities this ways in order for them to see the need to conserve the resources.

On the question of the *local people involvement in the management of the park*, the interviews revealed that they are involved in the management through the Protected Area Management Advisory Unit (PAMAU). This is a governance board responsible to advice on the

best ways to undertake activities in the Mole National Park. There are four of these units, one at West Gonja, one at West Manpurugu, one at Wa West, and one at Wa East. The management of the park is supposed to have regular or quarterly meetings with these units. Each unit has its constitution, and it is the platform of discussing issues concerning management of the resources both within and outside the park. PM on this claims that the PAMAU “is *where communities and stakeholders make their inputs to park management because it comprises of traditional authorities, communities, NGOs, the district assembly and other identifiable groups. So, for the West Gonja one for instance, we had about four chiefs on the PAMAU, NCCE was represented, the district assembly was represented, communities, four communities were also represented in addition to the park also 7. We had even the hunters group also represented*”. The role of those on this management advisory unit has been the education as to how to manage the resource, and as well they assist in conflict resolutions, especially those among the various stakeholders of the park, which in essence is highlighting the postulation of (Hankinson 2007:248) that there must be the need for consistent communication across a wide range of stakeholder in any tourism destination management because of its being a multi-service product and often an interest to varied group of people. Such consistent communication has the potentials of educating and resolving any looming conflict which may arise from the diverse interests of these various stakeholders. Therefore, Mole National Park needs to always encourage this sort of involvement and consistent communication to facilitate sustainability.

On the question as to *whether the local people benefit from the management of the park and how they do benefit*, the interviews revealed that the local people benefit so much from the park’s operations and in varied forms including the promotion embarked upon by the park with regard to the Community Resource Management Area, where the communities are allowed the authority to manage their own natural resources which are outside the park, employment of the local people on to the staff of the park, the livelihood activities such as bee hypes offered to them, ecotourism activities, art and craft, sheer butter processing, and the like. According to PM “*the livelihood activities that I mentioned, the bee keeping is one, ecotourism is one and we also have the art and craft and as and when like I showed to you the sheer butter processing these were all initiated by the park although other partners are also sponsoring it like the TREEAID and what not, most of the work was done, initial work was done by the park and the facilitation was done by the park and AROCHA*”. This by implication means that these livelihood activities offered to the people in the fringing communities such as the bee hypes, sheer butter processing and what have you were started by the park to see to it that the people are placed on something for their livelihood until some other organizations like AROCHA and TREEAID came in to also support in that regard. This in fact highlights claims made in (SNV briefing

2009:4) that Mongnori is a community which has received support from Mole National Park in the development of ecotourism enterprise. This indeed is an indication that even though the park is a state-owned enterprise, but the role played by the other organizations in its operations cannot be overemphasized. CC reechoed on this stating *“the park initially funded our eco village. They again helped people. They gave out bee hypes for community members in a way to prevent them from poaching. And also, they were able to buy a very big canoe for the communities, for all the communities in that when the river is flooded, they can use it in crossing the rivers and, like I mentioned it before, when you are sick and you call the attention of them, they would come and pick you into the hospital and then you would bear the fuel cost”*. That is to say, in addition to the livelihood activities initiated by the park to the people, the park has also eased their movement by supplying them with canoes and help to carry sick people from the communities to hospitals with the community members catering only for the fuel. The communities in time past found it difficult to cross the rivers during rainy seasons, but the supply of the canoe eased life for them and they can now easily move anytime of the year.

### **Security of the Tourists**

In relation to *robbery and pick pocketing*, the interviews revealed that there is a sign of that but on very, very, rare occasions noted to even occur outside the park. According to the PM the occurrence of robbery is *“very, very limited. Not in the park. For armed robbery just recently that we heard of one or two incidences on the Fufolsu, Damongo road I think even that one I think the police dealt with it effectively and, for these petty, petty thievery for the park very, very, very, very limited. For now, now, now I don’t know the one that we heard of was about three or so years ago and that was even outside the park it seemed the person and even that one the guy was apprehended. The one who did that was apprehended. I think the person was walking from the gate to the village where they just picked his purse or something”*. This means that when even such situation of either the robbery or the petty thievery occurs, the situation will be immediately brought under control, which is an indication that there are mechanisms put in place to deal with such situations as they occur. Also commenting on this, AT2 maintains *“when we went to Mole, we met a guy when we told him we were going to Larbanga, he said secretly watch your pockets he said there were boris boys so I guess that that also spoils a perception”*. This goes to attest to the fact that there is a problem of robbery and petty thievery around Mole National Park, and this needs to be tackled seriously in order that it does not build negative perceptions about the park into the tourists, as negative perceptions reduces repeat visitation. However, the interviews revealed that the management of the park has put measures in place that could at least protect the tourists especially within the park as observed in the claims made

by PM, when he was posed the question as to how they are going about the problem of robbery and the like:

*“All visitors who come to the park are captured at the gate in terms of the vehicle they came with, the vehicle number and everything and especially you know we have staff staying in the park with their families and children and you know in our African setting of extended family system, people under normal circumstance, the community should have been located outside the park but now we have it here so we have to manage the situation so when visitors are coming at the gate they find out from them where they are going if you are coming to the community, that one but, if you have to visit any of the tourists facilities, like the motel and whatever, you are registered and given a tag. So, when you get to the motel, they identify you as such”.*

The implication of this is that it is not only the tourists who visit the park since the staff of the park is living in the park with their families, so, it is an obvious fact visitors with bad intentions could come to the park in the name of visiting any of these members belonging to the families of the staff. Therefore, the park has adopted that mechanism of registering anybody at all coming into the park so that in the advent of any problem, it could easily be traced and necessary actions taken, and this goes to explain what (Keller 2003:8) espouses that the most valuable assets that many firms have may not be their tangible assets, such as plants, equipment and real estate, but their intangible assets such as management skills, marketing, financial, and operations expertise, and most importantly, the brands themselves. The park putting this measure in place will help to sweep off the negative perceptions which might have developed by the tourists visiting the park.

With regards to *proper health care facility*, the interviews revealed that the park has a clinic under the ministry of health that attends to minor health issues, like malaria, cuts, and the like with major health issues referred to the nearby hospital. According to the PM *“for now we there is a clinic in the park under the Ministry of Health and, even some of the communities come there, is one of the benefits. Some of the communities like Larbanga, Mongnori, and maybe Kananto come for first aid. Is just a clinic so, they manage minor, minor problems like malaria, maybe cuts but if it is a major this thing they refer it to Damongo”*. The people visit the clinic from time to time for first aid, which emphasizes (Kernel 2005:153) claims of recognition of individual and mutual benefits as the keys to securing the stakeholders’ interest in finding mutually beneficial solutions. This can facilitate effective collaboration for a sustainable destination management. But some of the tourists do not really consider health at the park as an issue. For instance, DT comments *“for me is not really an issue as you can hear is not something I have been thinking about what is the risk if I go to Mole about having malaria for*

example, I would always make sure that I have malaria tablets so I can treat myself for example". She believed in self preparedness once she had her malaria tablets with her it was enough for her so she did not consider that so much.

In relation to the question of whether there is *proper accommodation in the park for the tourists*, the interviews revealed that there is motel in the park that accommodates tourists. The park has camp site and even tree hide with necessary protective devices, such as treated mosquito nets, mattresses, and the like, available for rentals. According PM "*visitors who come at least they are supposed to be protected, they are netting, mosquito netting although is not 100% mosquito proof but for now at the camp site too there are mosquito nets some even go to the tree hide to stay there, they are mosquito nets and mattresses that they could maybe rent and then use*". He also adds in relation to the standard of the available accommodation "*for now I think for that area, affordability and standard are sometimes subjective but generally I would say that the accommodation we have here are very basic. The facilities are not all that high class and then for the affordability issue as I said is quite subjective but I think for now is manageable looking at the cost*". The implication of this is that it is the duty of the park to ensure that those who visit the park are protected, so they have the necessary facilities to provide such protection except that the available facilities are of basic in nature and not the highly classed type. DT adding to this claims "*for me well I can live almost anywhere so for me is not something en particularly what can you say in a pesh about, a critical about but of course we didn't have running water and even that is quite important actually it should have that. It's very basic as well but having said that we it was quite cheap the accommodation*". She feels she is ok to live anywhere and therefore not so much critical about the standard of the accommodation except that there was not running water in the accommodation which she thinks is very important and must be provided, but upon all that the facility is basic and quite cheap. But then, she continues "*if you rebuild it, if you do a lot of things is going to be more expensive and I think it must be done well of course if you attract tourists based on ecotourism there would be another value attached to it and perhaps, people would be willing to pay more, you get me*". This means that even though the tourists seem not to bother themselves about the standards of the accommodation they are provided with, but improvements on the accommodation will raise value of the place, and this, as (Keller 2003) espouses will strengthen the positioning of the park. This in consequence will bring about repeat visitation of the tourists to the place.

On the question of *whether the animals pose any threats to the tourists*, the interviews revealed that they pose threats, and the problem lies with the baboons, petals and monkeys, which are found worrying visitors in the park with food. According to PM "*the baboons really are a bit mischievous so you have to be very; very careful especially when you are holding food*".

The baboons always disturb visitors who have food with them and will always threaten them for the food. They cannot imagine why one should have food and they cannot have it. Therefore, the tourists in the park are strongly advised not to feed the animals in the park since they are not tamed. There is a big notice board with the inscription that tourists should not give food to the animals in the park because they are not tamed all in the hope of limiting such threats, but the tourists themselves encourage the feeding of these animals, which in turn worries them again as the animals keep on threatening them for the food anytime they see them with it.

With regards to *the road network to the park and vehicles transporting the tourists to the park*, the revelation was that the challenge lies with the road network, but that of the vehicles is not so much of a challenge. PM states *“I think for transportation, the major challenge in the road network but fortunately now there is one tour operator, M&J Tours, they started transport services from Tamale to, shuttle service from Tamale to Mole so, and you can even hire so, based on that tourists can now decide if you have the means in terms of the funds you can decide whether after coming here you would want to go back immediately because the services are now available if you get to the information center they are there”*. The meaning here is that it is not very difficult to get vehicle to get to the Mole National Park since there are several transport services available from Tamale to Mole, including M&J Tours, Metro Mass Transport, and the like. The only problem is the road network to Mole, which is serious in the sense that if the vehicles are there to transport visitors and the road is in a deplorable condition, it can be a disincentive to many of the transport owners to ply such a road with their vehicles for fear of damage to their vehicles or accidents occurring. The transport owners could even extort money from these commuters all in the name of ensuring against their vehicles for plying on such a deplorable road with their vehicles, and this could have a negative impact on the image of Mole National Park. The road therefore needs to be worked on to clear this negative perception to increase tourists' visitation to the place.

Regarding the *availability of a restaurant at the park and the cost per plate*, the interviews revealed that there is a restaurant and a bar at the motel as well as an unofficial small staff canteen that caters for the food needs of the park's staff. The cost per plate at the restaurant is about 9 gh cedis. According PM:

*“It's about 9 gh cedis and again is also because of the cost because all the food items have to come from especially the vegetables and, that is one area that when we were trying to encourage local production in dry season farming where they could produce some of these cabbages, carrots, tomatoes and other things then at least they could be supplying the motel and this would cut down on cost but for now most of these things as I said sometimes they have to go all the way to Tachman to get these vegetables and these things because they are used*

*on daily basis: the carrots, cabbages, and spring onions, spring pepper, they are used on daily basis chicken and in fact sometimes for the guinea fowls I think they are able to source some from around and but still is even difficult to get the quantity that they want”.*

That is to say, the park although supplies food to the tourists from its restaurant, but it looks a bit expensive as a result of high operational cost. However, the expensive nature of the food in the restaurant could dent the image of the park if not checked, and this can be done by finding ways that could minimize the cost involved in operating the restaurant. Therefore, the park could encourage the communities fringing it to cultivate the vegetables to be supplying the restaurant at a reduced cost to minimize the operational cost in the restaurant since that could help reduce prices in the restaurant at the park for the tourists.

### **Tourists’ Expectations**

Expectations and perceptions, together with motivation, are the factors often used to measure satisfaction and, therefore service quality. Quality products or services should possess certain features that have the ability to satisfy customers by meeting their needs. However, these needs are unique, different and varied from one customer to another, and in consequence leaving producers to have to understand true customer needs and to translate these needs into product or services that will satisfy those needs. Sub-themes to discuss under this part of the analysis include tourists’ perception and its influence on the park’s brand value, and the questions to guide in this direction are:

- What have been the expectations of international tourists of an ecotourism destination?
- How is Mole National Park’s management doing to meet it?
- Do the international tourists have perception about the park?
- How will this perception look like?
- How can it influence the tourists’ decision to visit the park?
- And what can be done about that perception?

Regarding the question of the *tourists’ expectations of an ecotourism destination*, the interviews data revealed that the tourists expect to see wildlife, clean environment, and peaceful area for relaxation, have a feel of what they have never experienced before, expect that everything in such a destination should look ecological and the like. According to AT1 *“I did expect to see a certain number of wildlife I expected to see the various wildlife, wildlife that I haven’t seen yet but also like I said just a nice place to relax and I think a lot of people come to the natural park they don’t rest they expect you know to be clean and not to be noisy”*. His expectation was to see the wildlife that he has not yet have a feel of in his life, as well as a cool place to relax. DT

on her part states “*well, as far as I know ecotourism is a one when the tourism is sustainable. So, my expectations would probably be that everything you do would be in a way sustainable that comes to accommodation, the food, the way it is run and how it is done everything should be in a way ecological*”. She expected that everything that is done at park should be done such that it does not degrade the environment. PM adds “*...the youth are quite adventurous. They normally want to see new things, areas that at least they have not been before to see how things are over there so, if they hear of such places, they want to visit to see how the place is...*”. He thinks that the tourists especially the youth are adventurous and always aspire to have a feel of new things. So, any time they hear of such places they try to visit there with the expectation that they will have a new experience.

In relation to *what has been done to meet such expectations* of the tourists, the interviews revealed that the park has done everything possible to meet the tourists’ expectation by making available facilities such as motel for accommodation, restaurant for food, camp site, some limited game drive, retention of the integrity of the park, and the like all aimed at satisfying the tourists. According to PM “*to receive you we have the motel over there although I would say the standard is quite low but for a backpacker or a volunteer sometimes they even want to share facilities because their budget is quite small. And, apart from that we also have the camp site you know most of them also like camping and sometimes they even want to hike, do more hiking and all these facilities are here which they can take advantage of. You can also do limited game drives*”. TB also adds “*they would go from there to the hotels; we monitor the hotels so we make sure the hotels are also offering some certain minimum level of facility services. From there they would go to the attraction sites, we liaise with these various attraction sites, train the staff there, offer necessary information we can to make sure that when they enter those areas the minimum level of interaction that would go on there would be experiential*”. The inference here is that when the tourists land at the airport, the arrangement is that they pick up vehicles to send them to the hotels, board management makes sure that the condition of the vehicles is perfect and the drivers are also of certain level of knowledge and experience, the customer relation is expected to be of certain level to be able to drive the tourists to the hotels. At the attraction sites, the staff there is well trained to handle the tourists in order for them to have nice experience.

### **Perception of the Tourists and its Influence**

On the question of whether the *tourists may have some perception about the park*, the interviews indicated that they have, and that it has even been the perception that informs their visit to the park. DT on this comments “*I was actually surprised how green it was and how*

*amazing it was I think it was spectacular and having the view and watching the animals drinking from the lake was in itself amazing I think and walking around and having animals coming up to the motel because a lot of animals came up I think that was quite amazing*". This by implication means that she least expected to see the environment in a green condition as she saw it, and to some extent have the opportunity to even see the animals. So, it really amazed her. PM further adds *"I think that is what really, really keeps people coming to the park. Because definitely that would also inform you to even tell others whether they should come to Mole"*. He thinks that the tourists have some perception about the park that they make known to friends which makes them to also try to visit the park to find those things to be sure of whatever they may be told by those friends. This perception may be either positive or negative. He continues on the positive *"what they really tell us is that the attraction here is quite unique. The animals are not so many like probably when you compare it to East Africa and South Africa but when you come here, it seems the experience you have is a bit quite intimate or interactive"*. The tourists mostly think they would have experienced the animals moving in greater numbers like experienced in the other places, but the situation in mole looks quite different and unique in an interactive mood. The tourists have the opportunity to see some of the animals at very close range. The place is considered to be a little bit relaxed and the guides have time for the visitors. This highlights what (Keller 2003) refers to as a competitive brand positioning, which is all about creating brand superiority in the minds of consumers (tourists). Commenting on the negative perception PM states *"...the other side of it is in terms of the limited infrastructure that we have and key among it is even the access to Mole"*. This means that the road leading to the park is not in the best of shapes and indeed it leaves whoever visits the park in a state of confusion having been told that Mole National Park is a premier national and he/she will only come to land on rather such a bad road, but this could be an adventure though for the adventurous tourists, and since not all those who visit the park are adventure tourists, the ability of the park to improve upon the condition of the road could reduce the negative expectation that would have emanated from this experience.

With regards to how *such perception can influence the tourists' decision to visit the park*, the interviews showed that the tourists with such perception usually inform their friends about this perception who will in turn visit the park based on what they have heard from the friends. PM on this relates *"I think that is what is happening now, who visit have that perception and when they go and they interact with their colleagues they also let them know and then they also decide to take a trip here when they get the opportunity"*. Those who have the opportunity to visit the park and have their perception met usually discuss it with friends who will also consider having that experience should they also get the least chance. DT also re-echoed *"I think I can only say is been a positive experience so in that way of course it influences in a positive way"*

*and I am also at a place of course to say every time someone is going to Ghana I would say ok go and visit Mole because is a great experience so, in that way".* She considers what she had at the park as a positive experience, and will encourage whoever she knows who will be going to Ghana to do well to visit mole to also have that experience, which in fact explains the postulation of Bolan and Williams (2008:386) of word of mouth serving as an external factor that can impact on the decision of a person to visit a destination. Once the tourists say something good about a destination experienced to a friend, he/she is propelled to try it to also have that experience. Therefore, destination managers should do well to always have the expectations of their visitors met so that it will help them achieve both repeat and new visitations of tourists.

### **Sustainable Ecotourism**

In these times of limited resources, struggling economies, and increased threats to natural environment, the tourism industry needs creative solutions to the present day sustainability challenges so that not only the present generation, but also the generations yet to come will both reap the full benefits from the industry. This part of the analysis will discuss sub-themes such as the characteristics of sustainable ecotourism, regulation of other tourism operators, and available planned initiatives. The questions to answer under this are:

- What makes the Mole National Park a sustainable ecotourism destination?
- How is the management working to achieve this?
- How is the tourists' board regulating the activities of other tourism operators?
- What planned initiatives are available for the park?

### **Regulation of other Tour Operators**

Relating to the question as to *how the tourists' board regulates the activities of travel and tour agencies, hotel and restaurant operators, car rental agencies, and the like*, the revelation was that these operators are guided through their operations by the Legislative Instruments, LI 1205 and 1923. The instrument, which is a law, stipulates the standards the operators have to meet before they can undertake any tourism activity. According to TB:

*"...when it comes to hotels, restaurants, guest houses, Inns, hostels, name them, when it comes to travel and tour industry, each of them has regulation that so for instance the accommodation and catering subsector is regulated by the LI legislative instrument 1205. It is clearly spelt out what each of them ought to do and what each of them ought not to do and things. That is what we run by. The travel and tour industry you see LI 1923 I think, that also tells the travel and tour industry what is expected of them what they must do what they should not do, the registration processes and all that".*

This law requires that before one can operate any tourism activity, he/she has to be licensed by the Ghana Tourists Board. It has specified both what the operators have to do and not to do, as well as the punitive measures if the laws are flouted by these operators, including court prosecution to ensure compliance to the laws by the operators all in the hope of ensuring sustainability in the tourism industry. This explains (Bosselman et al 1999 as in Weaver and Lawton 2006:364) emphasis on development standards or legal restrictions that dictate the physical aspects of development as a mechanism to facilitate pursuit of sustainability. Included in this category are density and height restrictions, setbacks such as s footpath, floodplain or beach high water mark, building standards, noise regulation and signage control (prohibitions on motorway billboards). Destination managers can ensure sustainability with imposition of laws and standards as well as punitive measures so that the various operators in the tourism industry will use them as guiding principles in their operations.

### **Available Planned Initiatives**

Regarding the question of the planned initiatives available for the park, the interview revealed that the available planned initiative for the park has been the Savannaland Tourism Destination Programme currently focused around Mole National Park. This initiative is adopting the Destination Management Approach (DMA) to tourism development. This takes a holistic look at the entire environment and not just a single attraction as TB comments:

*“...we are looking at Mole and all that environment as a destination and Mole is the hub. When the visitors drop into Mole, which is the key attracting force, then we keep them to stay longer and then we disperse them into the communities so if you stay spend some three days here, if you would have stayed 7 days, then two or three days should be spent in the communities so that something can be left in the communities yes. It is also a way of ensuring that the communities do not destroy the environment...”*

By this it means that Mole National Park serves as a focal point that could be distributing visitors to other smaller community based tourism. The destination management approach considers the wider area around Mole National Park, rather than individual attractions for the purposes of planning, product development, marketing, service provision, and management (SNV Briefing 2009:2). It is, by definition, a multi-stakeholder process. A range of governmental and nongovernmental organizations and development partners are involved in the development of the Savannaland destination. They include Ghana Tourist board, Regional Coordinating Council, Mole National Park, District Assemblies, SNV, A Rocha, local community based organizations, and the like.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

First and foremost, the study has found out that the park is a public enterprise with the necessary logistics such as staff emoluments, uniforms, boots, vehicles, etc. coming from the central government fund with some intermittent donor assistance from other nongovernmental organizations, which even demands counterpart funding from the government. The revenue that is also generated from the operations of the park gets its way back to the central government fund without any percentage deduction of it remaining in the park for future development, especially in the communities fringing the park, and since the government has a lot of commitments to meet from the other sectors of the economy, it is always difficult for the state alone to adequately attend to the needs of the park. The nature of operations in the park calls for persistent supply of logistics like uniforms, boots, and the like, but this is not forthcoming from the central government. Therefore, since there are some other nongovernmental organizations that have interest in the management of the park, if the government should partner with them, especially the private enterprises in the park's management, it will a bit relieve the government of this pressure of the logistics constraints for the park. The park really needs these logistics for it to be effectively managed.

Secondly, it has been revealed that the park currently is dealing with the wildlife as its substantive attraction for the tourists even though it has other attractions that it could develop because of the fact that it has aims it is operating with and also because of the strength of its resource base. But then, it is always good that businesses remain focused to their major aims of operation, and equally, it is viable and paid off that businesses are innovative right in today's devastating complete environment to be able to survive in the market. The park has a lot of potentials attractions including waterfalls and the like it could develop but for fear of losing focus from its main aim of maintaining its naturalness, and having been constrained in terms of resources, it does not want to diversify itself by adding more attractions to the current attraction of wildlife. There is the need for the park to take risk, and the risk should be a calculative risk. Therefore, developing these other potential attractions in the park could help the park to meet the diverse expectations of the different prospective tourists in the tourism market.

Furthermore, the study found out that the park adopted promotional tools such as web site, CDs, brochure and word of mouth to get information about its brand to the target audience. However, these are just a few of the available promotional tools. Even though this seems to be beneficial to the park in terms of budget but as to whether the message about the park could reach far places becomes another issue. Therefore, the park could adopt other promotional mix, such as advertising through other media like television, and newspaper and magazines, sales promotion, publicity and public relations. The ability of Mole National Park to vary its promotional

mix will make it possible for it to maximize tourists' visitation to the park. Varied promotional mix, claims (Kotler 1997), can make messages about destinations to reach far and wide places.

Again, the findings revealed of the target audiences of the park to be people from the Northern European countries, United States of America, and Asia, and the people are basically the young guys ranging between 18 and 30 years with few in the middle income class and on retirement. These people are in the categories of adventure tourists, backpackers, students, etc. Information about the park has been able to get to these markets as the number of visitors from these markets keeps on rising. However, there are still equally potential markets that the park could target at both geographically including some of the Eastern European countries such as Russia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, etc. and socio-demographically including married couple with or without children, single parents, bachelors, etc. if indeed the park should widen the base of its target audience to further maximize tourists' visitation to it.

Also, the findings had it that in order to limit the rate of illegal activities in the park by people from the fringing communities, the park relates with these communities in several forms including Community Resource Management Committees, Community Resource Management Areas, Protected Area Management Advisory Unit, provision of livelihood activities, etc. Opinion leaders and key persons from identifiable groups within the communities are placed on some of these committees. They serve as a direct link between the park and the communities and through that authority is given to each of the communities to manage the natural resources within their localities but outside the park. The people in the communities fringing the park hunt the animals in the park for food which is a big threat to the very existence of these animals for future generations, and to minimize such illegal activities, the park has been involving the people in the management of the park in these ways just for them to have that sense of belongingness. They are provided with livelihood activities that will sort of engage them economically to be able to fend for themselves without necessarily poaching the park. The park also has a department that is meant to create market for the products of the artisans from these communities to be able to sell their craft to the visitors to the park. The park is working with the communities this ways in order for them to see the need to conserve the resources for future generations to also benefit from it. (Hankinson 2007:248) insists on consistent communication in any destination management among the varied stakeholders involved to ensure better education and resolve any looming conflict that may arise. This indeed is good because it is only through such relations that effective collaboration occurs for sustainable management of a destination like Mole National Park.

The study also found that the park has made available certain basic facilities such as clinic, motel and restaurant, transport service, etc. to ensure that it operates to meet the

expectations of the tourists. However, the problem lies with the standards of these facilities even though standards are relative. For instance, the accommodation in the park is basic of a kind without potable running water; the restaurant supplies food that is a bit expensive, the clinic attends to only first aid related ailment, poor road network leading to the park, and the like. All this can help build negative perception. Therefore, the ability of the park to improve upon the standards of these facilities can help to uplift its image. The road to the park could be paved; the conditions in the motel could also be looked at, especially ensuring that there is potable running water since this can help to build positive perception about the park.

Finally, the study revealed of a legislative instrument that has been put in place stipulating what ought to be done and not to be done by the various operators in the tourism industry with the necessary punitive measures to ensure compliance to further ensure sustainability in the industry. The Legislative Instrument 1205 has spelt out the minimum requirement to be followed by those who supply the accommodation and catering products in the tourism industry to ensure that these people supply the products ecological and sustainable as possible. Monitoring exercises are conducted to make sure that the guests' expectations are being met. Those suppliers who flout the laws are severely dealt with to ensure compliance. But, sometimes laws in Africa are flouted without punishment being meted out to the offenders if even they are apprehended, which makes a lot of the suppliers in the tourism industry to produce sub-standard products for the guests and without much respect for the welfare of the environment. Therefore, the tourists' board with the responsibility of supervising the activities of these suppliers should be strict in this regard to ensure sustainability in the tourism industry. Also in place is the Savannaland Tourism Destination Programme currently focused around Mole National Park aims to reduce poverty through pro-poor sustainable tourism development. With this initiative, a hub and spoke strategy has been adopted whereby Mole National Park is serving as a focal point and magnet for the area and distributing visitors to other smaller, community based tourism attractions from there. The aim for this initiative is to make it possible for the communities to benefit directly from the tourists as and when they visit Mole National Park in order for them to see the need to conserve the resource in the park for generations yet unborn.

However, the effectiveness of all these initiatives is questionable as the people within the fringing communities to the park still poach the park of its resource day-in and day-out. Therefore, the park needs to find out from the people the actual benefits they expect from the park's operations and make sure that it attends to those expectations since this can help to limit such illegal activities of the people.

## CONCLUSION

The research has focused on managing Mole National Park for sustainable tourism. The study contests that in so far as brands are assets, which are expensive to create and manage, it is incumbent that brand owners try to protect them from competitors. It therefore assesses the current brand of Mole National Park in Ghana, and determines the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination.

The findings of the study, illustrated through the interviews, have shed light on the current brand of Mole National Park in Ghana and the international tourists' expectations of a sustainable ecotourism destination. The data gathered from the interviews revealed that the park is a state-owned entity with some organizations showing interest in its management. Therefore, the analysis resolved that the park could be efficiently managed when the private interest is allowed to partner the state in its management since that will help to pool together sufficient resources to provide the needed logistics for the park's management. It is clear that Mole National Park was a resource reserve converted to national park with the government of Ghana providing logistics such as uniforms, boots, staff emoluments, and the like, as well as donor support projects from nongovernmental organizations, which has not been sufficient enough to effectively manage the reserve. So, to ensure sufficiency in the provision of funds and other logistics for effective management of the park, there is the need for the state to partner the private interest group in the park's management.

Furthermore, the data revealed that the park currently is focusing on only the wildlife as its key attraction to the international tourists even though it has other attractions like waterfalls, and the like. As a result, the analysis concluded that the park could still add to its current product line by developing those other attractions. It can be recalled that Mole National Park in Ghana is currently focussing on only the wildlife as its key attraction because it does not want to lose focus of its major aim of maintaining the integrity of the park by keeping it in its naturalness, and as well it operates based on the strength of its resource base. However, the ability of the park to diversify its product line can help it to satisfy the different international tourists with their varied expectations. For any touristic destination like Mole National Park to survive in today's competitive environment, it needs to diversify its product line.

As outlined from the analysis of promotion of the current brand of the Mole National Park in Ghana, the park relies mainly on word of mouth together with website, brochure, and CDs to disseminate information about its brands to the target audience. In relation to this, Mole National Park in Ghana could adopt other promotional mix, such as advertising through other media like television, and newspaper and magazines, sales promotion, publicity and public relations. The ability of Mole National Park in Ghana to vary its promotional mix will make it possible for it to

maximize tourists' visitation to the park. Varied promotional mix allows messages about destinations to reach far and wide places.

Again, it is observed that the differentiation efforts of Mole National Park is concentrated on the countries from the Northern EU countries like Netherlands, Germany, Britain, Denmark, among others, United States of America, and Asia. The effort is also centred on the bulk of the young guys, few of the middle income group and those on retirement. But a premier national park like mole can still make extensions regarding the markets and the segment of the population that it deals with. Therefore, the study is recommending that the park could geographically still extend its differentiation efforts to cover other markets. Again, the park could also consider segments like married couple with or without children because such segment is significant and accessible enough to target at.

Also, the information gathered from the interviews revealed that the park has been relating with the people from the fringing communities through several forms including Community Resource Management Committees (CRMCs), Community Resource Management Area (CRMA), Protected Areas Management Advisory Unit (PAMAU), and the provision of support for livelihood activities. It is apparent that the fringing communities poach the park of its animals for food, which is a big threat to sustainability of the resource in the park, and since the animals form the core of the expectations of the tourists to the park, it tries to relate with the communities in these ways to minimize the rate at which the poaching is done. But this does not seem to be enough for the communities since the poaching activities still perpetuate. Therefore, for Mole National Park in Ghana to be able to minimize the poaching activities, it must make sure that it relays very well information about operations of the park, especially information regarding revenue from the park's operations to the people. The park should also do well to find out from the communities the nature of benefits they expect from the park and make sure that these benefits are provided.

Finally, the study has found out the various measures Mole National Park in Ghana has put in place to ensure that the expectations of the international tourists visiting it are met. Among these include the provision of facilities such as clinic, motel and restaurant, and transport services with legislative instrument regulating their operations to keep them in check. But, the park could still do better in terms of its image by improving upon accessibility both within and without the park. The road networks both inside and outside, especially the road leading to the park has to be worked upon in order to help limit the negative perception of people about the park. Again, the state of the motel in the park could also be improved upon, especially making it possible for the motel to have running water.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study proposes the following recommendations for Mole National Park in Ghana:

- ❖ The park has to review the way it allows involvement of people from the communities fringing the park in the management of the park. The park allows the people involvement in its management through several forms including PAMAU, which is a governance board serving as advisory to issues relating to management of the park. PAMAU represents the communities, and they have quarterly meetings with management of the park during which time matters concerning the park are discussed. The park even discloses revenue accrued from the park's operations at the PAMAU meetings with the hope that it will be further disseminated to the people they represent, but this does not seem to happen. Therefore, the park has to review the way it relays such valuable information by either directly giving the information to the people through district information services department or monitoring the activities of the representatives on PAMAU to make sure that they give out such information for the sake of transparency. The people seriously need that information to satisfy their curiosity.
- ❖ The park needs a valuable brand element that will help to enhance its awareness, prominence and reputation, and this is seen in the elephant as it is seen as one of the key wildlife that draws a lot of tourists to the park even though antelope has been used on the brochure, the park could still adopt the elephant for further identification and differentiation with value.
- ❖ The park should embark upon the organization of seminars to offer in-service training to the staff on marketing and management skills for them to upgrade themselves on marketing and management related issues to be able to manage the park effectively.
- ❖ Finally, the park, even though has a long term target of expecting about 40,000 visitors within the next 10 years, should do well to have a short term, maybe quarterly or annual expected target of visitors to the park for that to shape and direct the park's operations towards achieving the long term expected target of visitors it has set for itself.

## REFLECTIONS AND AREA FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

If the aim for branding a destination is to create some amount of awareness, prominence and reputation in the market about that destination, and it is the responsibility of the management of Mole National Park in Ghana to ensure that it comes out with the necessary marketing strategies that will win the park such awareness, prominence and reputation, especially in the international arena, then the strategies adopted by the park could either help the park to gain such awareness, prominence and reputation or not depending upon the consistency with which

the strategies are applied. Therefore, the discussion and the empirical results presented in the study have provided new insight into various forms of managing Mole National Park in Ghana for sustainable tourism. Even though necessary qualifications have been made to the views espoused earlier, nonetheless, the study is still open for further investigation.

Much elaborate research requires to be carried out in the area of collaboration between the park and the people from the communities fringing the park. This stems from the fact that the relationship between the park and these communities is not the best to facilitate sustainable management of the park. The fact remains that it looks as if these communities have specific demands they are expecting from the park which the park is not aware of, and this is causing the problem of poaching into the park. Therefore, research requires to be conducted into this to be able to find lasting solution to it for the park to operate sustainably.

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