



ECOTOURISM AND RECREATIONAL ECONOMICS OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

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Abstract

Ecotourism helps in environmental protection, wildlife conservation, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. It affects environmental, social and economic components of the community and the whole country. It has different forms which are named according to the preference of the country. Developed as well as developing countries like Nigeria are promoting ecotourism for sustainable development of the nation. Different methodologies are applied throughout the world by different researchers for linking ecotourism. This study focuses on the review of ecotourism researches worldwide. It has both positive and negative impacts on environmental, social and economic aspects of the country. Sequel to the high rate of beneficial impacts, it is helping in the overall development of the country, community and the world at large. There is a need for alignment and cooperation among stakeholders in the training of ecotourism to tourism entrepreneurs and appropriate policy for sustainable implementation of ecotourism projects.

Keywords: *Ecotourism, Environmental conservation, poverty alleviation, Social development, Nigeria.*

Introduction

Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial mass tourism, Ceballos-Lascurain (1987). It means responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment, and improving the well-being of the local people. (The International Ecotourism Society)(TIES, 2015). Its purpose may be to educate the traveler, to provide funds for ecological conservation, to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or to foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Since the 1980s, ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavour by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. It refers to sustainable tourism, which has minimal impact on the environment. This is a common type of tourism in Nigeria. Examples include the Obudu Cattle Ranch in Cross River State, The Yankari Games Reserve in Bauchi State and The Ikogosi Warm Spring found in Ondo State.

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the sustainable tourism industry Das *et.al.* (2009), Cusack *et.al.* (2006) and UNEP (2013) which focuses on wildlife conservation, environmental protection, poverty alleviation and economic development. Ceballos-Lascurain (1987) describes Ecotourism as nature based travel to relatively undisturbed area with emphasis on education. There is no such universally accepted and acceptable definition of ecotourism, it is differentiated from nature –based tourism as it helps in sustainable rural development and makes biodiversity conservation economically viable for local communities Cusack *et. al.* (2006). Ecotourism is one of the preferred tools for conservation and community development in many rural areas. Its effectiveness depends on its potential to provide local economic benefits by maintaining ecological resource integrity through low impact and non-consumptive use of local resources Stem *et.al.* (2003). It provides jobs for the local people and market for local products. It encourages cultural sensitivity in guest-host relations and acts as a catalyst for ecologically sustainable development. Planning is required to address the issues of ownership management and coordination of protected areas. It enhances wildlife conservation and equitable sharing of benefits from ecotourism. Sindiga (1999). It helps in the conservation of natural, cultural and built resources and maintains the quality of life in local area with an objective of environmental conservation. It creates sustainable economic development and balances conflicting goals of economic development and biodiversity conservation. Cusack, *et.al.* (2006), Anup, *et.al.* (2015) and Cao, *et.al.* (2014).

Considering the sustainable principles and practices, it fulfills goals of biodiversity conservation, poverty reduction and business vitality Hawkins (2004). In ecotourism, local people realize the importance of conservation and protect the environment in an active manner. They maintain national standards of atmospheric quality, sound quality, drinking water, sewage, lampblack and all kinds of establishments Degan *et.al.* (2006).

Benefits of Eco Tourism

Ecotourism like any industry has both merits and demerits. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), defined ecotourism as a responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order

to enjoy and appreciate nature that conserve the environment and sustain the well-being of the local people. The United Nations declared 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism (IYE)

The benefits of ecotourism can be broadly categorized as economic, socio-cultural and physical. The most direct economic benefits are the improvement in employment and income. The world tourism council estimates that travel and tourism provides employment for more than 100 million people worldwide responsible for over 7% of world capital investment.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) and The British Columbia statistics reviewed that tourism injected \$9.5 billion into the British Columbia economy with 22.5 million visitors and generated 11,980 direct jobs (The British Columbia Statistic 2000). Domestic and international tourism contributed in net terms approximately 6 billion dollars to the Queensland economy Louise Wallace (2012). A tourist dollar is a new dollar injected into the local economy with greater economic benefits that can come from employment as porters, cooks, and guides in hotels and in transportation, as well as tour operators/guides and travel agencies. Ecotourism is a labour intensive industry and creates many job opportunities, especially for young people and part-time workers. There are tremendous opportunities for the establishment of new products and infrastructures (road, social amenities etc.) which all lead to a major source of local economic input from tourism (Mock and O'Neill. 1996). Ecotourism involves four sectors' the tourists, the host communities, the environment and the tourism Industry. NGOs, such as WWF, the Ecotourism Society, IUCN, etc. can produce codes to catalyze and strengthen efforts to promote environmentally responsible tourism.

Tourism highlights the need for proper management of the environment and through effective policies and planning it can ensure that the environment of an area is preserved. It is also a catalyst for residential development. Ecotourism can stimulate the establishment of a new and improved transport services to and within a regional area. Ecotourism provides economic incentives and promotes conservation of wild lands, generates income for park management and brings needed income to rural populations. It promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations Wall(1997). Odunlami (2003) reported that the Argungu Fishing Festival is an attraction spot for many tourists' now and Kebbi State government is poised to develop it to a world class event.

Availability of attractive natural virtues is an indicator of potential success in the use of ecotourism for national development Ijeomah *et al.*, (2011). Many countries where tourism is well developed and practiced has benefitted enormously in terms of infrastructure maintenance, national development and economic empowerment. Nigeria has not derived significant benefit from tourism however; some communities can boast of benefits of ecotourism for instance, communities around Farin Ruwa WaterFall have free supply of electricity; hence a lot of events take place in the playground of the destination at no financial cost. Similar things happened in Assopfall of Hawankibo where the inhabitants of the area are given free electricity. It was because of the Farin Ruwa Water Fall destination that the Abdulahi Adamu led government of Nasarawa State established a police post and primary schools in the host community. The Nasarawa State Government also constructed 12 culverts for the inhabitants of Farin Ruwa being a tourist attraction centre. The frequent events including national World Tourism Day celebration that the destination hosted during Abdulahi Adamu led administration popularized the community. Ijeomah and Alao (2007) reported that the Farin Ruwa destination has been the ecotourism site with the highest percentage of foreign visitors in Nigeria.

Lives of many people are sustained through souvenir production and sales - the Naraguta souvenir centre in Jos Plateau State Nigeria is a typical example (Ijeomah and Edet, (2011). Shells of periwinkle and oyster which should normally be thrown away in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria (where it is very abundant) can be filled to shape and sold as souvenirs by households when tourism thrives in the area (in the host communities). An Individual made two million naira (#2,000,000) with sixty five thousand naira (#65,000) worth of investment in Argungu fishing festival. The lives of many boat operators and fish sellers in Oguta community are sustained through the market created by tourism to Oguta lake destination. The road leading to Port Harcourt beach was tarred in 2017 by the Rivers State government to create access to the ecodestination. Ijeomah *et al.* (2005) reported that an Australian couple saved three years' salary to visit the Wase rock, which is one of the only five permanent breeding places of the Rosy Pelican bird in Africa. The Argungu festival has brought about visitation of many foreigners to Nigeria and popularized the host state. These tourism operations have created informal jobs for many people especially hoteliers, transporters and souvenir producers and sellers. The national parks, forest reserves, game reserves etc. have been source of employment to many people. Many restaurants in Oguta operate because of the visitors to Oguta Lake destination. Africa is popular because of its highest congregation of mammals on earth in the contemporary world. Fifty percent of international visitors to Kenya want to view wild animals Odunga and Maingi, (2011). Eltringham (1984) reported that the main reason tourists visit Africa is to view games, sight see and learn other cultures.

Tourism brings about infrastructural development such as tarred roads, airports, hotels, power, railways and of course revenue generation. One of the major sources of revenue generation in Plateau State is tourism. Nigeria has different kinds of ecodestinations which operate at different seasons. Thus, all season tourism can take place in Nigeria in places like caves in Enugu tourism complex, Mado cave of Plateau State. Awareness of an area as a tourism city and the consciousness of the inhabitants of the area to receive visitors is part of human development as that gradually becomes part of the people's lifestyles. Cross River State is a popular tourism state similar to Plateau State and the awareness level of this amongst the inhabitants is very high. Performances of Asharuwa dance, Atilogwu and etc. promote cultural preservation. Fishing festivals strengthens culture that is already being weakened by religion and development.

Ecotourism Potentials of Nigeria

Nigeria is well endowed with various ecotourism potentials including diverse culture, biodiversity, and scenic landscapes. There is hardly any community in Nigeria without unique ecotourism attractions - unique culture, food and environment. The cultural foods of different tribes in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States and the hospitable manner the dishes are packaged and served to visitors have been commended by many tourists. In Agulu, Anambra State, the chief priest 'Ezemmuo' uses a chicken to call out about 10 crocodiles from a river to satisfy curiosity of tourists that the community is endowed with the species. Monkeys roam about in Awka, Anambra State and can easily be sited. Whale is found in Akwa Ibom State coupled with crab colonies that exist therein. The consistent straddling of Manatee in Itu of Akwa Ibom State made the community very famous among travelers in the early days – Many tourists usually gathered watching sea horses (struggling to get back to water) in the era when indigenes of Itu did not have the technology to kill the attractive species and therefore termed it a mermaid (Ijeomah et al, in press). The Itu indigenes believed that any attempt to have contact with the Manatee leads to the animal stimulating the person to laugh to death, thus the species moved undisturbed then. Various species of Python are found in south eastern Nigeria and the Niger Delta area. Python is considered sacred in many parts of Bayelsa State and therefore can easily be observed by tourists.

Threats to Ecotourism Development

With numerous tourism resources, Nigeria is not among popular destinations in Africa because of many challenges: The game rangers and ecotourism staff are not well motivated. When staff morale is low they become beggarly and start exploiting tourists. In some parks' tourist camp, hunting could take place in the night. Non-motivated rangers can become hunters in the night and start hunting or connive with poachers to poach from the park. Most parks in Nigeria do not have good communication facilities such as walkie talkie. The few places communication facilities exist they are inadequate.

Tourist facilities are low in most parks and ecodestinations in Nigeria: Ecotourism vehicles are not functioning in many parks. Many destinations lack outdoor camping facilities for tourists. Okomu has the tree house from where a tourist can have a panoramic view of the resources in the ecodestination but it is not well maintained. In Oguta Lake, the destination motel, golf course and one of the pontoons have not been functioning for some years. Farin Ruwa Waterfall is devoid of lodges as the one started about ten years ago was uncompleted and has become dilapidated. Farin Ruwa destination is inaccessible during rainy season as the culvert for River Njiri will become covered by water. The road to Okomu national park is bad and worse during rainy season. Tourists therefore pass through communities with many difficult terrains to access the destination. Cross River National Park has no facility that can enable tourists have a panoramic view of the resources in the park. Infrastructure has really degenerated in most parks: Erokut gate entry of CRNP is the only place where there is a little facility because CERCOPAN was once involved she wanted to embark on re - introduction of animals. There is nowhere in most park for a tourist camping to buy basic items.

Tours are not scheduled and efficiently carried out. In Krudger national Park, there are scheduled ecotourism tours that tourists are aware that of the time for viewing different species in different sections of the park and that is very efficient and effective. Tours are not well packaged in Nigeria. Frequent harassment by the security personnel in Nigeria: There are so many police check points where unnecessary demands are consistently made. This does not only delay tours but also frustrate visitors as they are not used to such systems -. Police demand for receipts of basic things tourists carry such as Binoculars, laptops, cameras etc to look for avenues to exploit them. From Johannesburg to Krudger national park is over 5 hours yet no check point will be seen though cars will be seen packing by the road side. Many tourists feel secured when they travel without seeing road blocks because of police The matching ground syndrome of Nigeria where every visitor seen in an area will be exploited: Tourists are to pay before they are allowed to take photographs else their cameras will be seized. The amount to be paid is not regulated, the collector is not identified. If the tourist fails to pay he will be molested or could be kidnapped, and there is no avenue to seek redress. This happens in destination host communities in Nigeria.

Foreign tourists are scared of molestation by such agents who make tourists survive by whiskers. Police, Vehicle inspection officers, Road safety and other security agents should begin to redress their way and style of operation if Nigeria should be listed among popular destinations in the world. Signage's in Nigeria are grossly absent; where they exist, they are misleading. Nigeria should adopt one signage system i.e. metric or mileage Road signs and billboards that should give visitors information should not be misused; Politicians should not campaign on government or tourism bill boards. There are no land marks. Buildings are not numbered; many streets are not named. This has to be addressed to reflect light in the night for tourists to get direction for ecotourism to function. Frequent power outage; Wind energy and solar energy are used to generate energy. Nigeria relies on electricity which is not efficient. There should be point of sale (POS) to payments for transactions. Ecotourism requires intelligent and efficient tour guides who are multilingual at least to communicate with tourists; else there must be pocket dictionaries to aid interpretation. This facilitates communication.

Increase in awareness of new religious practices has aggravated the deforestation rate of sacred forests that served as living laboratories, store of resources, habitats and ecodestinations. A Chief priest in charge of the sacred forest in Lagwa community of AbohMbaise Local Government Area of Imo State willingly resigned while supporting the clearance of the sacred forests (Ijeomah *et al.*, 2011). Inadequate staffing: Most national parks, game reserves and forest reserves in Nigeria are understaffed. The number of staff employed to cover a large area makes it difficult for them to be effective. It also endangers the life of the rangers as they can easily be overpowered by poachers. The Plateau State Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (PSMNRE) assigned only two rangers to guard Pai River game reserve, a park that was five miles away from Yankari game reserve, and covers an area of about 830 km². The killing of one of the rangers by herdsmen who lurked in the destination led to the withdrawal of the remaining game guard by PSMNRE for safety of life. Low level of awareness concerning ecotourism resources: Consistent killing of elephant, Hippopotamus, Crocodile and other endangered species in Nigeria is an indication of prevailing low awareness level of the people about the value of conservation. Other threats to the use of ecotourism as a tool for national development as listed by Ijeomah and Aiyeloja (2010) include: Poverty, poaching, over hunting in none protected areas, bad global image, lack of maintenance culture, poor road condition with cultural traffic jam, corruption, internal insecurity, inadequate funding, misplaced priority, inadequate infrastructure etc.

Conclusion and Recommendations

One of the greatest justifications for rural people to be involved in conservation of biodiversity is the promising effect of empowerment to be brought by ecotourism. Nigeria is endowed with attractions that can satisfy the curiosity of almost every type of tourist. There is no local government area in Nigeria without unique ecotourism attractions - unique cultures, foods and environments. The challenge is lack of promotion and packaging. Killing of elephant in Idanre, Ondo State shows that the level of awareness about tourist attractions and species of global ecological importance is still very low in many areas. Neglected species of wildlife should be focused on.

All the 3 species of tortoise in Nigeria have been declared endangered by IUCN but commonly consumed in Nsukka area of Enugu State. The three species of crocodile in Nigeria are endangered but commonly consumed in the Niger delta region of Nigeria. The long snouted crocodile can hardly be found within the Niger Delta environment. Awareness of the ecological and touristic importance of turtle in Akassa led to the formation of turtle club for the conservation of turtle in the environment. Fishermen who by chance catch turtle release the species unlike the case of crocodile. Nigerians should begin to celebrate and promote the animals the country is endowed with. There are three species of electric fish in Akwa Ibom State. African civet is found in Akwa Ibom State and Cross River State. The fact that this species use community latrines is enough to draw the interest of many tourists. Lapwings that migrate from Europe to Akwa Ibom and many states in Nigeria do two weeks rehearsals before travelling back to Europe and viewing this species rehearsals could interest tourists. Awareness should be created about the magic trees in Nigeria; which one smells and get drunk. Ecotourism should be made to empower host communities. Global environmental facility (GEF) was formerly funding empowerment projects but that ended because of corruption in Nigeria – Misuse of the fund. It was because of this that establishment of community Wildlife sanctuary is presently introduced in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States. This is more preferable than zoos. Other ways to harness greater benefits from tourism for national development as listed by Ijeomah and Aiyeloja (2010) includes:

- Change of attitudes and development of tourism culture
- Secure local people's support
- Strengthen internal security and security in protected areas
- Motivate rangers
- Enforce wildlife protection laws
- Clean up the environment
- Develop infrastructures

- Create varieties of activities
- Amend national image
- Create awareness
- Monitor tourism growth and impact

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