

EXPLORING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN NIGERIA FOR DEVELOPMENTAL GROWTH

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Abstract

Tourism has become a major source of economic diversification for many countries, underpinning the service sector and forging effective backward and forward linkages with the rest of the economy, allowing new employment and income earning opportunities. Although, the developed countries account for a higher proportion of global tourism, many developing countries are beginning to take advantage of the huge opportunities offered by tourism. However, only developing countries with effective natural and man-made tourism supporting and enhancing infrastructure have been able to develop their tourism sector and seize the attendant advantages. The need for economic diversification in most developing countries is overwhelming because of their defining mono-cultural economic characteristics where only one or two commodities dominate exports and provides the bulk of foreign exchange from which these countries could reconcile their internal and external balances. Nigeria is one such country seeking to diversify its economy away from crude oil production to maximize employment and income generating opportunities. Nigeria has huge tourism potentials, especially given its natural and diversified landscapes but lacks effective and tourism supporting and enhancing infrastructure. While tourism affords huge employment and income generating opportunities, its impact on bio-physical environment is well acknowledged hence the emphasis on sustainable tourism. Indeed, most of Nigeria's natural landscapes are eco-sensitive areas and exploring them as tourist destinations must be

sustainably conducted to enhance the carrying-capacity or regenerative capacity of these landscapes. This paper critically analyses Nigeria's tourism potentials, focusing on the impacts on the wider economy. By appealing to the qualitative method of research, the paper concludes that the tourism sector has huge potentials yet unexplored, which if fully supported, can contribute significantly to the economic diversification and poverty alleviation efforts of the government.

Keywords: Development, Economic Diversification, Growth, Sustainability, Tourism

1. Introduction

Tourism is identified as an effective way to revitalise the economy of any destination as noted by Long (2012) and widely acknowledged as one of the fastest growing industry globally (Lanza and Pigliaru, 1999; Raymond, 2001; Newsome et al, 2002; Basu, 2003, Ozgen, 2003;Chockalingam and Ganesh, 2010; Jennie, 2012). The continuous and rapid growth of tourism is not in isolation of the stable economic growth experienced in the global economy, which lasted from the mid-1990 to 2007. This growth has facilitated increased global disposable income, demand for leisure, and this combined with the global economic restructures in response to globalization that ensured competition in global tourism industry and drastic reductions in travel costs. Thus, tourism has become a major source of economic growth, employment, earnings, and foreign exchange for many countries (Vaugeois, 2000; Basu, 2003) and considered by developing countries as a main source of development and growth for local economies (Hodur et al, 2005; Haller, 2012). However, while the growth in tourism owes itself to global economic growth, it is also a fact that tourism has contributed immensely to the growth of the global economy. Indeed, Ozgen (2003) acknowledged that the tourism industry has grown into a major component of the global economy and has become highly developed. In this vein, Nigeria is looking to tourism as a possible alternative income earner (Uduma-Olugu and Onukwube, 2012) and it is believed, as averred by Ajao (2012) that if Nigeria gets its tourism sector right, tourism will serve as an employer of labour besides agriculture.

Given the definition of tourism by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) as an activity involving the travels of persons to places outside their usual environment for not more than once for leisure, it is indicative of how such activities may benefit host and local economies and communities. This is particularly the case as the notion of tourism has grown

from the pursuit of the privileged few to the indulgence of the masses (Murphy, 1985). Indeed, tourism has a range of benefits both to the individual tourist, tourism organizations, and the local economies and communities in terms of employment, income, and enhancement to the quality of life (Besculides et al, 2002; Oh, 2005). For some major tourist destinations, tourism has become a major alternative form of commodity export and a significant source of foreign exchange that allows internal and external trade balances to be reconciled.

Tourism development without proper planning and integration with local values and environment can lead to socio-cultural, environmental and economic damage (Long, 2012). Thus, there is no doubt that tourism can make an effective contribution to economic development but the challenge is to develop the sector sustainable to minimize the ecological footprints. The rest of the paper is structured into four sub-headings, including the theoretical framework, tourism as a tool for socio-economic development, methodology and results, analysis of results, and conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

The potential of tourism development on the one hand, and on the other, the huge scope for diversifying mono-cultural economies through tourism has drawn the attention of policy makers, unilateral and multilateral organizations contending with the underdevelopment and the attendant poverty in developing countries to the sector (UNWTO, 2007). One of the unique characteristics of the tourism industry that makes it a prime sector from which employment can be engineered; especially in the case of the developing countries, are its labour intensive characteristics. This is particularly significant given the huge unemployment rate, especially among the youths (O'Higgins, 1998) and the labour surplus characteristic of most developing economies (Ranis, 2004). Given the low-level skills and the relatively short-lead period for training and skills acquisition, the tourism industry lends itself as a sector capable of generating huge employment and income earning opportunities.

Similarly, the tourism sector is a magnet for foreign direct investments and affords developing countries the opportunities to attract inward direct investments both for soft and hard tourism infrastructures. The significance of this trend can only be imagined if the low foreign exchange earning capacity of most development countries is considered. This combined with low-level divisible capital nature of the downstream end of the tourism industry; it affords huge opportunities for creating small and medium sized enterprises. In the

experience of developed economies, the role of small and medium sized businesses in employment creation and technological as well as managerial innovation is widely acknowledged (Schreyer, 1996).

Available data shows that between 1950 and 2004, tourist arrivals at destinations have grown from 25 million to 760 million (Zhehna, 2003). This has grown to 842 million by 2006 (UNWTO, 2007, Cooper et al (2008) and this is expected to rise by an annual average rate of 4.3 per cent until 2010 to record a total of 1.6 billion by 2020. The expected associated income is forecast at US\$ 2 trillion (Pearson, et. al., 2008, Mowforth and Munt, 2009, OECD, 2008, and Olorunfemi and Raheem, 2008).

Although it is difficult to accurately quantify the benefits of tourism (Mbaiwa, 2003) there is no doubt that the tourism market will expand rapidly to provide alternative income and employment opportunities for countries to seize upon (Chibuikem, 2009; Rogers 2009). For a country like Nigeria longing for effective economic diversification, tourism presents such an opportunity.

3. Tourism as a Tool for Economic Development in Nigeria

Tourism is widely acknowledged as an effective tool for socio-economic development, because of the possible backward and forward linkages with the rest sectors of the economy, which allows it to facilitate employment opportunities, income, local economic development, and enhance the quality of life (Hall, 2007). However, Hall (2007) argues that the extent to which these benefits accrue to a nation crucially depends on local conditions. Furthermore, Manwa (2012) argue that for tourism to be sustainable the community has to benefit directly from it, this will enable them to protect and conserve the resources upon which it is based. This is further emphasized by Smith (2007) that apart from the type of tourism, the extent to which tourism confers economic benefits on any country also depends on the expectations of the tourists and the host country's ability to provide appropriate and adequate facilities. And unless economic policies to promote tourism remain a focus in developing countries, tourism will not be a potential source of economic growth (Ekanayake and Long, 2012).

This has been a problem for the developing countries with inadequate infrastructure generally and tourism supporting infrastructure in particular. There is no where the problem of inadequate infrastructure is most pronounced than in Nigeria where the dearth of infrastructure is compounded by the inability to maintain the few existing ones and replicate

infrastructure to areas lacking in amenities usually outside of the capital and major cities. In Nigeria, lack of infrastructures is most pronounced in the rural areas where incidentally most of its tourist sites are also located. Nevertheless, efforts at developing infrastructure to support tourism in Nigeria, paltry as these may be, happen only in the urban areas (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004). This is where and how tourism is expected to have its most impact on economic development given the infrastructure and income it can attract to rural Nigeria to spur economic growth (Fayissa, Nsiah and Tadaese, 2007), and development in rural areas and the regions (SEPO, 2006) In this regard, tourism can facilitate the replication of infrastructure to the regions and the rural areas of Nigeria, which are usually the areas which lack amenities (Hawkins and Mann, 2007; SEPO, 2006).

While tourism presents developing countries like Nigeria with huge opportunity and scope for economic diversification, efforts should be made to manage possible adverse social and environmental impacts. Although the quality of the environment, both natural and man-made, is essential to tourism, this cannot be taken for granted given the complex relationships that exist between tourism and the environment (Mbaiwa, 2003). Many of these impacts are linked with the construction of general tourism enhancing infrastructure such as roads and airports, and of tourism facilities, including resorts, hotels, restaurants, shops, golf courses and marinas to name but a few. The associated environmental problems, according to Giaoutzi and Nijkamp (2006), have consequences for the quality and quantity of available resources, which in the long run could undermine tourism development.

However, Yasong (2008) has argued that it is not difficult to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism and clarify associated benefits, and that this can be effectively done through tourism planning. This is particularly the case in order not to undermine the carrying-capacity of the biophysical environment. In particular, tourism can also impact negatively on the social fabrics of local economies where local culture such as local celebrations, festivals, dance, and folklore amongst others could be subsumed (Godfrey and Clarke, 2000).

4. Study Area and Methodology

A case study has been used to provide an insight into the state of tourism in Nigeria because it is an ideal method of capturing a snap shot of a wider issue, and since it is possible to analyse the whole of Nigeria (Figure 1), three tourist destinations in Ondo State have been used as a case study. Ondo State is one of the thirty-six states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, located in the western part of the country and has Akure as its capital created in 1976

(Figure 2 shows the Map of Akure, the State capital).The state lies between latitudes 5°45' and 7 °52'N and longitude 4 °20' and 6 °5'E and is about 15,500 square kilometres. The state is bounded on the east by Edo State and Delta States, on the west by Ogun and Osun States, on the North by Kogi and Ekiti States and on the south by the Bight of Benin and the Atlantic Ocean (Ogunbodede, 2007; (Aribigbola, 2008; Francis, 2012).. The State is well endowed with several varieties of tourist's attractions which can be categorized into:historical monuments,cultural attractionsand Natural attractions.

Figure 1 Map of Nigeria Showing Ondo State



Retrieved from <http://www.firstbanknigeria.com/annualreport/2009/images/map-ondo.gif>
Accessed on 12/09/12

Figure 2: Map of Ondo State, the study Area



Retrieved from http://speakersoffice.gov.ng/constituencies_ondo.htm Accessed on 12/09/12

Thus from these numerous attractions, the Cave of Ashes at Isarun, Oke-maria hill at Oka, and Idanre hills at Idanre have been chosen and briefly discussed.

The Cave of Ashes: Isharun, the home of the cave of ashes is about 24kilometres from Akure the state capital is situated in Ifedore Local Government Area, lies between Igbaraoke And Ilara-Mokin towns, in ondo state. The Cave of Ashes as recorded by the State Information Technology Agency (2011a);Kolawole and Anifowoshe (2011)Omosa (2012) is believed to be the cradle of West Africa’s oldest pre-historic man from where a skeleton dated to 991 years was excavated by Prof,Thurstan Shaw, an archaeologist alongside other fascinating artefacts such as grinding stones and pottery fragments which dates as far back as 1000BC. Although, parts of the skeleton have been taken to various museums in Nigeria (Ibadan and Owo) and also to the British museum, South Kensington, UK; however, the cave still stand out as a tourist potential in the state.

Idanre Hills: the historic town of Idanre is located about 24 kilometres southwest of Akure, the Ondo state capital and made up of the hill top sanctuary which has about 640 steps up the hill with five resting spots; and the new settlement at the base of the hills. As narrated by Adisa (2010); State Information Technology Agency (2011b); Adeniran (2012); Itayemi (2012), the people of Idanre lived on the hill (OkeIdanre) for almost 100 years before descending to resettle at the base of the hills. The town’s unique cluster of hills where all

activities revolve has made it a world heritage site. At the top of the hills are the traditional arts, the old palace built in the 17th century, the foot print which is believed to enlarge and contract to the size of any foot placed in it, cultural relics and dilapidated chalets which once served as accommodation to the colonial masters. The hill became more prominent few years ago when the state government organised an annual mountain climbing and cultural celebrations.

Okemaria, Oka-akoko: the hill is located in Akoko south Local Government, about 113 kilometres from Akure, the state capital (State Information Technology Agency (2011); Catholic Diocese (2008). It is a Roman Catholic Mission shrine popularly called the St Mary's Hill and dedicated to the Virgin Mary whose statue was erected on the hill. It is a religious tourist attraction where pilgrimage is performed yearly and nearly about 600,000 pilgrims congregate every second week in February

These sites were examined using an observational method of research in order to have in-depth information and understanding of the true state of the Nigerian tourist attractions and patronage. Face to face interview with tourists and few tour guides on site was also conducted to gather more information for the improvement of the Nigerian tourism. This was done over a period of twelve weeks and weekly reports were taken based on daily records.

5. Analysis and Findings

The following observations were made:

Tourists or visitors came from within and outside the State with occasional few coming from outside the country. An important observation is that most of the tourists were excursionists as they make only daily visits to these sites and leave for the capital city soon after their visits. This has enormous implications for transport energy consumption attendant to repeated visits and hence affects the ecological footprints of tourism. Similarly, this also impact negatively on the local economy, especially rural income, as the income expected to accrue to the local economy are forfeited to the city. When asked for this behaviour, the overwhelming majority puts this down to lack of adequate facilities such as hotels, restaurants, telecommunication facilities, shops, and tourist centres. This behaviour conforms to the definition of an excursionist by Mason (2008), as someone who visits and leaves without staying a night at a destination. Nevertheless, providing these infrastructure and services would also impact the ecological footprints of tourism unless their provisions are

guided by sustainable principles where minimum impact on the environment both in material use and specification of renewable materials are observed.

Also noticeable was the very few tourists visiting these sites and even more worrisome is the lack of data collection and collation as visitors, their origin, and purpose of visits are not recorded. Although Oke-Maria hill is said to host about 600,000 pilgrims, there is no official record to validate this figure. Thus, the huge development opportunities presented by these sites have not been exploited by potential stakeholders, particularly the government and private sector stakeholders. In particular, none of these sites have been promoted in any of the news media and those visiting the sites are either locals or those that know about the sites from previous visitors. However, this is about to change given the announcement by the State Government of their intention to publicise the sites, especially Idanre Hills with a further promise of building a hotel along with other basic and tourism enhancing infrastructures. No doubt that effective advertising in conjunction with the provision of basic infrastructure and supporting facilities within and around the sites would attract more tourists and lead to the diversification of the local economy to generate employment and income opportunities.

Secondly, it was observed that excursionists pay no entry fees and not ticketed, which means that no attempts are made to know how many people are on site at any particular time, and neither could health and safety or evacuation arrangements be ascertained for instances of stampedes or other forms of accidents. The only exception is with regards to Idanre hills, even then, only a token amount was charged. Efforts were made to establish whether this was to attract visitors but this was not the case. According to tour guides, there had never been charges to these sites. Payment of entry fees not only generate income that can be ploughed back to infrastructure and service provisions but also has the advantage of yielding vital statistics on the number of visitors. It also affords the opportunity to reverse a common trend of non-payments for services in sub-Saharan Africa. Payments for services also ensure availability of funds for the maintenance of existing infrastructures and perhaps facilitate new facilities and services

Presence of tour guides were not noticed at all the sites, but the few that were available had little knowledge about the sites, and training was found to be patchy at best. They trained themselves on the job and more seriously, there were no guide notes available to the guides for visitors.

Evidently, no evidence of tourist centres, souvenirs and other crafts and special local products were non-existent. Thus, the opportunities for locals to augment their income levels are lost owing to lack of adequate and functional infrastructure. In other words, the capacity, according Jackson (2006), of tourism to stimulate local employment and income is forfeited to lack of basic tourist facilities and services.

Noticeable was the poor state, and in some cases, the absence of general infrastructures and services such as roads, electricity supply, water, and above all tourist centre at all the sites. This means that on a raining day, visitors are exposed to the elements and hardly an experience any tourist would normally relish. In the particular case of electricity, this makes it difficult to communicate with the outside world and also puts a limit to how much time a tourist could spend at any particular site.

Physical Planning of the sites visited was haphazardly done, no allocation of spaces for varied uses and no evidence of landscaping except for the trees and ill maintained shrubs seen.

Apart from the heritage recognition of these sites by both the State and Federal Governments, there are no other forms of direct or indirect interventions either in ways of development or policies. As earlier indicated, the Idanre hills are beginning to receive attention.

6. Recommendations Based on Findings

Although, Nigeria is an upcoming country in tourism development and so much to gain from developing the sector, the sector must be developed sustainably in order to enhance the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability of the tourist areas (Dimoska, 2008, Choi and Sirakayab, 2006). Sustainability is not only about being self-sustaining but also about being sensitive to local community needs and concerns, recognizing the importance of all the people in the decision making process (Ozgen, 2003). Thus, all stakeholders in the tourism sector must be guided by the following recommendations:

- **Development of Infrastructure:** infrastructures i.e. roads, water, electricity, communication facilities, and health and safety services should be developed and provided in manners that will minimise the ecological footprints of tourism, and to a standard that encourages internal and international tourism. This is the only way the positive gains from tourism can be maximized (Sautter and Leisen, 1999) and the proportion of income that is lost to local areas defined by Prosser (2002) as leakages can be controlled. This requires the

understanding of the many ways that tourism profits can leak out of an economy (Vaugeois, 2000) and allow for effective strategies can be devised to minimize it.

- **Active Promotion Policies and Marketing Strategies:** actively promoting tourism through policies and planning are necessary for the development of tourism while at the same time monitoring and dealing with possible adverse effects of tourism on the local economy. As noted by Zhang, Chong, and Ap (1999), government taking an active role in the development of tourism is essential without which it is unlikely that the industry could act alone.
- **Implementing Better Land Use Planning:** this will help minimize the ecological footprints of tourism. Stakeholders should endeavour to assess the physical impact of tourism to enhance the preservation of the implementation.
- **Gathering Statistics on Tourism:** In most tourist destinations in Nigeria, there are no available on visitors and tourist infrastructure. Such statistics is vital for planning and optimal resource allocation within the tourism sector.
- **Tourism Awareness:** There should be an effective campaign in the media about tourism and tourism sites in the country to encourage internal demand for tourism.
- **Encouraging Touring Training and Education:** Effective training and education should be provided in order to create professionalisms in the industry towards efficiency in service delivery. This is necessary to encourage the much needed entrepreneurship in the industry if the backward and forward linkages tourism normally forges with the local economy can materialise.

7. Conclusion

The analysis shows that although developing countries like Nigeria have huge tourism potentials, the sector needs to be supported and developed for the benefits to accrue. However, in developing the sector, stringent efforts should be made to minimise the ecological footprints of tourism through the design and specification of materials and services. Furthermore, it is certainly the case that for mono-cultural economies such as Nigeria, the need for economic diversification is overwhelming and this is predicated upon the need to create employment and income on the one hand, and on the other, to conserve foreign exchange outflows attributable to tourism and maximise foreign exchange inflows from tourism and thereby strive for macroeconomic stability. The paper has elaborated on the need for tourism to be developed sustainably in order to minimize the ecological footprints. This would require effective planning and participation by all stakeholders.

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