

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CROSS RIVER STATE: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is currently one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries. It accounted for 10% of global GDP or US\$4.7 trillion in 2000. Its development in Nigeria has undergone a gradual and progressive evolution. It is one of the six priority sectors in the Nigerian economic development agenda. In Cross River State, tourism and Agriculture remain the two pillars of the State government's economic development aspirations. The Cross River State Tourism Bureau established in 2003 is responsible for the handling of all matters relating to tourism development in the State, which is blessed with both natural and manmade tourist attractions, among which are Mary Slessor's Residence in Odukpani, Amazing Grace Marina at Freedom Bay Calabar, Tinapa and Calabar Free Trade Zones, Agbokim Waterfalls, Obudu Cattle Ranch with the longest cable car in West Africa, the Cross River National Park, Afi Mountain Wildlife Sanctuary, among others. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of many projects in the State has not been carried out.

Long term use of many of these tourist sites may result in negative impacts on the ecosystem that justified the creation of the resorts in the first place. Benefits accruing to local communities have not been substantial. It was recommended that EIA be carried out in all the tourist sites to avoid the consequences of overuse of the resources. Public enlightenment campaigns, seminars and workshops should be organized for the benefit of local communities, who should also be provided with micro credit facilities to invest in the tourism industry.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is currently the largest industry and one of the fastest growing sectors in the world. Sustainable tourism, as defined by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the World Tourism Organization and the Earth's Council, "meets the needs of present tourist and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support system" (WTTC/WTO and Earth Council, 1999). Ecotourism which is subset of sustainable tourism is defined as "environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations" (Celallos Lascuraim [IUCN] 1996).

In 2000, tourism accounted for approximately 10% of global GDP or US\$4.7 trillion (World Tourism Organization 2001). In the ranking of the world's top fifteen tourist nations, the United States placed third while Canada and Mexico ranked seventh and eighth respectively. International

arrivals to the three northern American countries in 1999 totaled nearly 87.3 million (Canada 19.6, Mexico 19.22 United States 48.5 million) arrivals respectively (WTO 2000).

It is also interesting to note that Africa's share of International Tourism receipts grew from US \$88 million in 1950 to US \$1.13 billion in 1975, US \$2.71 billion in 1980, dropped to US \$2.6 billion in 1985 and rose again to US \$3.7 billion in 1990. Between 1980 and 1990, Africa attained the third highest average annual growth rate of tourist's arrivals (Groth, 2000). Today, tourism is regarded as very important to the economy of over 125 countries. United Nations World Tourism Organization (2004) indicated that tourism could provide immense benefits in the areas of poverty alleviation through the creation of small and medium size tourism businesses. This also has the impact of raising environmental, cultural and social awareness. Most African countries, like Nigeria, are therefore, cashing in on these developments, particularly in the area of eco-tourism. Zimbabwe is expected to earn more than \$2.86 billion this year, making tourism its third largest foreign currency earner after agriculture and mining.

Africa, particularly the continent's tourism-leading nations, like Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe, are investing heavily in tourism. The situation is not different in the West African sub region, where countries like Ghana, which is seriously developing its eco-tourism potentials, has registered a sustained annual growth of 12% in tourist revenues. This development is expected to attain a peak of \$1.6 billion by 2010, making the sector one of its largest foreign exchange earners in the nearest future. Ghana's ecotourism programme currently focuses on the central region, including the Kakum National Park, where forest elephants, seven species of primates and high antelope and bird diversity provide tremendous potentials for ecotourism.

Nigeria is a richly endowed nation with a huge landmass of 924,000 89 km² and an estimated population of over 160 million people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The country is strategically located between the tropical latitude 4⁰ and 14⁰ in the Northern Hemisphere. Nigeria's natural endowment include a wide expanse of vegetation with different varieties of flora stretching from the equatorial rain forest belt in the south to the semi-desert in the North. The country's vegetation belts are traversed by rivers of various sizes and interspersed by hills and mountain ranges (Orungbemi, 2009).

This has placed Nigeria undoubtedly as a potential tourism destination in the globe. Consequently, both the Federal Government of Nigeria and some States have taken advantage of these developments to invest in the sector. The commitment of the government of Cross River State in the development of tourism has received tremendous support at both local and national level. However, it has been recognized that the successful long term management of protected areas as well as nature-based tourism projects depend largely on the involvement of the local (host) communities. Support should be targeted in the areas of enlightenment of the people, revenue sharing, participation in decision making, appropriate development schemes near tourist destinations as well as local empowerment. These are areas that can enhance sustainability. More recently, there is a growing awareness of the complex link between poverty, development and environment. This has led to the search for ways of ensuring that nature-based tourism is people-oriented (Orungbemi, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Personal visits were made to the prominent ecotourism sites in the state to assess the state of development of the sites and the level of their reutilization. Discussions were held with the chiefs and opinion leaders in

the communities where the tourism sites are located. Information was also obtained from the Cross River State Tourism Bureau. The data obtained was analyzed and presented in the form of bar charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tourism Development in Nigeria

Tourism development in Nigeria has undergone a gradual and progressive evolution. The history of tourism as an organized sector can be traced to the establishment of the Nigerian Tourism Association in 1962. The country was admitted as a full member of the International Union of Official Travel Organization (IUOTO) now World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 1964. Through the efforts of this body, the Nigerian Tourism Board was established later under Decree 54 of 1976 taking over the responsibilities of the Nigerian Tourism Association. In 1992, Decree 81 established the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC). The corporation is the apex tourism agency of the Federal Government charged with the overall promotion, marketing and co-ordination of tourism activities in the country. The commitment of the present administration in the realization of the tourism policy objectives of the country is quite commendable. The government has made tourism one of the six priority sectors in its economic development agenda alongside oil, gas, agriculture, manufacturing and solid materials. A Ministry of Tourism and Culture has been established by the present administration to oversee the proper functioning and operations of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC). A presidential Council on the Tourism (PCT) has also been inaugurated with the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as chairman, while all the State Governors of the 36 States of the federation are members. Meetings of the council are held on regular basis to deliberate on various strategies and programmes of tourism development in the country. Some dividends have begun to accrue from

these developments, judging from the recent WTO reports on global tourism destinations as presented by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in his address during the World Tourism Day Celebration held in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The report indicated that tourists to Nigeria spent ₦150 million on accommodation and allied matters in 2001. It further stated that a total revenue of ₦85 billion was regarded as proceeds from tourism in the past three years (2001-2003) adding that tourists to Nigeria in 2001, 2002 and 2003 stood at ₦850,000, ₦887,000 and ₦1037,790 respectively. The President noted that the corresponding financial receipts for the period stood at \$171 million in 2001, \$200 million in 2002 and \$234 million in 2003.

To further strengthen the steps so far taken by government in the development of the sub-sector, the Presidential Council on Tourism has adopted the Harmattan Holiday season as part of the National Tourism Policy. This was in recognition of the need to encourage Nigerians spend most of their holidays within Nigeria and play host to friends and relations outside the country during this auspicious period. The federal government has also begun the intensification of its national sensitization efforts through well publicized and attended national seminars and conferences aimed at confidence building and forging of a renewed understanding between the private and public sector. It has also been recorded that an encouraging number of State Governors are increasing their investments in tourism infrastructure complexes and cultural industries, thus laying the foundation for job creation and poverty alleviation through tourism.

Tourism Development in Cross River State

The economy of Cross River State was in the past characterized by a prolonged insignificant growth with increasing incidences of poverty (estimated at over 70%), high unemployment rate, growing income inequality and declining ethical standards. More than 75% of the

population in the State is engaged in subsistence farming with an annual turnover below average. The State is uniquely located within three vegetation belts of mangrove swamps, tropical rainforest and savannah, thus, tourism and agriculture remain the two pillars of the present administration's economic development aspirations. These are two key areas in the State, which can be exploited effectively to improve the economy.

The Cross River State Government is, therefore, poised to transform the State economy into a viable one through these two sub-sectors. This is expected to propel the State into a leading Nigerian State with prosperous healthy and well-educated citizens. To achieve these laudable goals, the government plans to create an enabling environment for an effective transition from public sector to a private sector driven economy. Other areas are infrastructural development, including opening of access roads and urban development as well as the promotion of tourism as the development flagship of the State. For a State with vast natural resources and a limited industrial base, tourism is an important source of generating the much-needed foreign exchange. It will also provide opportunities for creating jobs, encourage local entrepreneurship as well as reduce the growing incidences of rural-urban migration. The tourism sector in the State is also an avenue for redistributing wealth thereby improving the economy of the local people.

The policy thrust of the Government of Cross River State towards tourism development is quite commendable, as evident in the establishment of the Cross River State Tour Bureau (CRSTB) and the development of infrastructures at various tourism sites in the State. The Bureau was established in 2003 with the sole responsibility of handling all matters relating to tourism development in the State. Specifically, the Bureau is to modernize Cross River State without compromising the cultural values of the people, encouraging sustainable tour planning and

development for the social and economic benefits of the people of Cross River State. Other responsibilities are sustainable development of tourist attractions, accommodation facilities, service delivery, transportation and other related infrastructures. These include the development and operation of the institutional structure necessary for the regulation of individuals and commercial concerns that provide and operate tourism facilities, services and infrastructures in the State. The government of Cross River State has registered significant level of achievements in some of these areas as reflected below:

Cross River State Tourism Circuit

The Cross River State tourism policy initiative is predicated on modernizing the State through tourism but commensurate with the capacity of the State government to sustain the tempo of its development. To achieve these goals, a tourism circuit is now operational to showcase the number of tourist sites that abound in the State. The circuit has two main entry points: the southern and northern points. These two major entries can be accessed through three different means of transport – air, land, and water. Below are some of the interesting sites in the circuit.

Mary Slessor's Residence

This house was built in 1887 at Okoyong in Odukpani Local Government Area of the State for the female legend of the “save the twins” fame – Mary Slessor. A Scottish carpenter, Charles Owen, constructed the house. He is also linked with the building of other structures in and around Calabar during the same period. The building is standing on a concrete base with the main living areas elevated on concrete piers. This magnificent structure showcases the tropical style of large verandahs at the front and rear, maintaining an air of missionary style.

Tinapa and Calabar Free Trade Zone

Apart from the development of existing tourism facilities in the State, the Cross River State Government has registered another giant stride by the takeoff of the latest world class tourism project known as “TINAPA”. Tinapa is a business tourism project incorporating shopping malls, restaurants, cinemas and other high volume cash flow businesses mixed with a variety of leisure including water sports and golf, all enjoyed within the same environment. The project site has already been designated as a FREE TRADE ZONE (FTZ) with all the attendant benefits and advantages to both investors and tenants. Structured to fit into the international architectural designs by experts in terms of tourism and business scope, the Tinapa project has been put in place to meet the requirements of the goal of the New Partnership for African Development – NEPAD. The project is now known officially as “TINAPA FREE ZONE AND RESORT”.

Another major boost to the tourism initiatives of the present administration in the State is the establishment of the Calabar Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) by the Federal Government. The restructuring of the EPZ to a FREE TRADE ZONE (FTZ) will help government keep tract of foreign trade as well as its revenue flow because informal trade is discouraged. Smuggling is also drastically reduced as a result of the low and flexible tariff structure. The combination of the operations of the TINAPA and Calabar FREE TRADE ZONES will further promote the growth of tourism in the State. Infact, TINAPA project is tailored towards playing a catalytic role in placing Calabar as a trade and distribution centre in West Africa, while at the same time providing unique tourism experience that will promote growth of the Nigerian tourism sector. The Tinapa and Calabar Free Trade Zones will add glamour to the tourism industry in Cross River State.

Agbokim Water Falls

This is a very attractive scenery of seven stream waterfalls located in the central part of Cross River State. The waterfall is fed by streams from the Republic of Cameroon. The roaring of the falls normally rise to a deafening level during the rainy season with intimidating and awesome heights. The waterfalls will definitely play a significant role in the power sector by meeting the Federal Government's plan to increase its power generating capacity in the country.

Obudu Ranch Resort

Obudu Ranch Resort is situated on the Obudu Plateau, which is a western off-shoot of the Bamenda highlands of South Western Cameroon extending into Southeast Nigeria. The stunning and captivating landscape located at 1,500 metres above sea level makes the Ranch a major tourist centre not only in the State but in the country. The Ranch Resort has brought into focus a new standard in levels of excitement, romance and luxury.

It is organized basically to provide tourists with hotel accommodation/tourism, ranching services & animal husbandry, and games facilities.

Vegetable Gardening

The definition has everything that it takes to enjoy a weekend holiday, state visits, board meetings, medically advised rest under breathtaking scenery and natural mountain vegetation with temperate climate all year round.

All Mountain Nature Reserve/Afi Wildlife Sanctuary

Afi Mountain/Nature Reserve is one of the last remaining reserves and Tropical Rain Forests in West Africa. The Protected Area is home to the

most successful rehabilitation programme for Drill Monkeys in the world today. This is also where Africa's longest canopy walkway covering a length of 388 meters is located. The walkway is a marvel with a bird's view of the rain forest from its viewing platform. All Reserve also provides very comfortable accommodation on its very natural environment with modern interior décor and comfortable finishing.

Prospects of Sustainable Tourism Development in Cross River State

Tourist's Satisfaction

In order to fully realize its aspirations of making the State the flagship of tourism in the country, the Cross River State Government has commenced development of new tourism sites as well as the upgrading of facilities at already existing sites. Consequently, project that need immediate attention are under various levels of development at various sites across the State. These include the Calabar Marina, Qua Falls, the Nkarasi Monoliths, Agbokim Waterfalls, Drill Ranch/Afi Mountain Sanctuary and the Obudu Ranch Resort. Outstanding achievements have been recorded particularly in the expansion of accommodation/recreational facilities in the Obudu Ranch Resort, completion and commissioning of one of the longest cable cars in the world and a Water Park all at the Ranch. Also completed are the two canopy walk-ways each at the Ranch and Afi Wildlife Sanctuary as well as the final design of the State Tourism Circuit expected to package and market the tourism potentials of the State.

Work on the Tinapa Free Trade Zone project is also in progress particularly in the area of the development of its major structures and facilities. Already over ₦10 billion has been committed into the project. Support infrastructures, like the roads, sewage, lake and water are funded by the state government. Government is also investing heavily on the expansion of internal road network within Calabar, including the plan to

build a mono-rail from the airport direct to the zone. Air transport facilities at the Margaret Ekpo International Airport, Calabar will be expanded to meet the anticipated growing traffic at the zone when commissioned. The Uyo International Airport under construction by the Akwa Ibom State Government is expected to provide essential transport support including cargo services not only for Tinapa but also for the Calabar Free Zone. The influx of tourists to the State in recent times has received a boost following these developments. Furthermore, the State has become a major centre of attraction for various international meetings, conferences, seminars and training workshops at both local and international levels.

Host Community Development

The growth of tourism in any nation is linked to a functional rural infrastructure network including regular supply of electricity, pipe borne water, good road network and a clean environment, particularly at various destinations. Other linkages are accessibility to tourism destinations by air, land and sea. The State government has registered outstanding achievements in this direction by opening more access roads in Calabar, Ugep, Ikom, Ogoja and Obudu in line with its Urban Renewal Programme. Government has also scored above average in the provision of electricity to rural communities in the State. Over 100 communities have so far benefited from this programme. The Ranch, which is the most prominent destination is now accessible by road and air. An agreement has been signed with Aero Contractors for the effective management of the Bebi Airstrip. The extension of the runway in the airstrip from 1.8 km - 2 km includes the expansion of its facilities to accommodate larger aircrafts. The holistic approaches in the development of infrastructures by government will not only serve the needs of tourists, but local communities where these destinations are located.

Policy Implementation

So far, the Government of Cross River State has demonstrated that tourism development is the State's flagship in which substantial investment can be made. According to the Personnel Communications, Esin, L., the greatest challenge before the administration is to ensure that the people of the State reap substantial benefits from these huge investments. The tourism policy thrust of the State is well articulated and capable of transforming the fortunes of the entire people of Cross River State. The pan of the administration is to modernize the State through tourism rather than westernize it. Above all, the pace of development of tourism in the State is expected to be commensurate with the capacity of government to sustain the trend of development. This will require putting in place policies that will ensure economic empowerment of host communities, skills acquisition and capacity building for sustainable management of what has been put in place. The State government has addressed some of these issues through various local and international training programmes embarked upon by the Tourism Bureau. Seminars have also been organized to sensitize Cross River State people for full participation in the various tourism business opportunities that abound in the state. Regulatory policies have also been put in place to monitor and ensure that standards are maintained by those already engaged in various tourism activities in the State.

Challenges

Although these efforts by government are quite commendable, it is also imperative that we examine other issues that are bound to impact negatively on sustainable tourism development in the State be examined.

Ecological Issues

The development of tourism infrastructures often put pressure on natural resources due to increase in consumption, particularly where resources are limited. In Cross River State, Government has not taken into account various strategies to ensure that a quality environment and ecological balance is maintained and protected in the tourism sites. Most important is the omission of EIA of the various projects across the State. EIA is expected to ensure that project planning and execution fall in harmony with nature. This provides for sophisticated and comfortable modern facilities for tourists where environmental protection and preservation are given due consideration. Lack of commitment by government in addressing environmental matters is bound to have serious implications on the quality of tourists' sites in the future. In the case of Obudu Ranch Resort, the development of tourism infrastructures has put pressure on the fragile ecosystem of the Obudu Plateau. Although recreational activities as well as infrastructural development presently in the Resort (such as picnicking, mountain racing, golfing, cable car operation, expansion of accommodation for tourists, etc) might have relatively low impact in the present settings, long term use may result in negative impacts on this ecosystem that justified the creation of the resort.

Income Leakages

Today, tourism has become one of the largest and dynamically developing sectors of external economic activities all over the world. It has a high growth and development rate, considerable volume of foreign exchange inflows, infrastructural development as well as new management and educational experience. There is no doubt that in many African countries, tourism is major employer of labour and source of foreign exchange. In a state like Cross River, this can actively affect various sectors of its economy thus contributing to her social and economic development as

well as that of Nigeria as a whole. However, large hotel chains and other agencies including those in the transport businesses that are expected to provide opportunities for the employment of local people often prefer expatriate staff and import all their basic needs including food and other major items to satisfy foreign tourists. Local staff are rarely engaged, except in junior positions. In the management of Protea Hotel in the Ranch, for instance, all local staff in its employ are in the junior cadre because senior management positions are strictly reserved for foreigners. At the Tinapa Free Trade Zone, the situation is not quite different. The major contractor at site is a foreign company - Julius Berger. The Tinapa Board has taken a decision that of all subcontracts in the zone (constituting 30% of the overall contracts) engaged in various constructions in the zone, over 98% will be Nigerians with 75% of Cross River State people. The extent to which indigenes of the State are benefiting from these policies is a matter for further investigations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In many African countries today, tourism is a major source of jobs and foreign exchange. It provides enormous incentives for government to manage natural environments as well as historic sites. In theory, this can increase the value of maintaining important and historic sites, thereby providing both government and local communities with incentives for protecting the area. In practice however, the benefits accruing to local communities have not been substantial, while there are negative impacts on tourist destinations. However, to ensure sustainability in the development and management of the vast tourism potentials that abound in the State, government host communities. The issue of environmental impact assessment at the various sites should also be given the expected attention. This will avert the consequences of overuse of resources in tourism destinations. It is pertinent to emphasize that unless proper steps

are taken by government to protect the interest of the people of the State, the huge investments that have been put in place to develop the tourism sub sector will not yield the expected benefits.

In this context, economic and social impacts on the people of the State, particularly the host (local) communities depend on how much of the income generated by the sub-sector goes specifically to them. The government should, therefore, intensify its efforts in ensuring that Cross River State people are empowered for a more effective participation in the activities of the industry. Public enlightenment campaigns, seminars, workshops and the provisions of micro credit facilities to interested Cross River State people, specifically for the purpose of investing in the sectors, will encourage local participation as well as sustainability. Finally, through legislation the State Government can create the enabling environment for full participation of host communities in the sector and ensure the use of local resources in preference to imports on sustainable basis.

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