

**CULTURAL TOURISM: A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
FOR NIGERIA RURAL AREAS**

BY

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Abstract

Without cultural heritage, there would not be any tourism. One's future depends on the others, (Sanusi, 2002). Regions, and settlement in Nigeria do not only serve as centers of production and consumption, they also epitomize and synthesized the cultures of their residents. A survey carried out in some rural communities revealed that these cultures are rooted essentially in the history of each community, but is disheartening to note that as the rural communities are aging, these cultural heritages and crafts also suffers either partial or total neglect and abandonment. A survey carried out in some rural communities in the Ekiti Local Government area of Kwara State revealed that, as richly blessed as these communities are in terms of cultural tourism resources endowment, physical and socio-economic development is almost stagnant due to neglect or non-exploration of the various distinctive and unique resource embedded in their domain. Further findings revealed that as a sustainable economic development tool in Nigeria, heritage features have economic values that can sufficiently contribute to economic revitalization, especially in the rural areas if effectively developed and marketed. Since tourism, exposes, develops and market culture of the people, the paper thus recommends an holistic approach to cultural heritage conservation in Nigeria rural areas to include comprehensive cultural plan, packaging and exposition, partnership of stakeholders all providing an inclusive and integrated approach to cultural heritage development through tourism.

Key words: Culture, Cultural Heritage, Tourism, Rural Areas, Rural Development.

Introduction

Tourism is a relevant domain of knowledge that cuts across several boundaries. It is attached to different human needs and wants outside normal work. It provides job opportunities, small-scale businesses for several people with different cultural background.

Tourism turns culture into displayable objects and visitable places. Through travel programmes and documentaries on television, advertising, promotional brochures and films, tourism has generated a vast and continual flow of images and discourses about other cultures. Accordingly, tourism is crucial to the population and diffusion of an imaginary that views the world as displayed. That world is composed of a 'cultural mosaic' of familiar ethnic and cultural differences, all of which are thought of in visitable terms: they appear to reside 'in' places, where we come to think of as destinations. In this way, tourism helps to circulate a kind of 'National geographic' perspective on the world, in which selected, highly demarcated cultural identities are expected to be on display in different places.

From the above, it has been established that tourism enables millions of people to gaze on their culture and other cultures at first hand. It offers 'customized excursions into other cultures and place' and tourists leave with merchandizing, snapshots and souvenirs that epitomize and evidence the cultural identity they have visited, rather than 'dead' culture, in the form of stone monuments and empty palaces, tourists today are seeking 'live culture', in the form of people and their 'colourful, customs, (Wahab and Cooper, 2001).

On the other hand, tourism enables millions of people to gaze on other peoples culture at first hand, while tourism delivers visitors to a huge range of different destinations quickly and easily, once often in the form of representations than actualities. It is expedient to note therefore that in tourism enclave, historic city centres, museums, theme parks, festivals, heritage sites, monuments and exhibitions, local cultures is displayed and in most cases turns tourism, which consequently promotes and enhances physical and economic growth especially in the rural areas.

Literature Review

Tourism has grown significantly in both economic and social importance, the fastest growing economic sector of most industrialized countries over the past several years, (Theobald, 2005:5), with overwhelming impact on virtually any economic measure, including gross output, value added, capital investment, employment and tax contribution (WTTC, 2003), when nurtured for sustainable national growth, tourism could be described as prime generator of job in the economy and a great stimulus for foreign investors. (Faoseke, 2001:16).

It was also defined as the “science, art and business of attracting and transporting visitors, accommodating them and graciously catering for their needs and wants” Ayodele and Falade (1990:1). This implies that any activity that voluntarily and temporarily takes a person away from his/her place of residence in order to satisfy a need, either for pleasure, excitement, and experience and or relaxation can be termed tourism. Consequently, as rightly put by Faoseke, (2001:16), the history, culture and the people, the preservation and conservation of wide life are among the basic elements of tourism.

Culture is on the other hand, “that complex whole, which including knowledge, belief, art; aw, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society”, (Darsic, 1996:14). Culture is the way of life of a group of people. It embodies all aspects of life of a group of people including their beliefs, style of life, dress altitudes, and other important attributes, which are unique to, and shared by members of the group. The importance lies in the fact that it produces the knowledge and the techniques that enable man to survive by physically and socially and to master and control in so far as it is possible the world around him.

Unlike other animals, men have few, if any, instinctive skills and instinctive knowledge, which might enable him to sustain himself an in fact the possession of culture, is one of crucial distinction between man and other animals. Also, culture is both learnt and shared. Men do not inherit them during the course of their lives. All aspects of culture are learned from the group into which individual are born and in which they live.

Contemporary tourism attractions are typically focused, then, on the experiential: destinations in which tourism can sample different socio cultural realities. Tourism offers 'customized excursions into other cultures and places' and tourists leave with the merchandizing, snapshots and souvenirs that epitomize and evidence the cultural identity they have 'visited'. Rather than dead, in the form of stone monuments and empty places, tourists today are seeking 'live' culture, in the form of people and their 'colourful customs'. Culture has thus become central to tourism, just as tourism has to culture.

Consequently, tourism has expanded and diversified into a huge global system. Already by 1992, tourism – as defined by the World Tourism Organization had become the world's largest industry in terms of nearly all the usual economic indicators, including employment, gross output and capital investment (Theobald, 2005:6), since then, international arrivals have continued to multiply yearly, and now number over 700 million every year. They are expected to reach 1.6 billion by 2020, whilst in 1950 the figure was just 25 million. Although Europe remains at the top of the league in terms of international arrivals, in 2003 Asia and the Pacific moved into second place, ahead of the Americans, for the first time. Arrivals in North-East Asia climbed particularly steeply, registering a 12 per cent increase, whilst South-East saw 4 per cent increase (WTO, Website). Japan and China – including Hong-Kong and Macau – as well as Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia, have all become major destinations (although the SARS – severe acute respiratory syndrome), outbreak of 2003 caused a temporary dip in figures.

Consequent to this, therefore, this global tourism system relies on high levels of standardization in infrastructure and facilities on the one hand, yet it also needs to be supplied with a highly diversified array of different holiday on the other. These experiences have to look into the multiple segments of today's consumer markets. Culture enables holidays to be packaged and promoted to match the fantasies and desires of every conceivable marketing niche. During the heyday of mass tourism in the decades immediately before and after Second World War, holidays were more standardized and limited – both temporarily and spatially – than they are now, (Nagle, 1999:144).

It is not out of place to say at this juncture that the richest cultures and places stimulating widespread interest around the world as discussed, dwell and abound mostly in the rural areas. These rural treasures, natural and man-made in Nigeria rural places, in most cases

are either hidden or not adequately utilized and not exposed. This is basically because rural communities in Nigeria have been cut off from the mainstream of urban life because previous governments lacked effective machinery for the implementation of rural development plans,(George, 1999:20). This has also affected the development of local cultural and natural heritages in Nigeria. The implication therefore, is that while these cultural components are issues of history and emotion, they are also of economic and environmental value (Sanusi, 2002:2). Here comes the question of tourism as a potential catalyst for cultural development and its consequent efforts on the economic growth of host communities. In view of this, therefore, serious tourism development and promotion helps to create jobs and business in the most undeveloped regions of any country in helping to equalize economic opportunities throughout a nation and providing an incentive for residents to remain in rural areas rather than move to overcrowded cities, (WTO, 1990).

Cultural Tourism in Nigeria

Insufficient attention to the historical aspects of developments is a set back to the challenges facing tourism development in Nigeria. One can not say Nigeria is ready for international tourism because the populace has not yet prepare to accept the idea of having in their locality streams of foreign visitors as well as having to ‘sell’ ‘market’ aspects of their culture, social life and the surrounding natural environments to tourists. While wide life and natural geomorphic features may be common to regions and countries, cultural activities represent the unique attractions that a country could preserve and promote for tourism. Unfortunately, our histories and culture have been little documented, let alone packed for tourism.

A number of tourists cultural facilities also been designed through poor maintaining, management and misuse. Apart from aiming to implement Nigeria’s environmental policy to check degradation, it is desirable that mass education programmes be embarked upon to promote the right environmental ethics and values. A major weakness in Nigeria in preparation for cultural tourism is that culture is still very much foreign to the people.

Tourism is seen as the exclusive pressure of the rich and affluent who can afford both the cost and time needed for trips.

Culture-based tourism takes advantages of the culture attributes of a society and environment and opens them up to tourists. Opportunities for cultural tourism in Nigeria, some of which include the Argungun Fishing Festival, Osun Cultural Festival, Tiv Poppet Show, Durbar Displays, Yam Festivals, Masquerade displays and a host of other festivals. Traditional arts and crafts as well as historical monuments and traditional religious relics are also examples of cultural tourism resources. Some cultural festivals, which originally started as local activities, have blossom in national and international fame. They include the Argungun Fishing Festival in Sokoto State, Osun Cultural Festival in Osun State, Tiv Puppet Show (Kwagh-hir) in Benue State and Durbar Displays in Northern Nigeria. Atilogu Dance (Anambra State), Awon Mass Wedding Festival in Shao, Kwara State, Eyo Masquerade Festival in Lagos State, Bakor Yam Festival in Cross Rivers State and others. Indeed the practice of cultural tourism is so well entrenched in Nigeria in recent times to the extent that it may require a significant research and documentation of its own in order to fathom the role it plays in inter-ethnic relationships and socio-economic development, (Marguba 2001:15).

In spite of the enormous rich cultural endowment in Nigeria as discussed above, it is disturbing to note that, like most things in Nigeria cultural tourism is one very complex and rich aspect of our life, which is not receiving the attention it deserves.

Cultural Heritage Preservation and Rural Tourism Development

Cultural policy for Nigeria recognizes the three arms of the arts namely literary, performing and visual arts (Incorporating crafts) as vehicles for cultural expression in their various states of presentation, promoting, and propagation, while the mass media of radio, television, newspapers and magazines are veritable medium for cultural transmission, (Oluwole, 2001:135).

Such cultural heritage include, parks and sites, monuments (for example, old city walls, gates, palaces, shrines, private or public building of historical significance and

monumental sculptures), museums (for example, of antiquities, traditional and contemporary deposits), hall of fame, galleries, and craft centres, theatres and festivals (for example, traditional, communal, contemporary and anniversaries including commemorations).

From the above, therefore, we can admit that cultural heritage comprises the complexity of all those activities of our whether tangible, through, which we express ourselves and our values for other people to appreciate and patronize. The context of promoting these heritages for people to patronize and appreciate their beauty and content is embedded in cultural tourism, and thus an important and sustainable component and strategy for effective rural growth in Nigeria.

It is expedient to note that presently most of these cultural endowments are either exhibited locally or even abandoned in majority of our rural communities in Nigeria. Consequent to this, therefore, many economic benefits that should have accrued to such communities through these cultural attractions were never available while many are experiencing degradation and even abandonment, especially in our rural places or communities.

The need to preserve these cultural heritages therefore is eminent; not only for protecting and keeping culture for generation to come, but also to enable these cultures contribute to the well-being of the rural communities through tourism. Without mixing words, preservation of culture in Nigeria is weak, and thus the need to embrace a more conservative principle and life style in protecting our natural and man-made endowments. Though, the absence of adequate infrastructure and financial backing for large resources of cultural products and personnel may constitute an impediment to cultural heritage preservation. Carelessness, ignorance and illiteracy are also major clog in the wheel of effective cultural heritage preservation in Nigeria rural areas.

In view of the above, government should endeavour to carry out a survey of both natural and man-made heritage in every community so as to know the potentials available for cultural and rural development in Nigeria for protection and conservation.

Cultural heritage is better protected through, normative instruments, such as international conventions and recommendations; through operations to restore and recover imperiled works of art; through research and training into new conservation techniques; through reinforce activities relating to the preservation, collection, revitalization and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage; and through tourism development.

Research Method

Five most developed rural communities were selected (Obbo-Ile, Obbo- Ayegunle, Araromi-Opin, Eruku and Ekan- Meje) from Ekiti Local Government Area of Kwara State. The selection was carried out with reference to the physical development (spatial coverage) and population of the settlements. Questionnaires were administered and oral questioning conducted amidst village heads and or spokesmen of each settlement as the case may be. These target audience were chosen due to the type of information required for this research work. Information collected were collated and summarized as reported below.

Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Rural Economy in Ekiti Local Government Area

Everyone interested in promoting tourism in Nigeria today must see it as something beyond mere economic venture. Tourism is one of the best ways of portraying, exhibiting and promoting our cultural heritage, tradition and even our image to both local and international observers.

This culture in other words is dynamic and productive, since human beings create and change culture, (Oluwole, 2001:123). In this context, therefore, trading our culture for economic gain opens up the hidden treasures of our culture, changes and modifies our culture with the influence and introduction of similar or superior culture. This in turn

facilitates citizens' empowerment by creating employments, promoting trade and skills, physical growth and outright exposure of beliefs and local traditions to the world around. The arts and crafts of varied media and materials, dances, songs and music of Nigeria rural communities constitutes vast storehouse for festivals and carnival (Alagoa, 1988), such as annual dance festivals, installation of new king, masquerade displays, etc. with each community having and displaying a distinctive style, exhibiting their local and inherited cultural attributes. Other local cultural elements are crafts, such as blacksmithing, cloth weaving, tie and dye, etc.

It is also evident from the local culture that the numerous artistic traditions of our past are today being modified for economic reasons, apart from their socio-physical, aesthetic, or economic value to the people also reveal the ingenuity of local craftsmen in using abundant local materials and tools to produce such useful artistic quality, (Nwafor 1982:104).

Consequent to this therefore, survey carried out in some rural communities in Ekiti Local Government Area of Kwara State, (Obbo-Ile, Eruku, Ekan Meje, Araromi-Opin and Obbo-Aiyegunle) revealed that these communities are blessed with historic arts and cultural attributes, ranging from weaving, tie and dye, blacksmithing, historic monuments, natural and man-made attractions to cultural festivals of various forms and magnitudes, (see table 1). The festivals as revealed from the survey includes, masquerades, unique cultural displays staged to celebrate important events, such as new yam festivals, coronations etc. It is surprising to note that as close as these settlements, each settlement has its own distinctive festivals, except for Obbo-Ile and Obbo-Aiyegunle, which from history are the same community but separated due to conflicts.

Consequently, most of these distinctive cultural tourism resources are not well developed, while activities and product of same are staged and market locally with little or no financial gain. This, the communities complained has caused a lot of depression and has also resulted into the lingering physical and economic development in their area. It is not out of place therefore, to say that if some of these cultures are sufficiently financed and

exposed to the outside world, will attract tourists from far and near. In short, if at least a tourism site, craft or festival in each of these towns is developed; it will open them up, and consequently enhance economic and physical development in its entire ramifications. Sequel to this therefore, using what is available in each community to develop them will not only attract socio-economic and sustainable physical development, it will amount to the active involvement of the local people in the developmental project or programme that will affect them.

Table 1: Communities and Cultural Tourism Resources

Community	Historic Monuments	Cultural Festivals	Arts	Craft
Obbo-Ile	✓	✓	✓	✓
Obbo-Aiyegunle	✓	✓	✓	✓
Araromi-Opin	x	✓	x	✓
Eruku	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ekan Meje	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Authors Field Survey, 2009

It is evident that every member of these communities will benefit in one way or the other from the proceeds and products of these tourism attractions if effectively promoted, marketed and managed. This is because when tourists are attracted to any community, it enhances trade, efficient transportation, communication, job opportunities, etc. all these in a short time will metamorphous into economic, social and physical growth of such community.

It is disturbing to note that despite the naturally blessed and traditionally enriched arts, crafts and cultural heritages that can effectively change the status of these communities economically and physically but it is disheartening to note that most of these rich attributes are either fading out gradually due to neglect, lack of encouragement or abandonment, lack of awareness and proper exposure of the communities to the benefits of such resources, if properly developed.

The survey further revealed that, neither the state nor local governments have in any way contributed to the development of these cultural resources, but that the little growth they have experienced in recent times was solely from self help efforts.

At this juncture, it is not out of place to say that tourism if effectively managed and sustained can be a comfortable replacement for oil business in Nigeria. The reason being that almost all the local places in the country can boast of at least one distinct culture or art that can be displayed and marketed for economic improvement, which consequently may serve as a sustainable strategy for poverty eradication in the country as a whole.

Planning Implication and Recommendations

Socio-cultural activities could be used as catalyst to develop leisure and attract tourists to rural communities. Tourists will be attracted from within nation initially but later, international tourism will develop. For this to happen, socio-cultural activities like carnivals local and distinctive festivals should be staged at regular intervals. This should be well packaged and properly planned to make a world class attraction for local and international tourists. The local cultures in this context may be tagged, “the principle of making use of what they (the community) have to develop their economy. This, no doubt will generate full communities participation, because they will support and accept every project that affects them willingly.

Also improved environment for economic activities can be attained through cultural tourism development in the rural areas. This may cause commercial activities on the streets to increase significantly while landlords and properties users will experience a boom through enhanced value on their properties and businesses.

The most apparent role of cultural tourism is that it makes the people to know and be acquainted with the value of relaxation, which could be attained inspite of the current economic crisis. Thus this paper calls on the government and entrepreneurs to establish tourism – related industries and activities around tourism site in rural areas to enhance economic and physical development with the private and public sectors from the services

rendered, while the government can also generate the revenue through taxes in the area of value added tax (VAT) from product and businesses evolving from these activities.

The establishment of the cultural centres in the 589 local government headquarters to exhibit and promote tourism will facilitate and enhance cultural transmission and revival, especially in this age of marked alienation. This will penetrate the grassroots and every rich but hidden culture of each rural community will be exposed, found and exhibited for the community's benefit. This suggestion will be more successful if the three tiers of government in form of partnership can investigate and collate viable tourism sites in their area for development.

Also such centres will enhance the teaching of social studies, cultural and creative arts and introductory technology. They are also expected to serve as leisure places for the enjoyment of arts. Cultural tourism also provided some meaningful channels for the simulation and distribution of cultural artifacts and thus viable outlets for the promotion of tourism through arts. Consequence to this therefore, since our rural communities are blessed with diverse cultural artifacts, government should work with the private sector to create a form of synergy that will promote these local arts and foster a sustainable cultural tourism development within the local communities.

Lastly, cultural tourism industry when properly managed will have a profound impact on virtually every sector of the economy ranging from commerce, investment, and transportation consumption to service and employment. This will rapidly transform the local communities into economic viable settlements, expose them to the outside world, and consequently create wealth for sustainability therefore; every stakeholder (public, private and the government) should participate as partners to enhance success. In the light of this therefore, this paper is recommending an incentive participatory and integrated approach to tourism education, awareness, project initiation, monitoring and management, to effectively develop and sustain our rural economies through the natural and man-made endowments of these rural settlements.

CONCLUSION

Rural community in Nigeria has been practicing cultural tourism since historic times. These are manifested in their aged festivals, customs and their material culture. As rich and historic as these cultures, most of them are done or stages locally with little or no economic relevance or value to the communities. This paper have been able to look inward on the need to promote the unique features embedded in the rural areas and recommended appropriately ways to improve on the living condition and physical development of rural communities in Nigeria. The effectiveness of this therefore depends mainly on the proper investigation of all cultural tourism resources (developed and undeveloped) in each community by relevant government agencies, but with the prior knowledge of the locals to facilitate their active involvement. Cost of the development will be budgeted for, and develop accordingly to enhance the local culture, attract tourists and consequently develop the community as a whole.

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