



SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF ECO-TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: Assessing the perceived tourism destination image of a place provides an important diagnostic insight into how tourists perceive the destination which is a very important marketing research tool for planning, development and promotion of her tourism industry. The tourism destination in Taraba State, Nigeria has witnessed tremendous attraction over the years from both domestic and international tourists. This research basically assesses the socio-economic implications of ecotourism development particularly as regards to resorts spots in the state such as the Gashaka Gunti National Park, the Rufu Rock and Water Falls, the Marmara Crocodile Pond and the scenic Mambilla Plateau. However, their socio-economic impacts were assessed based on the level of international patronage and the level of integration of the people toward ecotourism development in the state. Data were collected by a combination of questionnaires, direct field observation and interview. Random sampling technique was adopted to verify the validity of the data collected in the field. Although findings reveal that between 2010 – 2016 there was a great variation in international patronage between the four resorts and also low level of awareness was another setback toward ecotourism development in the state. Nevertheless, ecotourism potentials in Taraba State has the capacity for job creation, poverty reduction, economic growth and general transformation of the entire state if all the stakeholders such as the government and private individual and the general public are committed toward the boosting and development of this laudable industry.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Socio-Economic, Destination, Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of ecotourism strives to harmonize and reconcile issues of intergenerational equity, and the goals of economic growth, environmental protection and social justice. It recognizes the need for fairness between local individuals and groups, and between hosts and guest (Ayodele, 2002) today ecotourism is an important engine of economic growth and job creation of most nation of the world (Prentice, 2007). However, in Taraba State a lots more are of vital natural and man-made capital stock (tourist attractions) bestowed upon the state that are required for the development of any viable tourism product such as scenic; tours; cultural tourism; mountain climbing, biking and treks; ecotourism, religious or spiritual tourism, sports/recreation tourism and among others.

However, despite the state's position of comparative advantage over every other state in Nigeria in tourism attractions, the combined efforts of past government and the untiring efforts of private sectors, all geared towards ensuring that ecotourism gains its rightful place in the development process of the state, the situation on ground clearly shows that Taraba State is still far to claim of being Nigeria's "Nature's Gift to the Nation" and its "Foremost Tourist Destination". Besides, prominent factors have continued to re-echo the pace of development in this industry such as lack of measurable indices for periodic assessment, absence of proper database for effective planning, high level of ignorance, lack of holiday culture, absence of indigenous participation and so amongst others.

In the light of the above, this paper focus on resort potentials as a vehicle for ecotourism development in Taraba State, with regards to its contribution to socio-economic development of Taraba States, level of international patronage, level of integration and participation of the people and the setbacks towards ecotourism development in the area. This paper is part of the growing effort to provide a theoretical framework for the analysis of the relationship between environmental, ecotourism conservation and tourism growth. The core of this analysis is the comprehension of the "sustainable tourism" concept, and the fact that clarity on the subject, and the values and premises that underlie it, is essential if sustainability aims are to be accomplished.

1.1 Towards Sustainable Tourism

The principle of sustainable tourism was proposed as early as 1988 by the World Tourism Organization, with sustainable tourism "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 systems". Recalling previous declarations on tourism, such as the Manila Declaration on world tourism, the Hague Declaration and the Tourism Bill of rights and tourist Code, the Charter for sustainable tourism approved during the World Conference on sustainable tourism, held in Lanzarote in 1995, underlined the

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need to develop a kind to tourism that meets both economic expectations and environmental requirements, and respects not only the social and physical structure of its destination, but also the local population.

But what does such a way of understanding tourism development entail? Which are the major consequences of the adoption of a view aimed at ensuring the sustainable use of resources in tourism based on the diversity of opportunities offered by the local economy? From this perspective, it is useful to underline the principal aspects of sustainability when this is referred to the tourism sector (COOPERFLETCHER-GILBERT-WANHILL, 2000).

The concept of sustainability has a twin valence: on one hand there is the ecological aspect, that is the conservation of the natural equilibrium of all the components of the natural environment (flora, fauna, water resources, etc), on the other hand there is the anthropological aspect, which could be expressed by the persistence of enjoyment of this environment in spite of growing tourist flows.

It is obvious, at least for the economist, that there is a strong relationship between the two characteristics (ecological and anthropological) of sustainability in tourist enterprise. In fact, the degradation of the weaker components of the natural environment, especially if it is irreversible, provokes, first of all, a slowdown in the development of tourist activity, with substantial consequences at a social and economic level. Such a situation of backwardness and impoverishment will subsequently result in a loss of interest in conservation and good use of natural and environmental resources, which are of great interest to tourists. Added to this there is also a substantial loss even in the financial profitability of the different commercial activities concerned.

For this sake it is worthwhile underlining how this interaction between environmental deterioration and economic profitability can be considered as the point which lies at the root of the well-known phenomenon of the life cycle of tourist businesses. In fact, this cycle starts off in areas of great value both in culture and in landscape, when the territory is characterized by environmental high quality. As natural, cultural and environmental resources are assaulted by tourist exploitation, sooner or later the territory concerned passes from “luxury tourism” to “cheap tourism”, appealing to the masses. The short-sightedness of the public authorities and of private operators induces us to assert that the loss in quality-both of the client-tourist and of the natural environment – may be compensated by the quantity, by growth in the number of tourist, hotels, complexes to host tourists and entertainment places in general.

Very soon the unsustainability of such a strategy oriented towards tourism for the masses, emerges in both its economic and environmental negative consequences. The elasticity of the demand for tourist services – when faced with a reduction in prices – beyond a certain level of decadence of these services and of environmental quality – shows a value which is inferior to the unit and shows a declining trend, with a consequential reduction in the profitability of the commercial tourist enterprises, in general.

At the same time, the congestion created by the influx of a greater number of tourists determines degradation in the environment, in the landscape, in the flora and fauna while transport and restaurant services reach levels which are incompatible with an efficient running of the businesses from an economic point of view. When such a situation reaches drastic limits, the whole region – from an initial situation of a sort of “heavenly isolated paradise” which justified “luxury tourism” – is hit by phenomena of tourist desertification, with serious situations of environmental deterioration, which are frequently irreversible, which are linked with bankruptcy and the flight of the more qualified tourist operators.

Sustainable tourism is not only a utopian choice, or anyway a privilege, only for the elite, as it was in the past centuries: even in the era of globalization and of tourist activities on a wide scale tourism sustainability is a realistic objective for economic and environmental policies. However, it is worth underlining that the compatibility of the growth in supply of tourist services on one hand with environmental conservation on the other will be notably conditioned by the particular solution given for a series of complex problems, briefly stated hereunder:

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Level of concentration of tourist business: The more the supply of tourist services – with both fixed and mobile infrastructures which condition it – is concentrated in the territory, the higher the risk of damages to the environmental equilibrium (Querini, 1999). Such damages will get worse, especially in developing countries, if the pressure of tourist services tends to add up to the pressure on environmental resources of other productive businesses (agriculture, mining, fishing), which already critical in those regions of a particular country, which are highly populated and industrialized. Generally speaking, these costs of congestion will result much higher than the possible economies of scale which can actually be reached in the services and in the infrastructures with the concentration and the spreading of the tourist business themselves. Therefore, both in those countries which are economically advanced, but above all in developing countries, usually it is to be hoped that a high level of decentralization of tourist activities is achieved through the utilization of advanced “clean” technologies, such as biological agriculture, solar energy and the recycling of wastes.

Integration with the local ambient: A rigorous conservation of the natural environment, thanks to the maintenance of technological, cultural and traditional values, which have sometimes been perpetuated for centuries in the local populations, which it usually seems hard to reconcile with an influx of a massive kind of tourism, inevitably oriented towards a cultural genocide with a show off of its hedonism and its capability of consumption. The defense of the natural environment, especially in poor countries, seems to be linked to the conservation of the traditional culture, in its various expressions: the use of agricultural land, water control, eating habits, social and housing architecture, use of free time. The creation of a new supply of tourist services should not only respect these local cultural customs but also increase their potentials with the aim of launching a fruitful dialogue between the various elements: the local resident, jealous of his own cultural originality, and the foreign tourist, who is keen on discovering new places and different life styles, in the hope of a tourism that is more responsible towards our common heritage.

The contribution that a far-sighted strategy of a growth in tourist supply can directly offer towards the conservation of the environment is not to be neglected, especially in developing countries, which are today the most threatened by an irreversible ecological degradation. Moreover, tourism can indirectly induce growth in the awareness of the public opinion on great ecological issues, having a worldwide dimension, both at an international and a national level. The solicitations coming from both the public opinion and the scientific community show that the task to draw out and accomplish the technological instruments which are necessary for the conservation of natural and environmental resources differ greatly from one country to another. From various research projects carried out by international institutions one comes to the conclusion that major environmental problems crop up at a local level, and have to do mainly with the elimination of toxic or dangerous wastes, as well as water pollution. Instead, at a global level, public opinion is particularly worried by the progressive disappearance of forests and by sudden climatic changes.

Relationships between tourism activities and technological innovations: Any “ecological scenario” one may assume for the coming decades it is extremely probable that each country will have to face phenomena both of scarcity of certain natural resources (natural and forest resources) and above all, air and water pollution. This means that such problems will no longer be on a national scale but on a worldwide scale. At this point a crucial question crops up: will scientists and those involved in technology have enough common sense and motivations to solve the problems that the ecological scenario now offers in an urgent and undelayable manner? A historical analysis of technological changes does not reply to the worrying question if scientific progress should proceed in a completely independent manner with respect to the economical sphere –and only subsequently it could become a source of productive innovations – or if the casual process is actually moving in the opposite direction. In the sense that the autonomous evolution of the production of goods and services – to satisfy the necessities of mankind, expressed on the market through prices – is prosaically the real driving force of scientific and technological discoveries.

However, whatever the most probable interpretation of its role may have been in the past, it now seems ever more evident that, in the present situation, public opinion and economic agents put their trust especially in science to gain a tranquillizing solution for the emerging scarcity of natural and environmental resources. The performances of science – especially in the last decades – seem to be reassuring as far as its capacity of overcoming the challenge that such emerging scarcities present.

There is, however, an evident risk: that technological solutions, imposed at an international level, in the name of presumed cultural primates and arrogant political imperialisms – may lack in flexibility and the promptness necessary to be able to face situations which differ greatly on a world wide scale.

The general trust in the capability of the scientific community to overcome the scarcity of natural resources – above all if it is capable of overcoming the national and scientific perspectives – points out, however, the risk that at the end one meets another limit, the only one which it is really impossible to overcome for the survival of mankind: the lacking cultural and ethical capability of respect for the poor and those who are “different”, their dignity and their right to a creative and decent survival.

3. ECO-TOURISM IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Eco-tourism has attracted increasing attention in recent years not only as an alternative to mass tourism but as a means of economic development and environmental conservation (Ceballos, 2004). Eco-tourism ventures have also sustained the economy of most nations e.g East-African countries like Kenya, Tanzania etc. Its global value for 1998 has been estimated to have as high as US\$1 trillion (Filion et al,1992). It has often proved to be a powerful incentive for conservation in many parts of the world. In Sri-Lanka, eco-tourism activities along the coast have remained the main stay of the economy. With about 80 percent of tourism infrastructure in coastal areas, it contributes about USD 200 million annually to the national economy. Ceballos, (2004) projected that this was going to double by the year 2000.

However, some travelers stay several months of swimming, surfing and the friendly ambience, with the average expenditure at USD 32 per day. This also applies to places like Sikkim Himalaya, an area of high biodiversity and cultural heterogeneity with distinctive ethnic groups, mountain peaks, sacred lakes and monasteries, making it a

place of tourist attraction. The annual influx of visitors into Sikkim has increased by 155 percent over a span of 5 years (1988-1994). Trekking, nature and recreational tourism are growing very rapidly in the Sikkim Himalaya. The socio-economic conditions for people involved in the tourism businesses have also improved. The state has a rich tradition of nature conservation (Wallace, 2007). There is a vast scope for increased eco-tourism in Sikkim that must be viewed with response to environment preservation, and local communities, must be involved in such programs. Ecotourism has remained a high business for areas that have invested in it. It is estimated for instance that in 1988 there were between 157 and 236 million international eco-tourists worldwide. It is also estimated that between 79 and 157 million people could be considered wildlife oriented. In Costa Rica tourism values associated with visits by birds watching to observe the resplendent quetzal and the vanishing cloud forests of Monterede. Yet contributions to the economy arising from bird watching are often under rated.

However, the financial benefits derived from nature tourism are only of value to the resources upon which they depend if used at least in part to maintain those resources. In the USA revenue regenerated by tourism in visits to national parks amounts to US\$3 billion a year. So far however, the proceeds have gone mainly to hoteliers, restaurants, and purveyors of gasoline, fishing gear and t-shirts. But this revenue could benefit the parks if those who currently receive it formed a lobby for improved protection of the parks. Of course, the same could be said of any country that is engaged in ecotourism development. As pointed out earlier, native tourism cannot be equated with tourism unless it directly produces better protection. This is one reason why the Australian government is seeking to ensure that tour operators who profit from the Great Barrier Reef contribute to its maintenance (Straisund, 2000). Income, however, is only part of the park unless it helps resolve root causes of environmental degradation. Most threats to ecotourism resources arise from the need of local populations to use the natural resources for subsistence purposes (Ceballos, 2003). Yet traditional rural activities such as agriculture and hunting may have to be limited or prohibited precisely because of protected area development. One of the challenges facing nature-based tourism then is to ensure that local communities earn an appropriate share of the profits derived from eco-tourism while at the same time conserving the natural and cultural heritage upon which these profits depend (Aremu, 2001).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Study Area

Taraba State lies within the middle belt region of Nigeria and is located within 90.35° and 110.30° east of the Greenwich meridian and latitude 60.30° north of the equator. It has a landmass of about 60,000sqkm which is about 6.6% of the nation land mass.

Taraba State is rightly tagged nature gift to the nation. It is an undeniable fact that there is no better natural gift to the nation in Nigeria than Taraba State. The state is criss-crossed with rivers, streams, waterfalls and springs. It is characterized by two types of climate – the temperate climate on the Mambilla Plateau and the tropical climate in other parts of the state. It is a state blessed with fertile farm land and abundant forest resources.

To preserve the forest and enormous resources therein, Taraba State government has forty-nine (49) forest reserves, ninety-eight (98) plantations and three (3) major game reserves including the famous Gashaka Gumti National Park. Other tourist attractions in the state are the Zing holiday resource, the Maihula mountain, the Waterfalls, Nwonyo fishing festival, the famous Mambilla plateau, Marmara crocodile pond, special rock features etc. such beautiful environment in Taraba State has encourage the establishment of these tourist resort which further reinforces the attractiveness of Taraba State to visitors.

The research was restricted to, four tourist resort in Taraba State; such as the Gashaka Gumti National Park, Rufu Rock and Water Falls, the Marmara Crocodile Pond and the Scenic Mambilla Plateau. Data were collected from management of each tourist resort through interviews, field observation and questionnaires. Three hundred and thirty-six questionnaires were administered to various respondents along the streets, attraction sites and residential areas within the study environment using random sampling technique which allow every member within the study area to have equal chance of been selected for this study. In addition, scheduled interviews and structured dialogue were conducted with selected private and public sector representatives, politicians and resort management. Random sampling technique was applied to ensure that every member have equal chances of being selected. The questionnaire was to probe the contribution of tourist resort to economic development, the level of international tourist patronage and integration or participation of the people in ecotourism development in Taraba State.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data collected in the field were presented in tables. Table 5.1 basically to assess the contribution of Gashaka Gumti National Park, Rufu Rock and Water Falls, the Marmara Crocodile Pond and the Scenic Mambilla Plateau in the socio-economic development of Taraba State.

Table-5.1 Socio-Economic Impact of Tourist Resort in Taraba State

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
A. Income generation	36	10.7
B. Transfer of Idea	16	4.8
C. Employment	18	5.4
D. Expansion	4	1.2
E Educational Advancement	18	5.4
F. Provision of infrastructure	8	1.2
G. All of the Above	236	70.2
Total	336	100%

Source: Field work (2016)

Table 5.1: it was observed that all the listed developmental variables were achieved in the area as the last option in the table has 70%. In spite of these, income generation was also notice to be high on individual note with a value of 10.7% as compared to other factors. With regards to patronage, data collected shows fluctuation in terms of tourists patronage between 2010 - 2016. Although 2012 recorded the highest tourist patronage in Gashaka Gumti National Park and the Scenic Mambilla Plateau with values 7032 and 737 respectively. The data also shows that there have been successive increase of international tourist in Gashaka Gumti National Park, the Rufu Rock and Waterfalls and the Scenic Mambilla Plateau in 2014-2016 even though Rufu Rock and Waterfalls suffered with regards to international tourist from 2011-2015. As compared to other resorts Marmara Crocodile pond, even though it had a fluctuation in international patronage between 2012-2015, the data collected still reveals high influx of international tourist between 2011-2015.

Table-5.2 International Patronage of Tourist Resort Between 2010-2015 in Taraba State

YEAR	GASHAKA GUMTI NATIONAL PARK	RUFU ROCK AND WATER FALLS	MARMARA CROCODILE POND	THE SCENIC MAMBILLA PLATEAU
2010	6,100	1,051	581	2,564
2011	7,032	4,980	737	2,979
2012	5,382	216	409	3,391
2013	3,397	213	101	1,164
2014	2,979	1,679	811	2,204
2015	4,085	653	551	3,493
TOTAL	28,975	8,792	3,190	15,795

Source: Management of the resort (2016)

Table 5.2: Reveals that the level of international tourist patronage varies from year to another. Data in table 5.2 shows that a high level of international tourist 7,032 were recorded by the Gashaka Gumki National Park.

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However, eco-tourism development in Taraba State suffered setbacks ranging from poverty, lack of facilities, lack of subsidies, low level of awareness, illiteracy and poor planning. The percentages from figure 2 were derived from the percentages of each variable.

Table-5.3 Setbacks Towards Resort Development in Taraba State

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
A. Poverty	7	2.1
B. Lack of Facilities	3	0.9
C. Lack of Subsidies	2	0.9
D. Low level of awareness	120	35.7
E. Illiteracy	4	1.2
F. Poor Planning	5	1.4
G. All of the Above	195	58
Total	336	100.0

Source: Field Work (2016)

Eco-tourism development in Taraba State has suffered setbacks ranging from poverty, lack of facilities, lack of subsidies, low level of awareness, illiteracy and poor planning.

Table 3: Shows that all the above mentioned variables, constitute a major setback towards eco-tourism development in Taraba State as the last option had a value 58%. Table 3 reveals the remote and immediate constraints towards eco-tourism development in the area.

6. FUTURE CHALLENGES OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN TARABA STATE

- In the future of tourism industry will face many challenges as it becomes increasingly important. Government and private enterprises will be required to work together advancing and developing the tourism industry. This requires a higher level of awareness and management skills and thus a greater need for education.
- Attempting to develop tourism attractions encourages the government to enhance on physical development such as road construction, hotels and provision of our social amenities like energy and portable water supply. The development and promotion of tourism enhance the development of these auxiliary facilities needed for an efficient tourism operation.
- The availability of human resources is perhaps the greatest issue facing tourism in developing countries. There is an inadequacy of skill labour at all levels and training facilities lacking in volume or quality in develop countries where tourism often has a poor image as an employer.
- There is the absence of long term tourism work programme as well as the absence of well-articulated criteria for planning and development of tourism facilities.
- The absence of functional instruments for tourism development and promotions and this has facilitated uncoordinated expenditure of the small financial allocation at the various level of the tourism industry resources are concentrated on building hotels (as if hotels hold the greatest attraction to foreign tourist) while other tourism segment are neglected. Infrastructural and other auxiliary services especially those needed in tourist centres or areas are persuasively lacking or poorly developed.

CONCLUSION

The unique tourism attraction in Taraba State and the appreciable climate has made the state one of the tourism haven in West Africa. Today the favourable climate conditions in Taraba State has attracted many tourist to her numerous tourist spots. Tourism, as a world-wide phenomenon, touches the highest and deepest aspirations of all people and it is also an important element of socio-economic and political development in many countries.

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Governments, other public authorities, public and private decision-makers whose activities are related to tourism, and tourists themselves, consider it a priority to protect and reinforce the human dignity of both local community and tourists themselves, consider it a priority to protect and reinforce the human dignity of both local community and tourists. Because of this all these agents have registered a growing concern in sustainability as a guiding principle to allow the integration of economic development with environmental and social aspects within tourism policy and strategy.

But the incorporation of sustainability in tourism development is not a self-evident issue but a politically contested one, if the different interpretations of the concept which have been identified are taken into account. These differing, sometimes conflicting, interpretations are not accidental, but rather the outcome of particular ideologies, varied disciplinary backgrounds, value systems and vested interests. Despite the wide range of varying definitions, at its core tourism sustainability lies: strong emphasis to three simple concerns:

- The need to avoid the uncontrolled destructive degradation of the environment and the loss of local identity, while respecting the fragile balance that characterizes many tourist destinations, in particular environmentally sensitive areas;
- The need to actively pursue and strengthen the quality of life and equity between present generations;
- The exigency not to reduce the opportunities offered to future generation.

If the core elements of tourism sustainability – ecology, economy, and equity – are to be taken into consideration for balanced strategies, there are many gaps in our knowledge that need to be filled if we are to be successful in controlling tourism in a way that puts this important economic sector into a sustainable development path. Several analyses have emphasized this point. Nevertheless, there are no definitive answer, particularly in the field of fairness and distributional justice of tourism options. This paper has identified issues for future consideration, especially in view of making tourism become compatible with the conservation of major ecosystems and with the preservation and good use of historical – cultural heritage and ecotourism potentials in Taraba State.

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