

## Improving Tourism for Economic Sustainability in National Development

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<sup>1</sup>Ebodili, Chuka C, B.A. (ED) Hons, MILR M.A.

<sup>2</sup>Okolo Buchi & <sup>3</sup>Ewa Christabel Ifeoma

<sup>1,2&3</sup>Department of Fine and Applied Arts

Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba, Delta State

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine in its totality tourism as a source of economic sustainability in national development. Tourism is one of the sectors for economic development of a nation. It is also one of the largest and the fastest growing industry in the world. Nigeria has abundant tourism components with numerous attractions ranging from places of natural beauty to cultural and historical heritage. These potentials could make her the leading tourism provider in Africa. Tourism is a value adding enterprise because it has the capacity of growing the economy by increasing the economic activities in the environment. It has become potentially a major source of income for some countries of the world. Apart from being an economic backbone of some nations, it has also helped in the social life of the host communities. This study focussed on tourism as a means for sustainable development. It examined the benefits and importance of tourism in nation building, its potentials and the challenges facing the development of tourism sector in Nigerian. While trying to develop and establish the concept of tourism as a source of economic sustainability, the study observes that inadequate infrastructural facilities such as electricity, water and good roads were major problems facing the development of tourism in Nigeria. It therefore recommends that government and private sectors should give the needed attention to infrastructural development so as to boost tourism in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Tourism, Economic sustainability, National development.*

### **Background to the Study**

The idea of tourism developed in Europe between 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tourism in the medieval period was not a thing of pleasure as the tourists were mainly merchants, a pilgrim or a scholar in search of ancient texts. Tourism was to become an important area in the education of the young men. As a result, tours became expensive, difficult and limited to the rich and wealthy patrons. Bhatia (1993) emphasised that although the annual migration of people began rather more than a century ago, the present day exodus especially in relation to international tourists is essentially a Post-World War 11 phenomenon. As modern technological advancement develops, conscious tours in order to explore and see the world began. In recent times, tourism has developed largely and modern technological advancement in travel has made it accessible to millions the means to move from the routine of everyday life. Africa has a meaningful share in the growing international tourism trade in terms of both tourist arrival and receipt.

The importance of Nigerian tourism industry lies in its tourism resources in generating foreign exchange. In terms of the environment, Nigeria has world class tropical rain forests, savannah, grassland, mangrove swamps and the Sahel savannah very close to the Sahara desert. Tourism as an income earner belongs to the informal sector of the economy.

### **Definitions and Meaning**

Bhatia (1993) defines tourism as the totality of the relationship and phenomenon arising from the travel and stay of strangers, provided the stay does not imply the establishment of a permanent residence and is not connected with a remunerated activity. Horn by (2005) sees tourism as the business activity connected with providing accommodation, services and entertainment for people who are visiting a place for pleasure. He therefore classified a tourist as a person who is travelling or visiting a place for pleasure. The Great Illustrated Dictionary (1984) sees tourism as the practice of travelling for pleasure, the business of providing tours and services for tourists, while in the Wikipedia Encyclopaedia, tourism is defined as travel for recreation, leisure or business purposes.

The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people "travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes". Tourism is important, and in some cases, vital for many countries. It was recognized in the *Manila Declaration on World Tourism of 1980* as "an activity essential to the life of nations because of its direct effects on the social, cultural, educational, and economic sectors of national societies and on their international relations. Tourist attraction is a place of interest where tourists visit, typically for its inherent or exhibited natural or

cultural value, historical significance, natural or built beauty, offering leisure, adventure and amusement.

Leiper, (1995) defined tourists as persons who travel away from their normal residential region for a temporary period of at least one night, to the extent that their behaviour involves a search for leisure experiences from interactions with features or characteristics of places they choose to visit. This study defines tourism as a process and practice of travelling that involves the provision of tours, and services, pleasure and business purposes. From the above definitions, it was observed that there is a remarkable difference between normal travelling and when people travel as tourist. Tourists are people who travel to places outside their usual environment for leisure for a given period not more than one consecutive year. Tourists are mobile population of travellers who are strangers to the places they visit. Consequently, the money they earned in the normal working environment is spent in the places visited. Tourism has risen in recent years as a result of technological development in transportation especially in aviation sector.

### **Tourism and Sustainable Economic Development**

Tourism drives efficiency and competitiveness in economic activity and provides employment opportunities for sustainable development. Nigeria is a nation blessed with abundant natural resources. The physical structures of the natural resources located in different geographical regions represent centres for tourist attractions. The nation is also rich in art and crafts, sport, places of beauty, socio-cultural events, parks, museums, relaxation sites, waterfalls, resorts, hotels, historical monuments, and other accommodation facilities among others. There are also abundant cultural and historical heritage sites that are of tourist attraction. From the above therefore, tourism in Nigeria can be described as an “Untapped Goldmine”, as a result of the numerous resources that the nation is endowed with. These coastal lakes, mountains, the country side and places of historic interest, have the capacity of growing and increasing the economic base of the nation if properly managed. Nigeria's tourism sector has the potential to change the nation's economy and should be perceived as a money spinning sector.

The idea of developing tourism in an area is encouraged by steady improvement in the creation of social amenities and basic infrastructures. The improvement in the destinations' infrastructure could help in improving the socio-economic relations among the local people.

### **Nigeria's Tourism Potentials**

Tourist centres are cultural and historical monuments. It comprises natural or physical structures of attraction located in a particular geographical region. Nigeria is blessed with a variety of tourist destinations that are spread across the country. The destinations are either natural or man-made with abundant potentials that can be properly managed and harnessed for economic sustainability. Examples of such monuments include the Olumo-Rock in Ogun State, Osun-Osogbo Groove in Osun State, Ikogosi Warm and Cold Spring in Ekiti State, Ogbunike Cave in Anambra State etc. There are also national parks and beach resorts such as the Obudu Ranch Resort, Gashaka-Gumti Natural Park, Yankari Game Reserve, Mambilla Plateau etc., all of which are either presently active with low capacity utilization or lying dormant awaiting development.

According to Page (2009) Nigeria's tourism potentials is directly associated with the quality of life as it offers visitors the privilege to take a break away from the difficulties and stresses of everyday life from their original environment as it provides the context for relaxation and opportunity to do something different and less stressful in Nigeria. It is a general phenomenon that the availability of tourism products and services combined with abundant tourism destination stimulate tourism development in any nation. In this regards, the abundance of tourism components in Nigeria could make her the leading tourism provider in Africa. The attractions are numerous ranging from places of natural beauty to cultural and historical heritage. Adora (2010) also identifies other Nigerian tourism components to include transportation, accommodation, recreational and entertainment facilities among others. These potentials could be found in almost all the 36 states of the federation and the federal capital. If properly managed, these components combined could make Nigeria a centre of attraction for tourism and business destination.

### **Tourism Appreciation in Nigeria**

In Nigeria, tourism has never been fully appreciated and developed. According to Edwards (1983) the time for a change of attitude towards tourism appreciation is now. Edwards believes that tourism when fully developed will be a viable sector for expanding the economic base of Nigeria. Okotie (2009) is also of the opinion that tourism is one of the critical areas of the economy that will generate growth. She believes that tourism has the capacity to grow the economy beyond its present slow stage, to levels that may approximate those of other nations where tourism has played a major role in national development. Tourism has many sectors that can independently contribute to the growth of a nation if appreciated. Such sectors include transportation, travels and tour, camping, tour operation, hotels, resorts, restaurants, just to mention but a few.

### **Importance of Tourism to National Development**

Tourism is a vital factor that can contribute to any country's economy. In fact, it can directly be stated that tourism has a connecting link with the cultural, social, economic and intellectual potentials of a nation and the current trends show that tourism is defined as one of the most profitable and fast-growing industries in the globe. According to the United Nation World Tourism Organization (2006), tourism has grown in terms of destinations as there has been a widespread increase in the geographical expansion of tourism throughout the globe which has made it possible for many developing countries to develop tourism at their own pace for socio-economic advancement. Tourism development involves careful planning, administration and management. In some destinations, tourism tends not to work irrespective of the investment made and this might be as a result of mismanagement or improper planning. As the case may be, tourism development strategy makes it necessary to plan ahead for improvements in existing products, explore opportunities for advancement into new market and establish long-term priorities for the local tourism industry (Godfrey & Clarke, 2000). However, as tourism destination presents opportunities for development, it might still fail to grow if all the needed elements for development are not in place.

### **Benefits of Tourism to National Development**

According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and International Hotel and Restaurant Association (IH&RA), tourism not only assists in job creation and wealth acquisition, but also contributes to sustainable development of a nation. Tourism experts argue that tourism is a catalyst to economic development as it generates foreign exchange for the country. It encourages financial flow from other countries into the host nation. Tourism also stimulates recreational, educational and socio-cultural values. Tourists are exposed to new customs, different kinds of food and modes of dress. Tourists who travel bring along their own value system and exchange their values with other peoples' way of life. Tourism promotes socio-cultural and educational exchanges between the host community and the visitors, thereby teaching them to appreciate other people's culture and value system (Adora, 2010).

A major benefit of tourism to a nation is its capacity to stimulate infrastructural development. The development of infrastructural facilities such as roads, water supply and the improvement on the existing facilities such as airports, electricity, hotels and tourist villages creates jobs for people. It is quite obvious in Nigeria that the tourism sector employs a large number of people, providing a variety of jobs for both skilled and unskilled manpower, ranging from transportation to accommodation as well as art and crafts. Tourism is an element of promoting international goodwill and relationships among several nations of the world.

Tourism helps to build bridges between the developed and less developed nations. Tourism encourages regional understanding, cooperation and social interaction among member states and visitors from across the world. It encourages exchange of ideas and promotes trade, by creating markets for available tourism products and facilities.

### **Problems of Tourism Development in Nigeria**

Much as tourism is a source of economic sustainability in national development, tourism development in Nigeria is faced with lots of challenges. According to Edwards (1983) the development of urban life-style for the majority of people in developed countries, and the desire to spend part of their leisure time in a different environment, has led to greater pressure on environments suitable for holidays and tourism. In Nigeria such challenges include:

1. A dramatic increase in demand for hotel accommodation as a result of influx of tourists into urban and city areas, can result to tourist pressure in such areas.
2. Inadequate infrastructural facilities such as electricity, water and good roads is a major problem facing the development of tourism in Nigeria.
3. Pressure on urban transportation systems as a result of the influx of seasonal visitors which will result to heavy and uncontrolled chaotic traffic congestion on roads.
4. Security problems which may result from anti-social vices such as stealing, drug smuggling and other behaviours.
5. The problem of environmental hazards and damage to the ecological system occasioned by walkers, hawkers and picnickers.
6. Inadequate funding of the tourism sector and inconsistent government policies also hinder the development of tourism potentials in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

Tourism development is an element of growth that involves enlarging the ownership base. This will facilitate a large number of people benefiting from the tourism industry through job procurement, skills development, business and wealth creation. It will also ensure the geographical spread of tourism business all over the given destination. The importance of tourism to nation's socio-economic values cannot be underrated. Tourism plays significant role in promoting a people's culture. It also helps to foster relationships with the people of the outside world.

Tourism is a value adding enterprise because it has the capacity of growing the economy. Tourism increased the mobility of people and goods from one environment to another. It has the potential for addressing unemployment problem

in a nation. Therefore, government and private sector should give the needed attention to the development of tourism in Nigeria. The private sector should see tourism as a viable and lucrative venture to connect, explore and exploit. There should be appropriate policies put in place by the government to enable foreign and local investors explore the great potentials in the tourism industry. The government and private sector should see tourism industry as a fundamental component for sustainable economic development.

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