

PROMOTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL TOURISM IN THE 21ST CENTURY IN CROSS RIVER STATE**Bessong, Columbus Deku Ph.D¹****Bessong, Napoleon Osang Ph.D²****Usua, Oku Bassey Ph.D³****&****Ntui, Obasi Ewu⁴**

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**Abstract**

The study investigated Promoting Community Development Through Environmental Tourism in the 21st Century in Cross River State. One research question and one hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population for this study consisted of 5458 respondents (3928 tourism staff and 1530 community leaders) in the three senatorial zones in Cross River State. A sample of 357 respondents was used for this study. The instrument used for this study was a structured questionnaire titled: “Promoting Community Development Environmental Tourism Questionnaire (PCDETQ)” designed by the researchers. The instrument was dully validated by three experts and a reliability coefficient of 0.68 was deduced using Cronbach Alpha statistic. Data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The findings from the study revealed among others that environmental tourism significantly promotes the protection, conservation and restoration of biological diversity and sustainable use of natural resources, fosters enhanced attractiveness, and beautifies environmental sites. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that government should promote sustainable environmental tourism in order to ensure that the local communities benefit from the its resources within their domain.

Keywords: Community Development, Tourism, Environment

**Introduction**

In recent years, many community development practitioners have become interested in exploring trends in intergenerational transfer of wealth and philanthropic mechanisms to sustain community vitality and quality of life. This issue is common in Nigeria where present and past governments (federal, state and local-level) formulate good number of policies and programmes with rural focus and implications for improving rural life and the participation for rural people in National development and progress (Enyi, 2014). However, these policies and programme shave never seen the light of the day. Hence, community development becomes a critical issue that ought not to be undermined. Community development is a veritable tool for positive social and economic transformation of many rural communities into major urban towns and cities across the world. Thus, governments in developing countries deem it

necessary to balance their development priorities between urban centres and rural communities (Olofu, et al. (2024).

Community development can be viewed as the overall progress of a given community. It is also considered as a process where members of a community come together to take collective action with a view of generating solutions to their common problems (United Nations, 2014). Similarly, community development is a process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of a community, for proper integration into the life of a nation, and to contribute fully to national progress (Akande, 2016). Community development is operationally defined as a process that involves collaborative efforts and actions of government and members of a community in order to bring about improvement in the living conditions of the people (Bessong, et al. 2024).

Community development is a veritable instrument for inducing positive changes or transformation in a community. Filani (2018) asserts that community development is the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are combined with those of the government authorities to improve the economic, social, and cultural conditions of such communities by integrating them into the fabric of society; allowing them to contribute fully to national progress. Community development denotes the link or relationship between economic activity and the advancement of social life through the ongoing improvement and upliftment of people's well-being and standard of living. Community development is a process that seeks to build strong, sustainable communities by bringing people and organizations together to identify common needs and goals, mobilize resources, and implement strategies that improve the quality of life for all the residents (Community Tool Box, 2021). Community development is also driven through the instrumentality of tourism potentials.

Tourism is one of the leading and lucrative industries in the world today that serves as a source of income generation. Tourism is an environmental phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business purposes (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2008). It can expedite development in all facets of human endeavour. Hence, most governments at various levels are able to generate huge capital for development of the society through environmental tourism. Environmental tourism denotes the process whereby tourists embark on provisional journeys out of one's place of abode for the purpose of pleasure or medicals (Bessong, et al. 2024). It comprises the activities of a person or persons travelling to and staying in place(s) outside their usual home land or environment for not more than a year for leisure; business and other purposes than being employed in the place visited.

Tourism relies on, and greatly impacts, the natural environment in which it operates. Even though many areas of the world are conserved in the form of parks and protected areas, tourism development can have severe negative impacts. According to United Nations Environment Programme (2003b), these can include: depletion of natural resources (water, forests, among others.); pollution (air pollution, noise, sewage, waste and littering); and physical impacts (construction activities, marina development, trampling, loss of biodiversity). The environmental impacts of tourism can reach outside local areas and have an effect on the global ecosystem. One example is increased air travel, which is a major contributor to climate change. Anyadike, et al. (2024) avowed that tourism has the potential to create beneficial effects on the environment by contributing to environmental protection and conservation. The authors maintained that tourism raises awareness of environmental values, serves as a vehicle for funding protection and conservation of natural habitats, and increases economic importance. Tourism has the potential to increase public appreciation of the environment and to spread awareness of environmental problems when it brings people

into closer contact with nature and the environment. This confrontation may heighten awareness of the value of nature and lead to environmentally conscious behavior and activities to preserve the environment.

Promoting community development through environmental tourism could be viewed in various areas. Reynold and Braithwaite (2001), stated that tourism promotes the preservation of the environment if it is planned and implemented in an environmentally and socially friendly manner. In a related view Tunde (2012) asserted that tourism has been reborn as a possible tool to spur economic development while at the same time benefiting the environment and local social condition without harming the environment. It is an activity that contributes to a better understanding of places, people and their cultures. In the early years, agriculture used to be the backbone of Nigeria but after the discovery of crude oil in the early 1970s, attention was now shifted from agriculture to the oil sector. People focused mainly on the oil sector and this encouraged a lot of rural-urban migration in search of employment in the oil sector, other government offices and industries (Akpan, & Obang, (2015). The authors added that concentration on the oil sector was so much that other sectors of the economy that could have generated much needed revenue were neglected. Tourism was one of the neglected sectors, until very recently when government of Nigeria started plans to develop it as a means of improving the socio-economic well-being of the Nigerian people and diversifying its economic base. For this to be successful, Nigeria's tourism industry depends on its sustainability. Therefore, for tourism to be sustainable, it should adhere to economic, social, environmental and ethnic considerations in the regions (Tunde, 2012).

Environmental tourism can significantly promote the protection, conservation and restoration of biological diversity and sustainable use of natural resources. Because of their attractiveness, pristine sites and natural areas are identified as valuable and the need to keep the attraction alive can lead to creation of national parks and wildlife parks. Shorie (2015); and (Ibiang, et al. 2014), highlighted the areas environmental tourism can promote community development to include:

Direct financial contributions: Tourism can directly promote the conservation of sensitive areas and habitats. Revenue from park-entrance fees and similar sources can be allocated specifically to pay for the protection and management of environmentally sensitive areas. Special fees for park operations or conservation activities can be collected from tourists or tour operators.

Contributions to government revenues: Some governments collect money in more far-reaching and indirect ways that are not linked to specific parks or conservation areas. User fees, income taxes, taxes on sales or rental of recreation equipment, and license fees for activities such as hunting and fishing can provide governments with the funds needed to manage natural resources. Such funds can be used for overall conservation programs and activities, such as park ranger salaries and park maintenance.

Improved environmental management and planning: Sound environmental management of tourism facilities and especially hotels can increase the benefits to natural areas. But this requires careful planning for controlled development, based on analysis of the environmental resources of the area. Planning helps to make choices between conflicting uses, or to find ways to make them compatible. By planning early for tourism development, damaging and expensive mistakes can be prevented, avoiding the gradual deterioration of environmental assets significant to tourism. Cleaner production techniques can be important tools for planning and operating tourism facilities in a way that minimizes their environmental impacts. For example, green building (using energy-efficient and non-polluting construction

materials, sewage systems and energy sources) is an increasingly important way for the tourism industry to decrease its impact on the environment. And because waste treatment and disposal are often major, long-term environmental problems in the tourism industry, pollution prevention and waste minimization techniques are especially important for the tourism industry.

Environmental awareness raising: Tourism has the potential to increase public appreciation of the environment and to spread awareness of environmental problems when it brings people into closer contact with nature and the environment. This confrontation may heighten awareness of the value of nature and lead to environmentally conscious behavior and activities to preserve the environment. These activities could significantly attract community development to the host communities based on the following objectives, characteristics, importance and contributions of tourism to community development. According to Gibbs (2014), the overall objective of environmental tourism to community development lies in the protection of the environment. Thus, the author buttressed further that the main objectives of environmental tourism are as follows: habitat preservation, regeneration and conservation of the building and natural environment, environmental education and environmental improvements.

More so, Africa is endowed with a lot of natural and man-made tourism potentials which (Udeh, 2014) highlighted as follows: the Pyramids and the Sphinx in Egypt, Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya, Cape Town in South Africa, Virunga Mountains (Tracking Gorillas) in Democratic Republic of Congo, Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania and Omo River Region in Ethiopia. In Nigeria, there are many tourism potentials from abundant natural to manmade tourist attractions such as Yankari Game reserve in Bauchi State, the National War Museum in Abia State, Ogbunike Cave in Anambra State, the Oguta lake in Imo State, Zuma Rock in Abuja, and Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort in Cross River State just to mention but a few. Oboqua, et al. (2018) stated that environmental tourism is one of the fastest growing economic activities in the world. Tourism has been reborn as a possible tool to spur economic development while at the same time benefiting the environment and local social condition without harming the environment. It is an activity that contributes to a better understanding of places, people and their cultures. The author further stated that despite the attractiveness of the environmental tourism sites in Cross River State, its potentials were not harmonized neither were there any significant attention given to it in order to utilize and maximize these potentials.

Regrettably, there are many undermining factors such as insecurity, poor communication network, epileptic power supply, inadequate borehole, poor skill acquisition centers, high rate of unemployment, lack of industries, lack of adult literacy centres, deplorable road network, communal clashes, inadequate political will and lack of other social/basic amenities seem to have contributed to a large extent why there is low patronage of the environmental tourism sites for tours, hence hampers the development of the communities (Anipi, et al. 2023). Could it be that Cross River State government has never thought about the potentials of environmental tourism and what it can do for the host communities or could it be that these stakeholders treat tourism industry as a mere entertainment and not an instrument for economic development of the people and the entire community. Owing to the above scenario, it appears that adequate attention has not been given to community development through environmental tourism in Cross River State despite its environmental tourism potentials such as canopy work way, Obudu ranch resort and drill ranch among others. For instance, despite the revenue accruing from these tourism sites no substantial evidence in terms of development could be seen in the study area (Itari, et al.

2016). It is against this backdrop that the researcher sought to investigate the contributions of environmental tourism to community development in Cross River State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which community development has been promoted through environmental tourism in the 21st Century in Cross River State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the extent to which environmental tourism has promoted community development in Cross River State.

Research Question

This study was guided by one research question:

1. To what extent has environmental tourism promoted community development in Cross River State?

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of community leaders and tourism staff on the extent to which environmental tourism has promoted community development in Cross River State.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population for this study consisted of 5458 respondents which comprised 3928 tourism staff and 1530 community leaders in the three senatorial zones in Cross River State. A sample of 357 respondents was used for this study. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for this study. In the first stage, four local government areas (Boki, Etung, Obudu and Akamkpa) were selected from the three senatorial zones using simple random sampling technique with replacement. In the second stage, simple random sampling technique with replacement was also used to select 16 communities from the four local governments Areas, 4 from each local government. In third stage, proportionate sampling technique was used to sample 256 tourism staff in the 16 selected communities respectively using the formula (*Number of tourism staff in each community divided by the total number of tourism staff in the 16 communities times the sample size. i.e. $n \div N \times$ sample size of tourism staff, where n = number of tourism staff in each community while N = total number of tourism staff in the 16 communities*). The instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire titled: Promoting Community Development Through Environmental Tourism Questionnaire (PCDETQ). The questionnaire consisted of two sections: A and B. Sections A elicited demographic information of respondents, while section B contained ten (10) items on research questions. The instruments were validated by three experts, two of the experts were from the Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies and the third from Measurement and Evaluation unit of the Department of Science Education, all in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. To test the reliability of the instrument, the researchers distributed 25 copies of the questionnaires to the respondents in Ibom Plaza, Uyo, Akwa-Ibom State which was outside the study area. Data collected were subjected to the test for internal consistency using Crombach Alpha procedure with a reliability co-efficient of 0.68. The researchers made use of two field assistants to assist in distributing the instruments to the respondents. The research assistants were briefed on the modalities for administering the instruments to the respondents. The use of these research assistants helped to ensure that

the actual respondents for whom the instrument were meant for were those who filled the instrument. The research assistants also collected the completed instruments. The data collected were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research question one: To what extent has environmental tourism promoted community development in Cross River State?

Table 1: Mean rating and standard deviation showing the extent to which environmental tourism has promoted community development in Cross River State.

S/N	Item Statement	N			Mean	SD	DEC.
1	Tourism attracts construction of legendary monuments which beautifies the environment of the host communities for tourists' attractions.	3	5	7	3.00	1.00	High Extent
2	It creates awareness on the need to protect the natural environment for community development in Cross River State.	3	5	7	3.43	1.75	High Extent
3	Tourism enhances architectural designs which promote the beauty of Cross River State and its environs.	3	5	7	3.23	1.32	High Extent
4	Tourism protects and promotes archaeological deposits of the host communities in Cross River State.	3	5	7	3.22	1.22	High Extent
5	Provision of recreational and sports facilities such as valley ball court, relay tracks, tennis court among others add values to the environments of the host communities.	3	5	7	3.34	1.37	High Extent
6	Construction of the roads leading to all the tourist sites to ease the movement of the visiting tourists adds beauty to the environment of the host communities in Cross River State.	3	5	7	3.11	1.28	High Extent
7	Tourism activities in Cross River State make it possible to maintain and sustain many forest reserves which add beauty and shades to its environs.	3	5	7	3.23	1.49	High Extent
8	Tourism discourages environmental degradation and thus enhances and promotes environmental sanitation and attractions.	3	5	7	3.14	1.41	High Extent
9	Tourism ensures the protection and preservation of the environment and natural habitats.	3	5	7	3.35	1.31	High Extent
10	Tourism attracts the construction of canopy walk way which makes the tourism site interesting and thus adds value to the environment.	3	7	5	1.27	1.31	High Extent
	Grand Mean	3	7	5	3.27	1.27	High Extent

Key: Mean, SD – Standard deviation, DEC – Decision, VHE-Very High Extent, GE- High Extent, LE- Low Extent, VLE-Very Low Extent

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviations of the extent to which environmental tourism has promoted community development in Cross River State. Result shows that items 1-10 have mean ratings of 3.00, 3.43, 3.23, 3.22, 3.34, 3.11, 3.23, 3.14, 3.35, and 3.27 with standard deviations of 1.00, 1.75, 1.32, 1.22, 1.37, 1.28, 1.49, 1.141, 1.31, and 1.27 respectively. Since, the mean ratings are above the criterion level of 2.50 for accepting an item, this means that the respondents agreed that the items above are to a very high extent ways in which environmental tourism has promoted community development in Cross River State. The grand mean of 3.01 with a standard deviation of 1.66 means that all the items in table 1 are to a high extent way in which environmental tourism has promoted the community development in Cross River State.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of community leaders and tourism staff on the extent to which environmental tourism has promoted community development in Cross River State.

Table 2: t-test analysis of the mean ratings of community leaders and tourism staff on the extent to which environmental tourism has promoted community development in Cross River State

S t a t u s	N	M e a n	Std. Deviation	D	f	t - c a l	Sig. (2-tailed)
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Community Leaders	1	0	1	3	.	0	1	.28			
Tourism Staff	2	5	6	3	.	0	9	.29	355	-1.266	.209

Table 2, reveals that the probability associated with the calculated value of t (-1.266) for the mean difference between community leaders and tourism staff on the extent to which environmental tourism has promoted community development in Cross River State. The decision rule was used on the mean as 2.50. This means that any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered important for promoted community development through environmental tourism and as such accepted. While any mean score below 2.50 was considered negative and unimportant for promoting community development through environmental tourism and therefore was rejected. Since the probability value of 0.209 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of community leaders and tourism staff on the extent to which environmental tourism has promoted community development in Cross River State.

Discussion of the Results

The finding of this study as presented in table 1, showed that environmental tourism to a high extent has promoted community development in Cross River State. The result of the study also revealed that tourism creates awareness on the need to protect the natural environment for community development, enhances architectural designs, provides recreational and sports facilities such as volley ball court, relay tracks, tennis court among others add values to the environments of the host communities, discourages environmental degradation and thus enhances and promotes environmental sanitations and attractions. Environmental tourism also ensures the protection, preservation of the environment and natural habitats and others. These findings are in line with (Oroka, et al. 2024) who states the importance of environmental tourism to include: improvement of infrastructure, conservation of areas of outstanding natural beauty, conservation of archaeological and historic sites as well as improvement of environmental quality. In support of this, (Bessong, et al. (2021) avowed that environmental tourism contributes substantially in creating benefits that bring about value addition to the environmental development, protection, preservation and conservation.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that environmental tourism to a high extent has promoted community development in Cross River State. Environmental tourism significantly promotes the protection, conservation and restoration of biological diversity and sustainable use of natural resources, fosters enhanced attractiveness, and beautifies environmental sites. Natural areas are identified as valuable and need to keep the attraction alive that leads to establishment of national and wildlife parks in the state.

Recommendation

In line with the findings of the study, it was recommended that government should promote sustainable environmental tourism development in order to ensure that the local community members benefit from the tourism resources within their domain. That governments at all levels should endeavor to expand other budding and nascent environmental sites to lure more tourists to Cross River State among others.

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