

Trends Analysis of Visitor and Income Flows on Selected Ecotourism Sites in South-East Nigeria

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Abstract

The study was carried out to analyze the trends of visitor and income flows to two major ecotourism sites in South-East Nigeria. The two sites were selected based on availability of data on visitor and income flows over the period of study: 2001 to 2014. Secondary data were sourced from the records of the management of both sites. Trends analysis (ratio method) was used to analyze the data. Result showed that there was irregular but overall growth in the number of visitors from 67, 240 to 308,115; and in the volume of income from N10, 581,540 to N317, 105,741 over the period 2001-2014. The average growth rate of number of visitors over the period was 11% while income grew at an average of 37%. Using the average growth rates over the period 2001-2014, number of visitors was projected to grow to 971,099 in 2025 while income is expected to reach N8.3billion in the same year. The study therefore, concluded that if present socio-political and economic environment is sustained, ecotourism will grow substantially in South-East Nigeria in terms of number of visitors and revenue. It was recommended that local, state and federal governments should continue to pursue policies that promote free flow of travelers to the area.

Key words: Trends Analysis, Ecotourism Sites, Income, Visitor Flow, South-East Nigeria

1. Introduction

From old and emerging definitions, ecotourism may be perceived as passive or active. In the passive sense, which is often displayed by tourism and economic experts whose main interest is the revenue from it, ecotourism is viewed as a new and holistic approach to tourism aimed at making the industry sustainable to avoid “killing the goose that laid the golden egg” (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1990). In this wise, ecotourism has been defined as

An enlightening, participatory travel experience to environments, both natural and cultural, that ensures the sustainable use, at an appropriate level, of environmental resources and whilst producing viable economic opportunities for the tourism industry and host communities, make use of these resources through conservation beneficial to all tourism role players (Center for Ecotourism, 2006). Or Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education (TIES, 2015)

On the other hand, the “active” school sees ecotourism as a niche market or “legitimate sector” of the tourism industry (Honey, 1999). This school is made up of environmentalists and conservation scientists who see ecotourism as an approach to conservation which works by raising funds for protected areas and parks (Honey, 1999; World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), 2001; Drumm and Moore, 2005; Wang, Zhong, Zhang and Zhou, 2014). The innermost core of this school insists that ecotourism must refer only to tourism on ecological reserves, which have some legal protection and planned program of conservation rather than just any natural site (Honey, 1999; WWF, 2001; Drumm and Moore, 2005; Wang, Zhong, Zhang and Zhou, 2014). In this strictest sense, ecotourism has been described as

Travel to fragile, pristine and usually protected areas that strive to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps educate the traveler, provides funds for conservation, directly benefits the economic development of local communities and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights (Honey, 1999)

While a consensus definition may yet be in the process of evolution, protagonists seem to have agreed on necessary ground-rules and objectives for ecotourism (Honey, 1999; WWF, 2001; UNWTO, 2002; Drumm and Moore, 2005; TIES, 2015). These include:

- Ecotourism development should not destroy the resource upon which it is based;
- The needs and demands of actual and potential tourists must be satisfied in order for the industry to develop;
- Ecotourism should generate sustainable and equitable income for local communities and for as many other stakeholders as possible, including private tour operators;

- Stakeholders (individuals, communities, tourists, tour operators and government institutions) should be involved in the planning, development, implementation and monitoring phases; and
- Ecotourism should have educational value

Ecotourism therefore, is responsible tourism, which is ecologically and culturally sensitive. It encourages use of indigenous guides and local products. It combines environmental education with minimal travel comforts; helps protect local flora and fauna and provides local people with economic incentives to safeguard their environment (Madzara, 2011; Nwahia, Omonona, Onyeabor and Balogun, 2012; Barry, 2012; Wang, Zhong, Zhang and Zhou, 2014). The ecotourist makes non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labor or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site (WWF, 2001; UNTWO, 2002; Wang, Zhong, Zhang and Zhou, 2014). Properly implemented, ecotourism can integrate conservation and rural development/poverty reduction by helping to protect valuable natural areas/resources through tourism expenditures and providing jobs and markets for local products (Department for International Development (DFID), 1999; UNTWO, 2002; Drumm and Moore, 2005; Muganda, 2009; Doohyun et al., 2014).

Potential opportunities presented by ecotourism development are conceptualized by Drumm and Moore (2005) as shown in figure 1.

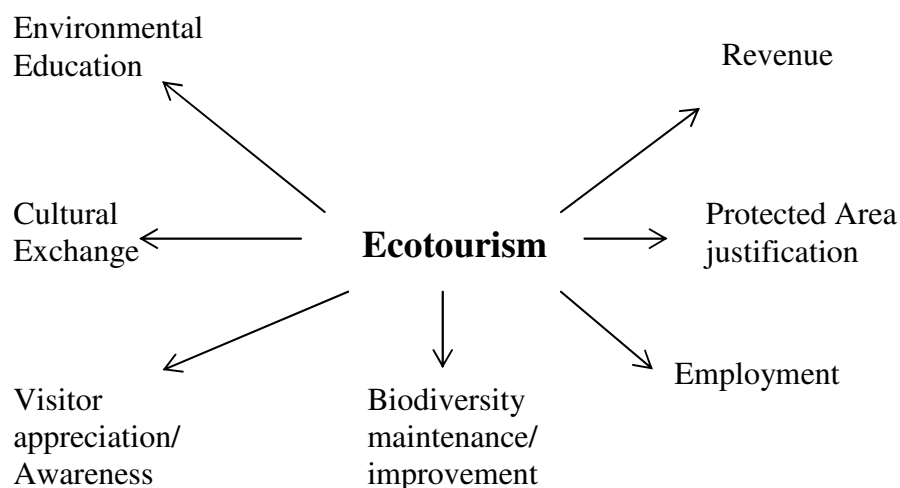


Figure 1: Ecotourism as a Development Opportunity
Source: Drumm and Moore (2005) P.102

Ecotourism impacts on the economy in a variety of ways; including commercializing environmental resources, catalyzing local businesses, providing local employment, enhancing household income and providing foreign exchange (Chami and Semboja, 2005; Muganda, 2009; Nwahia, Omonona, Onyeabor and Balogun, 2012; Doohyun et al., 2014; Ezeudjuji, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). As globalization and unbridled economic competition continue, it appears that ecotourism's greatest promise is its ability to harness the power of economic markets for the purpose of conserving the environment (Buchsbaum, 2004; Chami and Semboja, 2005; Barry, 2012; Wang, Zhong, Zhang and Zhou, 2014). Park entry fees and other forms of revenue give protected areas more economic value and local people can realize enormous value from environmental wealth- lakes, rivers, mountains, forests and wildlife- through ecotourism than they could ever get from them by any other way (Weaver, 2001; Buchsbaum, 2004; Chami and Semboja, 2005; TIES, 2015). When communities engage in ecotourism, new sources of sustainable income can be generated for the community as a whole as well as through individual employment opportunities. The income could be generated through collecting fees for access to trails, providing accommodation or guiding services, preparing and selling food and handicrafts (WWF, 2001; UNTWO, 2002; Muganda, 2009; Barry, 2012; Doohyun et al., 2014).

Ecotourism has been reported to provide higher multiplier values compared to mass tourism, and much more than other activities such as agriculture, and therefore, has greater per unit contribution to the economy (Kweka, 2001; Chami and Semboja, 2005; Onyeabor, 2014). According to Chami and Semboja (2005), ecotourism requires 44% of its input from other sectors- far above an average of 21% for all other sectors. Chami and

Semboja (2005) also reported that the industry is more labor-intensive than other industries, implying that a given level of capital investment creates more jobs than in agriculture or manufacturing. By its promotion of the use of local products and labor, ecotourism encourages local ownership and entrepreneurship and can substantially raise the multiplier effect of tourist spending (Chami and Senboja, 2005). Ecotourism brings people closer to local markets, and thus constitutes a low- cost mechanism for local businesses and artisans to market and sell their goods (Muganda, 2009; Madzara, 2011). It serves as a spin-off for many other businesses, especially those in the informal sector (Madzara, 2011). In addition, ecotourism preserves and enhances local culture by utilizing local knowledge and skills of the people (Muganda, 2009). Local knowledge about the terrain, ecology and natural history are utilized in guiding tourists and skills are utilized in arts and crafts which tourists buy. Local community culture is also incorporated into planning and marketing of ecotourism destinations and products (Wearing, 2001). Ecotourists appreciate local tradition, customs, and cuisines more than other market segments (Buchsbaum, 2004).

However, poorly planned and/or managed ecotourism poses development threats to the community. Drumm and Moore (2005) illustrates this as shown in figure 2.

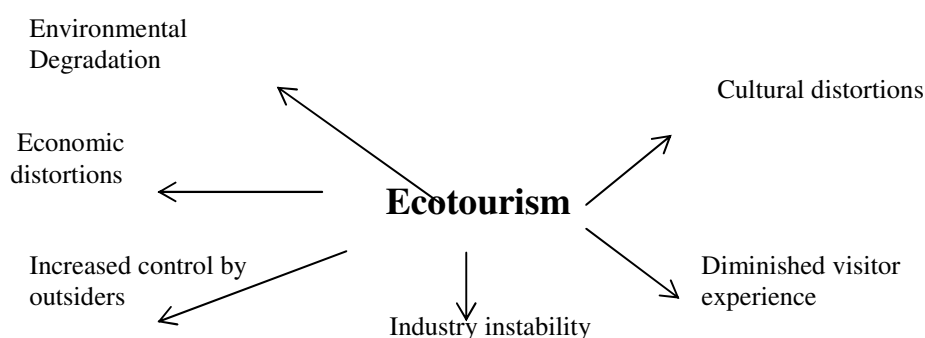


Figure 2: Potential Ecotourism Threats
Source: Adapted from Drumm and Moore (2005:117).

Degradation of ecotourism environment happens in many ways and in varying degrees including trampling on vegetations, causing erosion of trails, and litter (UNWTO, 2008; Wang, Zhong, Zhang and Zhou, 2014). In addition to surface damage, the intrinsic workings of nature may be affected, causing subtle changes and problems including the alteration of such animal behavior as eating habits, migration and reproduction, which may be difficult to detect though are important indicators of the health of natural resources (Drumm and Moore, 2005; UNWTO, 2008; Wang, Zhong, Zhang and Zhou, 2014). Ecotourism, like other forms of tourism, can be an unstable source of income. Many external factors influence tourism demand including political conflict or rumors of unsafe conditions within a region or country, natural disasters and fluctuations in international currency. These factors, though completely outside the control of tourist destinations, affect levels of visitation (Buchsbaum, 2004; Drumm and Moore, 2005). When a location becomes a popular tourism destination, crowding and excessive development can also result. Tourists may start to compete with residents for space and fledging local infrastructures may be overwhelmed (Drumm and Moore, 2005; Wang, Zhong, Zhang and Zhou, 2014).

The South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria has preponderance of cultural and ecological resources in form of forests, rivers, lakes, beaches, caves and rare flora and fauna (Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC), 2005; Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2007; NTDC, 2015). These are complemented by strong tradition of communalism, acclaimed entrepreneurial ability and hospitable attitude to visitors which point to a strong potentiality for ecotourism development (Onyeabor, 2014). Over the years, tourism activities involving visit to natural areas have apparently prospered in some parts of the zone. Notable among the sites are Awhum Waterfall and Ezeagu Tourism Complex both in Enugu State; Oguta Lake and Nekede Forest Reserve both in Imo State and Afikpo Beaches in Ebonyi State. However, effort seem not to have been made to empirically establish among other issues, the contribution or potential contribution of ecotourism to the economy of the region. This gap in knowledge seems to have resulted in the apparent lack of clear-cut policies and plans by State and local governments towards fully harnessing ecotourism in the area. This study was therefore,

designed to bridge this gap and to provide some empirical basis for ecotourism policy advocacy in the area.

2. Methodology

The study is situated in South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The area is comprised of five Igbo-speaking states namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The approximate total land area of the zone is 78,612 km² (Ebo, 1995). It lay between longitude 4°30' and latitude 71°5' (NPC, 2006) and has a total population of about 11.2 million people (Onyeabor, 2014). The major economic activities of the people include farming, trading and crafts. The area lay within rain forest and derived savannah vegetative regions of Nigeria. It has a tropical humid climate with two distinct seasons of the year – the wet and dry seasons. The wet season lasts for about six months from April to October and is characterized by regular and consistent rainfall pattern with consequent drop in ambient temperature. The dry season on the other hand lasts for about six months from November to March and is characterized by a hot dry spell. Between the two seasons, the temperature range varies between 18°C and 34°C. The zone is richly endowed with historical, cultural and environmental resources that portend great future for the tourism industry. These include slave routes, slave depots and slave markets. Others are archeological sites, historical monuments and relics of colonialism. There are also cultural festivals, most remarkable among which is the new yam festival. In addition, the preponderance of rivers, beaches, salt lakes, fresh water lakes, waterfalls, springs, caves, forests and various rare flora and fauna make the area a potential tourist haven. Rural lifestyle, traditional agriculture, crafts and arts are other tourist resources in the area.

Though there are a good number of visited natural and protected sites in South-East Nigeria, the study focused on two sites where reliable records of visitors and revenue were available. The studied sites were the Awhum Ecotourism Complex in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State and Nekede Zoological Garden and Forest Reserve in Owerri west Local Government of Imo State. The Awhum ecotourism complex comprised of forest, waterfalls, streams, a cave and hills. There is also the Cistercian Monastery of the Roman Catholic Church which was established in 1970 and served as a pilgrimage centre. The Monastery managed the complex of sites. The waterfalls included the *Igba-Egodo* and the *Tara-tara*. The more prominent and more visited of the falls- the *Igba-Egodo*, was located about 3 kilometers (about 45 minutes walk) from the parking lot that was just before the Monastery gate and three and a half kilometers to the 'Calvary' hills. The *Iyi-Nevo Ode* stream cut across the bush/forest path midway to the waterfall and flowed down the village. The *Iyi-Oke* stream emerged from Okpatu Community, gave birth to the waterfall, and also proceeded from the waterfall meandering through the surrounding forest down the adjoining community. The waterfall consisted of a breath-taking one kilometer long, twenty meters deep, windy and cave-like underground path; bounded on the left and on the right by granite stones that were cut through by centuries of the fall. At the end of the open tunnel, the water was seen and heard pouring heavily and speedily down the Awhum hill from a height of about twenty meters. The splashing sound of the fall mysteriously grew fearfully louder as visitors' voices got louder. The whole complex passed for an ideal place for adventure, bird watching, picnics and meditative activities. It offers a congenial and quiet atmosphere for spiritual activities.

Nekede Zoological Garden and Forest Reserve is located at Umualum village in Nekede community of Owerri West Local Government Area, 12 kilometers from Owerri capital city of Imo State. As the name implies, the site is comprised of the forest reserve and the zoological garden. The forest is not usually open to visitors except by special request and approval. The zoological garden is a man-made site where animal and plant relics are kept for protection and historical education purposes. Animals that are found there include Python, Monkeys of various species, Lions, Tigers, Chimpanzee, Crocodiles, Antelopes, Wild Pigs, Wild birds, Hyena, Porcupines, Grass cutters and Tortoise. The animals are friendly and humorous. The site is used for sightseeing and recreational purposes. There are areas provided for relaxations, picnics, birthday parties and other social activities.

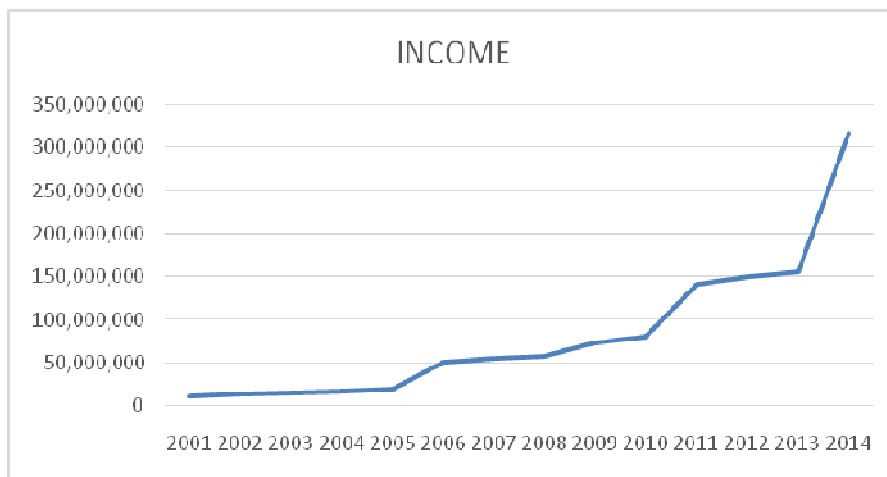
Secondary data sourced from the records of Awhum Catholic Cistercian Monastery and the management of Nekede Zoological Garden and Forest Reserve were used for the study. Trends analysis (ratio method) was used to analyze the data collected.

3. Result

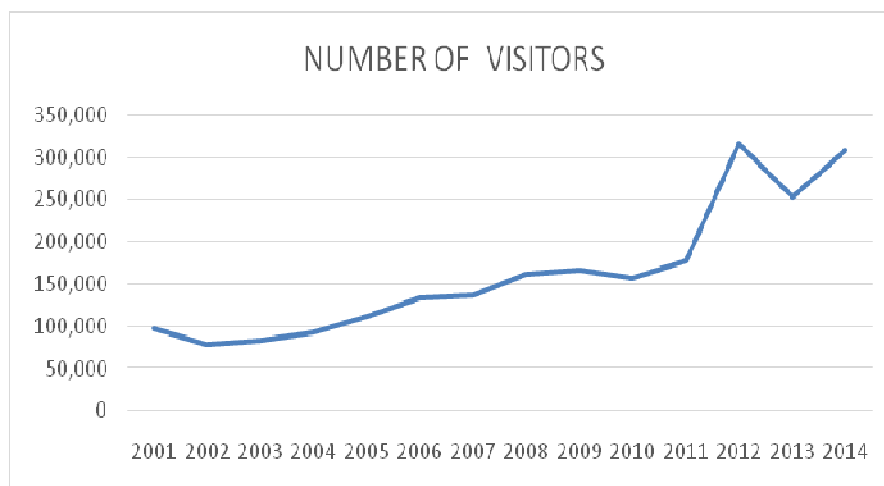
Table 1 shows irregular growth rates for both number of visitors to ecotourism sites and income from 2001 to 2011, after which they steadied. Number of visitors grew at the rate of 18% between 2001 and 2002 while income grew at 25% within the same period. From 2002, the rate of growth of number of visitors fail to

5% in 2003 then rose to 12% and 21% in 2004 and 2005 respectively. Within the same period, the rate of growth of ecotourism income fall to 12% in 2003 and 8% in 2004 then rose to 16% in 2005.

Year	visitors
2001	97,240
2002	79,066
2003	83,321
2004	93,059
2005	112,114
2006	133,207
2007	137,028
2008	161,412
2009	166,520
2010	156,910
2011	178,397
2012	315,575
2013	252,553
2014	308,115



Year	Income
2001	10,581,540
2002	13,184,561
2003	14,801,136
2004	15,918,944
2005	18,503,534
2006	50,535,417
2007	54,058,708
2008	57,894,132
2009	72,715,520
2010	79,853,410
2011	141,679,550
2012	150,180,323
2013	154,685,732
2014	317,105,741



Year	Average Spending
2001	157.37
2002	166.75
2003	177.64
2004	171.06
2005	165.09
2006	379.38
2007	394.51
2008	358.67
2009	436.68
2010	508.91
2011	794.18
2012	696.65
2013	612.49
2014	1029.17

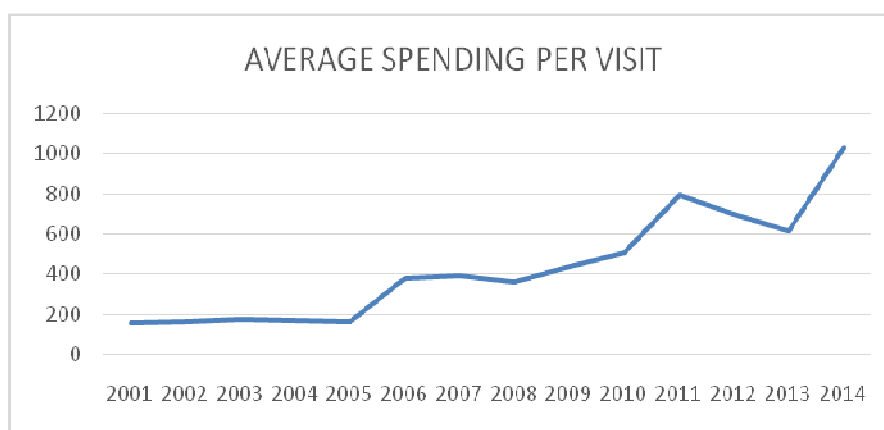


Table 1: Annual Percentage Growth Rates of Number of Visitors to Ecotourism Sites and Income in Two Ecotourism Sites in South East Nigeria (2001-2014)

Year	Total number of visitors	Annual percentage growth of number of visitors (%)	Total income (N)	Annual percentage growth of income (%)	Average per visit spending (N)
2001	67,240	00	10,581,540	00	157.37
2002	79,066	18	13,184,561	25	166.75
2003	83,321	05	14,801,136	12	177.64
2004	93,059	12	15,918,944	08	171.06
2005	112,114	21	18,503,534	16	165.09
2006	133,207	19	50,535,417	174	379.38
2007	137,028	03	54,058,708	10	394.51
2008	161,412	18	57,894,132	07	358.67
2009	166,520	03	72,715,520	25	436.68
2010	156,910	-06	79,853,410	10	508.91
2011	178,397	08	141,679,550	78	794.18
2012	215,575	14	150,180,323	86	696.65
2013	252,553	17	154,685,732	93	612.49
2014	08,115	22	317,105,741	105	1029.17
Total	2,145,517		1,150,508,371		
Average	153,251	11	821,179,169.4	37	

Source: Calculated from data obtained from the records of Cistercian Monastery, Awlum and Forest Reserve and Zoological Garden, Nekede, 2014.

*Income is calculated based on cost of ticket and bed-and-breakfast accommodation only.

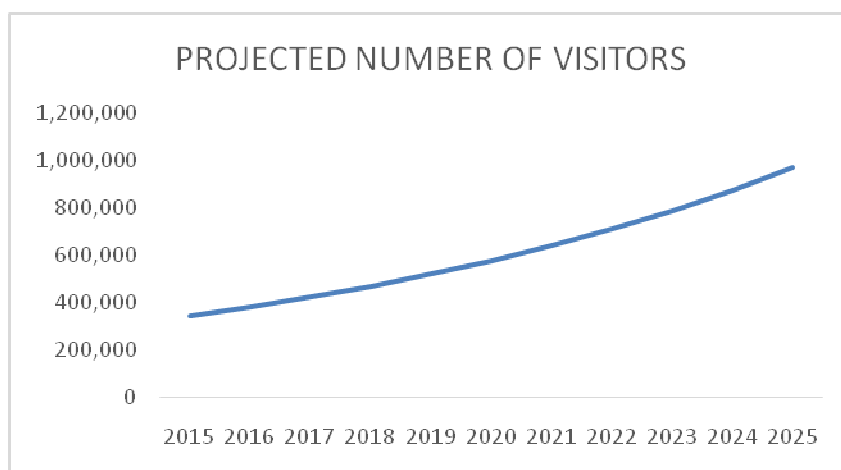
Number of visitors grew at 19% in 2006, 18% in 2008 while there was a negative growth in 2010. On the other hand, income flow grew at an astounding 174% in 2006 then fail to 07% in 2008 before rising to 10% in 2010. From 2011 to 2014, both number of visitors and income grew steadily from 8% to 22% and from 78% to 105% respectively. Average rates of growth of number of visitors and income over the whole study period were found to be 11% and 37% respectively. In 2001, average spending per visitor was N157 per visit (ticket and bed-and-breakfast accommodation only). It grew steadily to N379 in 2006, N794 in 2011 and N1029 in 2014. In 2020, if inflationary rate remained fairly same, per visit spending was expected to reach N2,596; and N8,580 in 2025. Using the average growth rates of number of visitors and income over the study period (14 years) - 11% and 37% respectively, projections were made on the future trends of number of visitors to the ecotourism sites and income in the study area (Table 2).

Table 2: Projected Growth in Number of Visitors to Ecotourism Sites and Income in Two Ecotourism Sites in South East Nigeria (2015-2025).

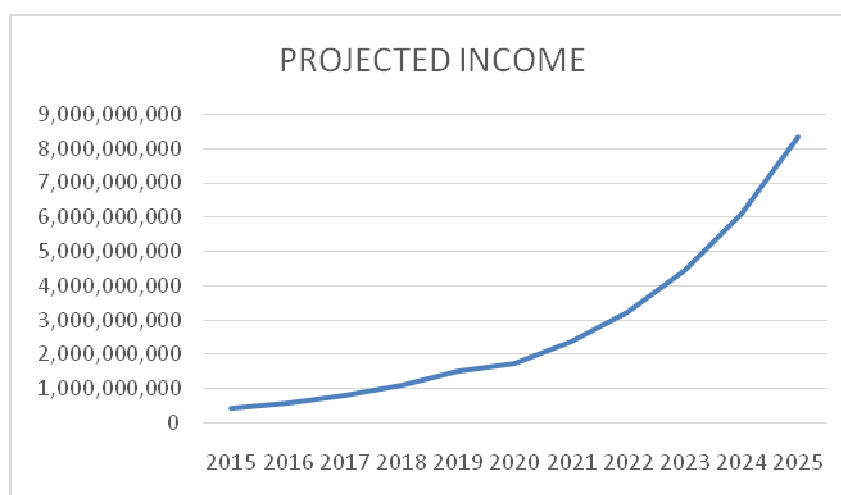
Year	Projected number of visitors at uniform growth rate of 11%	Projected income at uniform growth rate of 37%
2015	342,007	434,434,865
2016	379,628	595,175,765
2017	421,387	815,380,798
2018	467,739	1,117,072,193
2019	519,190	1,530,308,804
2020	576,301	1,726,523,062
2021	639,694	2,365,336,595
2022	710,060	3,240,511,135
2023	788,166	4,439,492,273
2024	874,864	6,082,104,414
2025	971,099	8,332,483,047

Source: Calculated from the records of Cistercian Monastery, Awlum and Forest Reserve and Zoological Garden, Nekede, 2014. *Income is calculated based on cost of ticket and bed-and-breakfast accommodation only

Year	Visitors
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Year	Income
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2021	2,365,336,595
2022	3,240,511,135
2023	4,439,492,273
2024	6,082,104,414
2025	8,332,483,047



From Table 2, if present socio-economic and political conditions continued to prevail, the number of visitors to the two ecotourism sites was expected to grow from 342,007 in 2015 to about 519,190 in 2019, and about 971,099 in 2025. Similarly, income accruing to the sites from ecotourism was expected to increase from N434.4 million in 2015 to about N1.5 billion in 2019, and about N8.3 billion in 2025.

4. Conclusion

The study has demonstrated a positive and significant growth rates in visitor and income flows on the two ecotourism sites studied in South-East Nigeria. Taking this as an indicator of the potential of ecotourism in the area, it then follows that if the present socio-political and economic conditions continue to prevail; ecotourism

will continue to grow in South East Nigeria in terms of number of visitors, total income and average expenditure per visitor per visit. It is recommended that local, state and federal governments should continue to pursue policies that promote local and international flow of travelers to South-East Nigeria.

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