

Rationale and Options for Community Participation in Ecotourism Development in South East Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper reviewed the rationale and options for local community participation in ecotourism development in South East Nigeria. The concepts of ecotourism, community and participation were analyzed. The objectives and conditions of community-based ecotourism development were considered against the background of South East Nigeria socio-cultural and environmental situation. Then the rationale and options for community-based ecotourism development were reviewed along with the opportunities and threats to the communities. The conclusion was that tourism as a component force of globalization and ecotourism as a sustainable development paradigm, present vast opportunities for rural community development and poverty reduction in the South East Nigeria that can be maximized by assisting communities to get directly involved. The paper recommends that local and State Government agencies and NGOs should partner with communities in planning, implanting and monitoring of viable community-based ecotourism projects to enhance environmental conservation and economic welfare of communities in the zone.

Key word: Ecotourism, Community Participation, Rationale, Options, South East Nigeria

1. Introduction

Tourism as part of the global process of change and development (globalization) has since the end of the second world war in 1945, become a major socio-cultural, political and economic driving force in both developed and developing regions of the world (United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2006; WTTC, 2010; Madzara, 2011; UNWTO, 2012; Barry, 2012; Ezeuduji, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Doohyun et al., 2014). A leading global industry, tourism is contributing to a significant proportion of world production, trade, investments and employment (UNWTO, 2001; 2012). Reports show that, international travel for recreational, leisure or business purposes has become one of the fastest growing economic activities worldwide (UNWTO, 2001; 2012; 2015). The number of international tourist arrivals rose by nearly forty fold from 25 million in 1950 to 980 million in 2011. It reached 1 billion in 2012, and is expected to reach 1.56 billion by 2020 (UNWTO, 2001; 2012; 2015). Tourism is one of the largest categories of international trade and a major contributor to the world's economy, accounting for greater than nine per cent of global GDP and almost nine per cent of jobs globally (World Tourism & Travel Council, 2012).

However, the degrading outcomes of conventional mass tourism on cultural and natural environment of host communities (destinations) have led to the invention of a "new tourism", namely, ecotourism (Honey, 1999). Ecotourism is widely promoted as an ideal component of the sustainable development strategy whereby natural (cultural and historical) resources can be utilized as tourism attractions without causing harm to the environment. It helps educate the traveler; provides funds for conservation, directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights (TIES, 2015). Community-based ecotourism (or community ecotourism) is participatory. As a development paradigm, participation connotes involvement by a local population and at times, additional stakeholders, in the creation, content and conduct of a program or policy designed to change their lives (Jennings, 2000). Hence, in community ecotourism, the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in ecotourism development and management and a major proportion of the benefits remains within the community (Barry, 2012; Nwahia, et al, 2012).

As an environmentally responsible, participatory and sustainable development strategy, community ecotourism has, since the late 80's, attracted wide-spread support and patronage among tourists, communities and development policy makers (World Trade and Tourism Council (WTTC), 2010; UNDP/International Trade Centre (ITC)/International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), 2012). WTTC estimated that ecotourism grew annually world-wide at the rate of 10-15 per cent in the last decade; it grew faster than that of tourism as a whole, particularly in the tropics. According to UNWTO (2012), tourism (mainly, ecotourism) is expected to grow faster in developing countries than in developed economies over the next ten years. From UNWTO (2012) report, destinations in emerging economies currently receive 47 per cent of worldwide international tourist arrivals and US\$306 billion in international tourism receipts (36 per cent of the global total). Moreover, the report noted that growth in the decade since 2000 has been most marked in emerging economies

(58.8 per cent). Market share has also grown more significantly in emerging economies (from 38.1 per cent in 2000 to 46.9 per cent in 2009). Tourism is an especially promising source of income for developing countries because it provides an effective transfer of income from wealthy to poor nations (UNWTO, 2012; 2015; World Tourism and Travel Council, 2012). In many developing nations, it is the most important source of foreign exchange and foreign direct investment (World Tourism and Travel Council, 2012). Tourism is an industry where there is a growing positive balance of trade flowing from developed countries to developing countries (World Tourism and Travel Council, 2012). Furthermore, recent trends and forecasts point to a spreading of ecotourism to new destinations, largely in developing countries, where there is outstanding potential to support development goals, and where new environmental and cultural attributes can make an important contribution to more sustainable tourism destinations (UNWTO, 2012).

However, despite Nigeria's huge ecotourism potential and several government declarations in favor of tourism development, the sector has remained largely untapped due mostly to lack of genuine commitments by governments at the various levels. Federal Government's designation of tourism as a priority sector, and the drafting and adoption of the National Tourism Master plan in 2006 (UNWTO/UNDP/DTI, 2006), seem to have failed to generate the expected response from state and local governments, particularly, in South East Nigeria. In three South-Eastern States of Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo for instances, tourism has consistently remained the least funded sector of the economy. For instance, between 2007 and 2010, Ebonyi State Government budgeted an average of N108.6 million towards tourism development as against N149million for commerce and industry, N344.8 million for agriculture and natural Resources and N127.8million for youths and sports (Ebonyi State Ministry of Finance, 2008; 2010). Enugu State budgeted an average of N91 million for tourism development during the same period as against N455 million for commerce and Industry, N785million for Agriculture and Natural Resources and N268million for Youths and Sports (Enugu State Government, 2008; 2010). In Imo State, 99.3% of the budgeted N339.7 million for tourism development in 2009 went into recurrent expenditure while 0.7% or N2.5 million only was meant for tourism capital development (Imo State Government, 2008; 2010). However, the preponderance of ecological resources, strong tradition of communalism, acclaimed entrepreneurial ability of the people and a receptive attitude to visitors are strong pointers to the potentiality of community-based ecotourism in the zone.

The purpose of this paper therefore, is to highlight ecotourism development as a veritable development strategy for the South-Eastern Nigeria and to stress the rationale and forms of making it community-driven for maximum sustainable socio-cultural, economic, political and ecological benefits. The paper relies on literature to explore the concepts of ecotourism, community and participation. It discusses the rationale and options for community participation in ecotourism development and analyzes the objectives and basic conditions for ecotourism development at community level. Potential opportunities and threats of community participation in ecotourism development are also considered.

2. Concept of Ecotourism

There is currently no clear consensus on the definition of ecotourism. The meaning and use of the term, in the words of Buchsbaum (2004), is "plagued by disagreement, confusion and propaganda". Some argue that the lack of definition and the vagaries and ambiguities that surround the term make it almost meaningless (Weaver, 2001; Buchsbaum, 2004). Others argue that there are different types of ecotourism, such as "hard", "soft", "deep", "shallow", "active" and "passive" ecotourism and as such they cannot be grouped into one categorical definition (Orams, 1995; Stem 2003). Orams (1995) attempted to categorize the various types of ecotourism into five groups as follows:

- Incidental - any travel during which the traveler views or appreciates the green environment;
- Nature-centered travel in which nature is the central value rather than an afterthought;
- Support - organized to raise appreciable financial support for the protection of the green environment visited or enjoyed;
- Involvement - travel in which the traveler personally engages in activities that support conservation or restoration;
- Ecological - travel in which all activities are ecologically benign.

Orams (1995) presented the concept of the variation of definition of ecotourism as a continuum of ecotourism paradigms where at one pole all tourism may be viewed as ecotourism and at the other, no tourism may be viewed as ecotourism. According to the author, at the high human responsibility pole, all tourism including ecotourism may be seen as having a damaging effect on the natural environment, thus implying that ecotourism is a contradiction of itself. At the low human responsibility pole, it is considered that human activities need take no consideration over the environment and in this way, all tourism may be considered as ecotourism. These two

scenarios according to Orams (1995) are the extremes of the scale and are therefore, somewhat severe and unrealistic. However, the different opinions (definitions) may be situated along this continuum.

From old and emerging definitions, ecotourism may thus be classified as passive/soft/shallow or active/hard/deep. The passive/soft/shallow stance was often taken by tourism and economic experts whose main interest is the revenue from tourism. This group sees ecotourism as a new way, a holistic approach to tourism aimed at making the industry sustainable to avoid killing the goose that laid the golden egg (Ceballos–Lascurain, 1993; Srinivas, 2006; Orams, 1995; Center for Ecotourism, 2006). For instance, Ceballos–Lascurain, (1993 cited in Orams, 1995) who coined the term ecotourism, described it as *Nature-based travel to relatively undisturbed areas with an emphasis on education*. The Center for Ecotourism (2006) similarly described ecotourism 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*. The Center for Ecotourism (2006) further contends that ecotourism is not just scenic or nature-based travel but an approach that creates a variety of products that are environmentally/ ecologically sustainable, economically viable and socially and psychologically acceptable. Continuing, the Center for Ecotourism (2006) argues that responsible ecotourism includes programs that minimize the adverse effects of traditional tourism on the natural environment and enhance the cultural integrity of local people. Therefore, in the Center’s opinion, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, initiatives by hospitality providers to promote recycling, energy efficiency, water reuse and the creation of economic opportunities for local communities are an integral part of ecotourism.

The “active/hard/deep” school sees ecotourism as a niche market or “legitimate sector” of the tourism industry. 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 (International Union For Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 1996; World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), 2001; Drumm and Moore, 2005; Honey, 1999; Wang, et al, 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; World Wide Fund for Nature, 2001; Drumm and Moore, 2005). In this strictest sense, ecotourism has been defined 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).

On the periphery of the active/hard/deep or conservationist school are experts who hold that ecotourism included all tourism that is based on natural environments (rather than protected areas only), that seeks to minimize harmful impacts and promotes conservation (TIES, 2008). In this wise, ecotourism has been defined as *Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present) that promote conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples* (World Conservation Union (ICUN cited in Orams, 1995). Conclusively, ecotourism may be referred to as travel to natural areas, which actively contributes to conservation and preservation of the overall environment on which it is based and to the sustained improvement of economic welfare of local communities.

3. Objectives and Character of Ecotourism

While a consensus definition of ecotourism may yet be in the process of evolution, some necessary ground-rule and objectives for ecotourism can be identified in literature. According to Honey (1999), ecotourism development should not destroy the resource upon which it is based. It should be of sound ecological and cultural nature, meeting the needs of host communities- with regard to improving the standard of living for the majority in both the short and long time- and the demands of actual and potential tourists in order for the industry to grow. Similarly, Drumm and Moore (2005) noted that ecotourism development must have a low impact on the environment, involve stakeholders (individuals, communities, tourists, tour operators and government institutions) in the planning, development, implementation and monitoring phases and respect local cultures and traditions. The authors further stated that ecotourism must generate sustainable and equitable income for local communities and for as many other stakeholders as possible, including private tour operators as well as educate all stakeholders about their role in conservation. The objectives of ecotourism are therefore aptly summarized by the World Conference on Ecotourism as protection of the environment, economic sustainability, cultural integrity and educational value (UNWTO, 2002).

The picture of ecotourism that has emerged from the above review is that of visit to a natural scene that is indigenous in attitude, educative, economically viable and ecologically and culturally sensitive. 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 and the social and economic wellbeing of local people. Properly implemented, ecotourism can integrate conservation and rural development/poverty reduction by helping to protect valuable natural resources through tourism-catalyzed incentives.

4. Concept of Community

A community, in biological terms, is a group of interacting organisms sharing a populated environment (Putnam 2002). In human communities, conditions such as intent, belief, resources, preferences, needs, risks are present and common and affect the identity of the participants as well as their level of cohesiveness (Putnam, 2000). From traditional point of view, a community is a group of interacting people living in a common location. Often, the term refers to a group of people that is organized around common values, characterized with social cohesion, within a geographical location and generally in social units larger than households (Arthur and Bailey, 2000; Bauman, 2001). The word “community”, according to Crow and Allan (1994), came from the old French *communité* which came from the Latin *communitas* (*cum*, “with/ together” and *munus*, “gift”), a broad term for fellowship of organized society. The advent of Internet has removed geographical limitations from the concept of society making it possible for people to gather in an online community and share common interests regardless of physical location (Etzioni, 1995).

5. Types of Communities

Putnam (2000) proposed a number of ways to typify communities. One is Geographic communities, which is based on communities’ location and range from the local neighborhoods suburb, village, town or city, region, nation or even the planet as a whole. Another category is communities of culture, which range from local clique, sub-culture, ethnic group, religious, multicultural or pluralistic civilization, or the global community cultures of today. It may also include communities of need or identity, such as disabled persons, or frail aged people. Putnam (2000) also identified community organizations which include informal family or kinship networks, more formal incorporated associations, political decision-making structures, economic enterprises or professional associations at small, national or international scale. He further observed that communities are nested; one community can contain another.

In literature, three linked qualities are identified in the discussion of community life. These include tolerance, which is openness to others, curiosity, respect, a willingness to listen and learn (Walzer 1997) and reciprocity, which is generally described by Putnam (2000: 12) as ‘I’ll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return, and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favor’. This way according to Putnam (2000), there is altruism in the short-run and in the long-run, self-interest. The third is trust or more accurately, trustworthiness- reliability, which is the confident expectation that people, institutions and things will act in a consistent, honest and appropriate way which is essential if communities are to flourish (Putnam 1993). Closely linked to norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement, social trust – trust in other people – allows people to cooperate and to develop (Putnam 1993; Coleman 1990).

6. Community, Social Capital and Economic Prosperity

Putnam (2000) argued that if community exists, both freedom and security may exist as well hence, the community takes on a life of its own, as people become free enough to share and secure enough to get along. The sense of connectedness and formation of social networks form what has become known as *social capital*, which according to Putnam (2000) is “the collective value of all species (who people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (norms of reciprocity)”. Recent research results point that where trust and social networks flourish, individuals, firms, neighborhoods, and even nations prosper economically. Social capital helps to mitigate the adversities of economic disadvantage (Putnam, 2000; Arthur and Bailey, 2000; Beck, 2001; Castells, 2001).

7. The Participatory Development Paradigm

The meaning of “participation” often depends on the organizational culture defining it. Participation has been variously described as a means and an end, as essential within agencies as it is in the field, and as an educational and empowering process necessary to correct power imbalances between rich and poor (Jennings, 2000). It has been broadly conceived to embrace the idea that all “stakeholders” should take part in decision making and it has been more narrowly described as the extraction of local knowledge to design programs off-site (Jennings, 2000). Differences in definitions and methods aside, there is some common agreement concerning what constitutes

authentic “participation”. According to Jennings (2000), Participation refers to involvement by local populations in the creation, content and conduct of a program or policy designed to change their lives. It requires recognition and use of local capacities and avoids the imposition of priorities from the outside. It increases the odds that a program will be on target and its results will more likely be sustainable. Ultimately, participatory development is driven by a belief in the importance of entrusting citizens with the responsibility to shape their own future (Jennings, 2000).

8. Political Benefits of Participatory Programming

Participatory development promotes equity and accepts that the exercise of decision making power at the local level is as legitimate as it is at the national level (Jennings, 2000). Like democracy, participatory development champions the sovereignty of people over the sovereignty of a state and helps to create an environment where people can more effectively identify and address their own needs (Jennings, 2000). According to Jennings (2000), participatory development explicitly recognizes the significance of political and social context in an effort to determine the roots of an enduring problem and to avoid harming those who should benefit. To believe in and promote participatory development is to believe in the intrinsic importance of self-determination (Jennings, 2000).

9. Economic and Socio-Cultural Benefits of Participatory Programming

While participatory methodologies may require greater upfront investment in staff training and operations expenditures (up to 15%, on average) according to the World Bank (1996), programs overall costs average lower than in programs that do not rely on local capacities. More studies have reported that participatory development programs are invariably more relevant and effective at addressing local needs. Moreover, the gains made during an intervention are more often sustained using participatory methods and chances are higher that the engagement of local women and youth in the intervention process will improve their status as well. In the end, the ability of local participation programs to leverage other national or foreign resources extends the overall reach of general assistance in most cases (Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), 1997; Chambers, 1997; Clayton, Andrew, Oakley, Peter, Pratt, and Brian, 1998). Four separate studies of participatory programming have found that such methods often cost less in the long run and are consistently more effective at getting assistance where it needs to go (CIDA, 1997; United Nations Development Program Civil Society Organization and Participation Program (UNDP CSOPP), 1999; United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 1999;). Such methods were also found to be unmatched in fostering sustainability, strengthening local self-help capacities and in improving the status of women and youth. Finally, by establishing platforms where governments and organizations may access and involve citizens in their programs; participatory development methods often extended the reach of traditional development approaches by leveraging local resources with national and foreign assets (CIDA, 1997; UNDP-CSOPP, 1999; USAID, 1999).

10. Rationale for Community Participation in Ecotourism Development

Communities had been the stewards of most of the world’s natural areas until the colonization of tropical countries by countries of Europe (WWF, 2001). Colonial governments ceased the most of the wildlife parks and protected areas, particularly in Africa, and “protected” or “reserved” them for their access only; thus, local communities were excluded from management decisions with respect to their development and even their self-determination (WWF, 2001). In recent decades, this exclusion has been manifest in economic development, not least in tourism. Community members have not been recognized as stakeholders and have been marginalized from nature tourism opportunities while private companies, located in distant cities and even foreign countries, control tourism activities (Buchsbaum, 2004; WWF, 2001; Drumm and Moore, 2005). In recent years, conservationists have come to recognize the crucial role rural and coastal communities play in conserving biodiversity. Consequently, conservationists have developed mechanism to incorporate these communities, as stakeholders, into planning and management process (Drumm and Moore, 2005). At the same time, the growing interest of tourists in learning from and experiencing different cultures has led the tourism industry to incorporate communities into its activities (Drumm and Moore, 2005; WWF, 2001). This has led to a growing awareness of the opportunities tourism presents. Communities that are well organized and have titles to traditional lands are likely to be more successful in capturing a greater share of tourism spending on natural areas (Drumm and Moore, 2005; WWF, 2001; TIES, 2005).

Community participation in ecotourism refers to communities having substantial control over and involvement in its development and management and a major proportion of the benefits remaining within the community (WWF, 2001). The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF, 2001) argued that the interest and concerns of local people regarding tourism development need special attention because tourism touches all the other groups involved professionally and in a mostly economic sense but the communities, in a personal way, affecting their life styles,

traditions and cultures as well as their livelihoods and their long-standing ways of organizing themselves socially and politically. Also, most of the other players enter tourism voluntarily whereas in many cases, communities must deal with tourism impacts whether or not they choose to. Furthermore, since it is their homelands and work places that are attracting nature travelers, equity and practicality require that communities be active decision makers in ecotourism planning and management. Similarly, communities' relationship to and uses of natural resources will determine the success of conservation strategies for protected areas and local traditional knowledge is often a key component of visitors experience and education. In addition to the above reasons, World Ecotourism Summit (UNWTO, 2002) identified the need to generate local community benefits from natural heritages and link ecotourism and rural economy to avoid leakages and maximize local economic benefits as important reasons to involve local communities in ecotourism development.

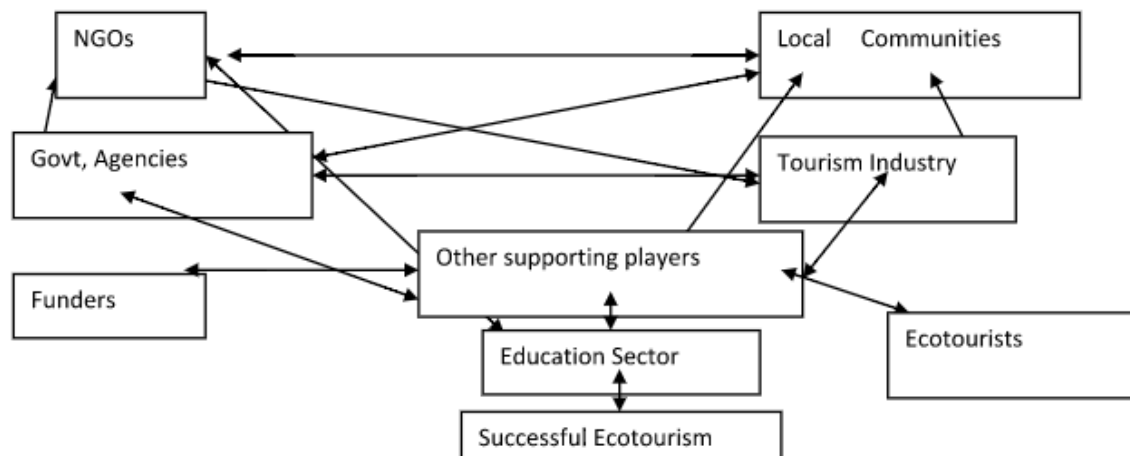


Figure 4: Ecotourism Partnerships Needed for Success (*Protected area / site managers play a facilitating role*).
 Source: Drumm and Moore, 2005. P.23

11. Options for Community Participation in Ecotourism Development

Community participation often takes the form of a structured or loosely aligned cooperative in which members of the community hold active roles in providing accommodations, food, crafts, transportation or guide services (WWF, 2001, 2001; Drumm and Moore, 2005). However, it is important for communities to choose from a range of degrees of participation including:

11.1. Private sector concessions

Private sector concession involve given a private ecotourism enterprise (internally and externally owned) right to develop and manage a facility in exchange for an annual payment. The participation of private sector reduces the risk of failure given their expertise but may increase the chances of economic leakages from the community (Drumm and Moore, 2005). However, further community involvement in providing labor and produce, as guide squads, in selling produce and handcrafts to visitors directly or through tourism business can be negotiated into the concession to maximize local benefits. Rodriguez (2005) cited in Drumm and Moore (2005) presented first hand examples from Kawi, Ecuador.

11.2. Community/Private/NGO partnerships

This structure enables each partner to contribute their greatest strengths, for example, NGOs in conservation capacity, communities in ownership and local knowledge, and tourism business in tour management experience and market linkages. Practical illustration of this form of community participation in ecotourism development is found in community conservancies in Namibia (WWF, 2001).

11.3. Community owned and run enterprises

Here, local communities organize, own and communally manage own tourism business, including accommodation. The disadvantage of this is that local communities may lack expertise and necessary links to market (WWF, 2001). However, this form of structure fosters sustainable use of and collective responsibility for natural resources (Liu, 1994; WWF, 2001; Drumm and Moore, 2005). The workability of this form of arrangement is supported by the projects for Toledo Ecotourism Associations in Belize (Boo, 1999).

The role chosen by a community, advisedly, should be based among other things, on her interest, sensitivity, presence of strong leadership, quality tourism demand, training opportunities, availability of partners and private

sector interest (Drumm and Moore, 2005).

12. Objectives and basic conditions for ecotourism development at community level

The fundamental objective of ecotourism is by consensus, to improve conservation of landscapes and biodiversity (WWF, 2001, Drumm and Moore, 2005; Buchsbaum, 2004; Honey, 1999). Community-based ecotourism therefore, may be seen and evaluated as one tool in achieving this (Honey, 1999; WWF, 2001; Buchsbaum, 2004; Drumm and Moore, 2005). Other objectives of community based ecotourism include: provide a more sustainable form of livelihood for local Communities; encourage communities themselves to be more directly involved in conservation; and generate more goodwill towards, and local benefits from conservation measures such as protected areas (WWF, 2001; Drumm and Moore, 2005; Honey, 1999). The capacity of ecotourism to support positive attitude towards conservation must be balanced with the delivery of direct economic benefits. Consideration of these issues at the outset should influence not only a decision about whether to proceed with the development of eco-tourism but should also provide a basis for the strategy to be adopted (WWF, 2001; Drumm and Moore, 2005).

However, for tourism business of any type (including ecotourism) to succeed, there should be a national economic and political framework which does not prevent effective trading and security of investment; a legislation which does not obstruct tourism income being earned by and retained within local communities and a sufficient level of ownership rights with the local community. Furthermore, there should be high levels of safety and security for visitors (both in terms of image of the country/region and in reality); a relatively low health risks and access to basic medical services and a clean water supply; and practical means of physical access and telecommunication to the area (WWF, 2001, Honey, 2007; Onyeabor, 2008). For community-based ecotourism in particular, there must also be landscapes or flora/fauna which have inherent attractiveness or degree of interest to appeal either to specialists or more general visitors; ecosystems that are at least able to absorb a managed level of visitation without damage and a local community that is aware of the potential opportunities, risks and changes involved, and is interested in receiving visitors. Potential structures for effective community decision making must exist; no obvious threats to indigenous culture and traditions; and an initial market assessment suggesting potential demand and effective means of accessing it and that the area is not over supplied with coteries' offers (WWF, 2001; Honey, 1999; WTO, 2002; Drumm and More, 2005; Honey, 2007). The Federal constitution of Nigeria guarantees enough freedom of investment to individuals, communities and corporate citizens as observed in the Nigerian Tourism Development Master Plan (UNWTO/UNDP/DTI, 2006). An empirical analysis of factors in ecotourism development in South East Nigeria by Onyeabor (2014) demonstrates that security is not a significant constraint particularly, to domestic ecotourists. Hence, with the preponderance of cultural and ecological resources, a strong tradition of communalism, acclaimed entrepreneurial ability and hospitable attitude, the South East Nigeria have strong potential for viable community-driven ecotourism development.

13. Potential Opportunities and Threats of Community Participation in Ecotourism Development

Tourism presents a mix of opportunities and threats and consequently, benefits and costs which vary from situation to situation, from community to community (UNWTO, 2010a). Opportunities and threats of tourism are handled by good planning and management (Drum and Moore, 2005; WWF, 2001). Potential opportunities presented by ecotourism development are conceptualized by Drum and Moore (2005) as shown in figure 2.

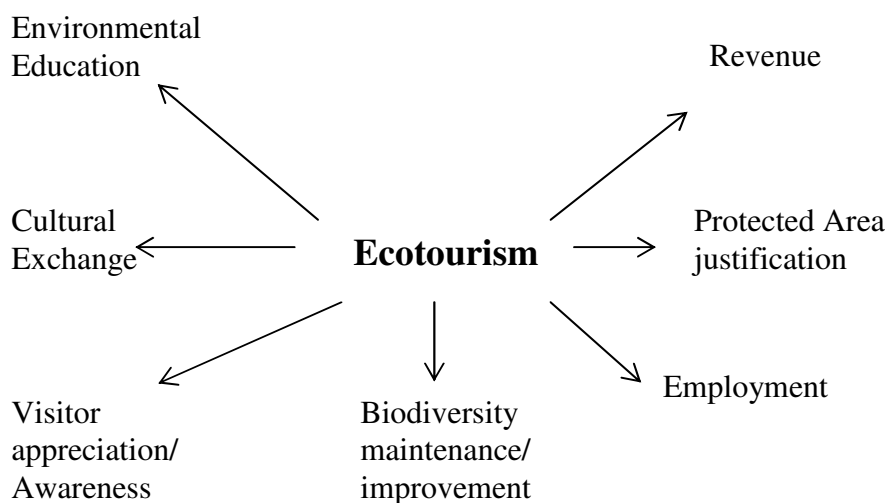


Figure 2: Ecotourism as a Development Opportunity. Source: Drum and Moore (2005) P.102

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.

13.1. Environmental economics

As globalization and unbridled economic competition continue to dominate the global agenda, it appears that ecotourism's greatest promise may be in its ability to harness the power of economic markets for the purpose of conserving the environment. Ecotourism, in purely economic terms, is a way of giving nature value, the most basic principle of environmental economics. Ecotourism is developed as a way to commercialize the existential value of sensitive ecological regions, protecting forests and generating employment and income at the same time (Buchsbbaum, 2004; Roaberts and Thanos, 2003). The prosperity of ecotourism in some places for example, Costa Rica and Kenya, is largely because it became more profitable than competing ecologically destructive land uses such as agriculture, cattle grazing, hunting, logging and conventional mass tourism (Honey, 1999; Weaver, 2001, Chami and Semboja, 2005).

13.2. Local business, local employment and household income

There are strong empirical evidences that ecotourism is contributing to higher household income and better overall standard of living for local people (WWF, 2001; Holland, Burian and Dixie, 2003; Mugunda, 2009; Madzara, 2011; Nwahia, Omonona, Onyeabor, and Balogun, 2012). 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 though collecting fees for access to trails, providing accommodation or guiding services, preparing and selling food and handicrafts (Lindberg, 1991; Liu, 1994; Honey, 1999; Lindberg and Huber, 1993). Ecotourism provides 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 (Chami and Semboja, 2005). Kweka (2001) calculated output multiplier for tourism (in most part, ecotourism) in Tanzania to be 1.8. Ecotourism requires 44% of its input from other sectors- far above an average of 21% for all other sectors (Chami and Semboja, 2005). 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 (Chami and Semboja, 2005). 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 (Stem et al, 2003). It serves as a spin-off for many other businesses, especially those in the informal sector (Stem et al, 2003).

13.3. Foreign exchange

Local, state and national governments may also expect to earn revenues from ecotourism. Lindberg in Drumm and Moore, (2005) reported receipts in excess of one million dollars per anum in the *Parc Nationale des Volcans* in Rwanda. This revenue paid the cost of park expenses of two hundred thousand dollars resulting in revenue to

the central government (Drumm and Moore, 2005). According to Honey (1999), ecotourism, when viewed as a tool for sustainable development in poorer countries, means in the main, the movement of travelers from the North to the South; from developed to developing countries. Tourism earnings surpassed Coffee in 1990 and then Bananas in 1993, becoming the number one foreign exchange earner and creating a more diverse economy in Costa Rica (Buchsbbaum 2004). Ecotourism contributed 90% and 50% of Kenya's and Tanzania's Gross National Product in 1989 and 2005 respectively (Chami and Semboja, 2005) and currently still constitute a major foreign exchange earner for countries like South Africa, Spain, Mexico, USA, France, among others (Chami and Semboja, 2005, UNWTO, 1997, 2002, 2005).

13.4. Social opportunities

Madzara (2011) reported that ecotourism preserves and enhances local culture by utilizing local knowledge and skills of the people. Local knowledge about the terrain, ecology and natural history, utilized in guiding tourists, and skills in arts and crafts, are ways of displaying local culture. Local community culture is also incorporated into planning and marketing of ecotourism destinations and products (Madzara, 2011). Ecotourists appreciate local tradition, customs, and cuisines than other market segments as well as supports a new awareness and new representations of the local culture, revitalized by interests of tourists (Buchsbbaum, 2004).

13.5. Capacity building

Community participation builds local capacity to plan, and manage ecotourism. It helps to identify community leaders, builds leadership capacity within communities and fosters social cohesion. It creates business awareness and fosters entrepreneurial spirit among participating communities and imbues confidence and a sense of entitlement and pride. It also enhances community's awareness of their role in the stewardship of the earth and strengthens the culture of communalism and collective responsibility and bargaining (Buchsbbaum, 2004). When a process in which direct knowledge, experience and understanding from the community forms the basis for the management of socio-cultural impacts, communities can engage in ongoing development and enhancement through ecotourism (Wearing, 2001). When people are central to ecotourism and community supports it, there is greater likelihood that they will devote their time and energy to it, understanding that the success of ecotourism is directly linked to their capacity to achieve greater standards of living and other additional benefits (Buchsbbaum, 2004).

13.6. Environmental opportunities

Ecotourism is a valuable tool for achieving environmental conservation, especially where there is weak presence of government and very little environmental regulation (Wang, et al, 2014). It helps protect biodiversity and manage natural resources sustainably while contributing to environmental education and changing the way people (locals and tourists) think about their environment (Wang, et al, 2014). This education builds an environmental ethos, which extends beyond the immediate scale of the ecotourism venue, so that ecotourists become active advocates for conservation for the area visited and their home towns or countries (Stem, et al, 2003). Parks and protected areas, which form the backbone of ecotourism, serve to protect the country's flora and fauna. Costa Rica, which is often referred to as number one ecotourism destination in the world, has 30 parks and 230 protected areas, amounting to 25-28 percent of the country's land-cover (Honey, 1999; Buchsbbaum, 2004).

13.7. Potential Ecotourism Threats

Poorly planned and/or managed ecotourism poses development threats to the community. Figure 6 is an illustration of development threats that may be posed by poorly planned or implemented ecotourism.

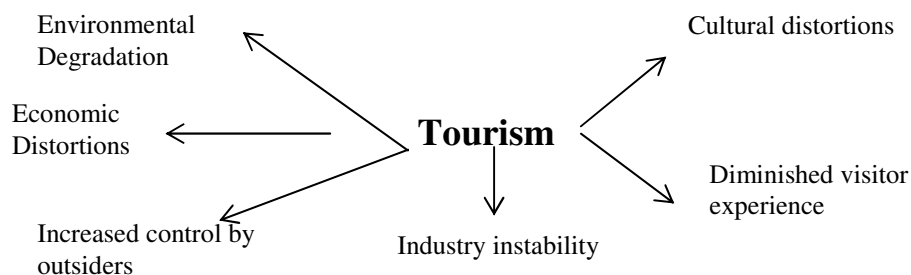


Figure 8: Potential Ecotourism Threats. Source: Adapted from Drum and Moore (2005:117).

13.8. Environmental degradation

The irony of nature tourism is that visitors can destroy the hen that lays the golden egg. Degradation of tourism environment happens in many ways and in varying degrees including trampling on vegetations, causing erosion of trails, and litter. In addition to surface damage, they affect the intrinsic workings of nature, causing subtle changes and problems including the alteration of such animal behaviour as eating habits, migration and reproduction which may be difficult to detect, but are important indicators to the health of natural resources (UNWTO, 2002; Drumm and Moore, 2004, 2005).

13.9. Economic instability

Ecotourism, like other forms of tourism, can be an unstable source of income. Many external factors influence tourism demand. These factors, though they are completely outside the control of tourist destinations yet they affect levels of visitation. For example, political conflict or rumours of unsafe conditions within a region or country can discourage international visitors for years. Natural disasters such as hurricane can easily destroy tourism infrastructure at marine sites. In addition, fluctuations in international currency can lead visitors to some countries and away from others. These factors all play major role in the decision to travel (Buchsbbaum, 2004; Drumm and Moore, 2005). Much of demand for tourism is determined by outside circumstances. Number of visitors can shift dramatically with little warning and greatly affect the financial status of small tourism businesses (UNWTO, 2002; Drumm and Moore, 2005). Owners and managers of micro-enterprises in remote areas do not typically have a diversity of employment options at their disposal should their businesses fail. A decline in tourism can mean disaster not only for individuals but whole countries if their economies are dependent on the volatile tourism industry (Drumm and Moore, 2005).

13.10. Crowding effect and excessive development

When a location becomes a popular tourism destination, crowding and excessive development can result. Tourists may start to compete with residents for space and fledging local infrastructures may be overwhelmed. Increased influx of visitors and sometimes, migrant entrepreneurs, will also lead to the development of lodges, restaurants, hotels, shops, which often is attended with minimal planning leading to aesthetic and ecological problems (Drumm and Moore, 2005).

14. Conclusion

The growing interest of tourists in learning from and experiencing different cultures has led the tourism industry to incorporate communities into its activities. More so, the interest and concerns of local people regarding tourism development need special attention because tourism touches all the other groups involved professionally and in a mostly economic sense but the communities, in a personal way, affecting their life styles, traditions and cultures as well as their livelihoods and their long-standing ways of organizing themselves socially and politically. When adequately planed and developed, ecotourism inspires diversification of livelihood opportunities in the rural areas, catalyze agricultural development and reduce poverty. Community-based ecotourism will in addition, lead to social and political empowerment of local communities through participation while it helps to conserve cultural and environmental resources through a non-consumptive use. Communities have options of concessioning ecotourism businesses, partnering with NGOs and the private sector or own their own ecotourism enterprises; in any case, communities earn direct economic and other benefits from ecotourism development. In South East Nigeria, the preponderance of cultural and ecological resources complemented by strong tradition of communalism, acclaimed entrepreneurial ability and hospitable attitude – traits that over the decades have catalyzed the development of another form of tourism in the zone, namely, agrotourism, portends a strong potentiality for community-driven ecotourism development in the zone.

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