

Challenges and Prospects of Developing *Abadaba* Lake into a Tourism Destination

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Abstract

The study examines the challenges and prospects of developing Abadaba Lake into a tourism destination in Obowo Local Government Area, Imo State, Nigeria. The study objectives were to identify the tourism potentials of Abadaba Lake, to ascertain the challenges and prospects of developing the Lake and actions needed to develop Abadaba lake. The method was survey design, and the sample size for the study consisted of 280 respondents made up of tourism officials of Imo State Tourism Board, members of the traditional council, indigenes of the host communities and staff of the State Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Data for the study were generated using observation, oral interview and questionnaire. Descriptive techniques were used to analyze the data generated through interview and observation for the research. The study revealed that the potentials of the lake comprised the serene environment, fresh water body surrounded by a luxuriant raffia palm with bamboo trees adding to its aestheticism that is capable of enriching good relaxation spot for tourists, wonders of two close rivers that do not meet/flow into each other, and cultural heritage resources such as Iwa-akwa and Mbomuzo. The challenges facing the lake were lack of interest by successive governments, change of government, lack of funds, poor road network, lack of infrastructural facilities, pollution of the lake and lack of interest and willingness by private investors to invest in tourism. It is recommended that government, private sector and other stakeholders should collaborate to develop this potential tourist site for tourism.

Keywords: *Abadaba* lake, tourism development, Obowo, destination,

Introduction

The beauty of *Abadaba* Lake can hold any tourist back on his first visit, this magnificent lake has remained an abandoned project due to lack of maintenance. This problem has eaten deep into the bones and marrows of many individuals in our society. There is no culture of continuity between preceding and succeeding governments. It is common in the country for uncompleted project to be abandoned by the in-coming government. *Abadaba* Lake is a victim of this circumstance and therefore has suffered neglect. Over dependence on oil as a major source of revenue generation in Nigeria has caused corruption, negligence in agriculture, and other sectors that provide alternative source of revenue. The fact that oil in Nigeria and around the world has been a source of wealth on one hand and a source of political and socio-economic crises on the other hand is a serious concern. According to

WTTC (2003), tourism sector has been the world fastest growing economic sector since the past 30 years. South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and some European countries are already reaping the benefits accruing from tourism. Tourism has been recognized as a potential tool in the drive to reduce poverty globally. The critical importance of tourism receipts to the developing nations' balance of payments and their economic welfare cannot be overemphasized. In 2000, tourism was the second highest combined source of foreign exchange earnings behind only petroleum industry exports among the least developed countries (WTO, 2002). In 2005, international tourism receipts to developing countries amounted to US\$203 billion. It is also worthy of note that travel and tourism industry is the primary source of foreign exchange earnings in 46 of the 49 Least Developed Countries (UNWTO, 2006).

Tourism provides a major contribution to the global economy. WTTC (2008) points out that world travel and tourism generated close to US\$8 trillion in 2008. The employment generation of the industry is estimated at 1,375,000 jobs in 2009 (6.4% of total employment) or 1 in every 15.6 jobs. By 2019, this should total 1,811,000 jobs (7.3% of total employment) or 1 in every 13.8 jobs. The 443,000 travel and tourism direct industry jobs account for 2.1% of total employment in 2007 and are forecast to total of 581,000 jobs or 2.3% of the total jobs by 2019 (WTTC, 2009). The industry generated 9% of global GDP and employs as many as 220 million people Worldwide (WTTC, 2009). Furthermore, WTTC (2011) forecast stated that the total contribution of travel and tourism to the Caribbean GDP including its wider economic impacts is expected to rise by 3.8% pa from 14.2% of GDP in 2011 to \$70.7 billion (14.6%) by 2021, with an expectation of increase in employment rate of 2.5% pa from 2,167,000 jobs to 2,764,000 jobs by 2021. It is expected that travel tourism export will generate revenue, and travel and tourism investment increase in a somewhat similar margin. Travel and tourism generated 108,741,000 jobs directly in 2016 (3.6% of total employment) and is forecast to grow by 2.1% in 2017 to 111,013,000 jobs (3.6% of total employment). The total contribution of travel and tourism to employment was 292,220,000 jobs in 2016 (9.6% of total employment) (WTTC, 2017a).

There has been a consistent rise in tourism growth precisely after September 11, 2001 without fall as it was observed and recorded. The event of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent conflicts in the Middle East have brought a significant change to the nature of tourism downward flow. Although the global figures for international tourist arrivals and spending indicate a recovery path from the crises period of 2001, the anatomy of that recovery portrays a different picture. For instance, within Europe, international tourist arrivals to Spain increased by 4.6% in 2001 even though

international tourist arrivals to Europe as a whole fell by 0.5%. The destinations such as UK (-9.4%), France (-2.6%), Germany (-5.9%) and Italy (-3.9%), have recorded decline in the number of tourist arrivals for that period (Cooper *et al*, 2005). Since 2012 after the September 11 incident, consistent growth trend has been maintained for more than a decade.

In 2016, Travel & Tourism directly contributed US\$2.3 trillion and 109 million jobs worldwide. Taking its wider indirect and induced impacts into account, the sector contributed US\$7.6 trillion to the global economy and supported 292 million jobs in 2016. This was equal to 10.2% of the world's GDP, and approximately 1 in 10 of all jobs. In 2016, 76.8% of all travel spent was as a result of leisure travel, compared to 23.2% from business travel. Domestic travel generated 72% of the sector's contribution to GDP, thus making a significantly larger contribution than international travel, with foreign visitor spending at 28%. Travel & Tourism's direct contribution to GDP grew by 3.1% in 2016. This was faster than the global economy as a whole which grew at 2.5%, meaning that for six consecutive years, the Travel & Tourism sector has outperformed the global economy. The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to employment grew by 1.8% in 2016 meaning almost 2 million net additional jobs were generated directly by the sector, and a total of around 6 million new jobs created as a result of total direct, indirect and induced activity. In 2017, all world sub-regions are expected to experience growth in direct Travel & Tourism GDP. South East Asia and South Asia are expected to be the fastest growing world regions with growth of around 6.5-7%. This year is also expected to mark a turnaround in fortunes for Latin America (2.0%) and North Africa (2.8%) as modest growth returns after weakness in 2016 (WTTC, 2017b).

The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was US\$2,306 billion (3.1% of total GDP) in 2016, and is forecast to rise by 3.8% in 2017, and to rise by 4.0% pa, from 2017-2027, to US\$3,537.1 billion (3.5% of total GDP) in 2027. The total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was USD7,613.3bn (10.2% of GDP) in 2016, and is forecast to rise by 3.6% in 2017, and to rise by 3.9% pa to US\$11,512.9 billion (11.4% of GDP) in 2027. In 2016, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the visitor exports generated US\$1,401.5 billion (6.6% of total exports) in 2016. This is forecast to grow by 4.5% in 2017, and grow by 4.3% pa, from 2017-2027, to US\$2,221.0 billion in 2027 (7.2% of total) (WTTC, 2017a). So, looking at the trend it is quite clear that the prospect of tourism development is very bright; and so investment in tourism is an investment in the right direction. This high-labor intensive industry has the capacity to facilitate sustainable national development. This development enhances foreign exchange earnings, creates sustainable job, encourages the growth of

tourism-based enterprises, promotes peace among countries, promotes infrastructural development, accelerates rural-urban integration, promotes even the development of other sectors and fosters socio-cultural transformation (Johan, 2003).

In spite of the enormous tourism potentials in Nigeria, tourism contributions to economic development, leave much to be desired due to inadequate facilities necessary for tourism development. Tourism cannot develop without the provision of infrastructure and superstructures. The infrastructure which includes roads, communication system, water supply etc; and the superstructures namely hotels, motels, guesthouses, etc must be available and well maintained for tourism to develop (Okoli, 2001). The World Travel and Tourism Council's (WTTC's, 2002) future agenda to address the inadequate capacity of transport infrastructure identified as real constraint upon tourism growth in the future in Europe and USA is a right step in the right direction. Furthermore, Nigerian market is massive given the vast population of the country and the fact that Nigerians are known to be the happiest people in the world (Adewunmi, 2011). Despite the severe economic recession Nigeria is facing in 2017 which has ranked the country 95th in the world, Nigerians are still Africa's sixth happiest people according to the World Happiness Report 2017 produced by the sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), a global initiative launched by the United Nations in 2012 (Bakere, 2017). Such a large population is an advantage to tourism development for Nigeria when compared with majority of the countries that benefit from tourism. The total inhabitants of some of the African countries like Kenya and South Africa that have benefited immensely from tourism only equals the total population of Lagos dwellers which is over 20 million. In addition to that, he noted that "Nigeria is well known for their more usual hospitality. The traditional Nigerian society dwells richly in welcoming guests, strangers, and visitors using various approaches and means". Tourism will only flourish and compete globally giving the appropriate conditions: hospitality, plentitude of resources, admirable climate and attractive scenery (Christie, 2002). This is why Wall and Matheson (2006) opined that suitable geographical location and climatic conditions are the prerequisite for tourism development.

Abadaba Lake is an eco-tourism site endowed with natural potentials that can contribute significantly to the development of Obowo Local Government Area if properly harnessed. This magnificent lake is capable of contributing economically to the development of the country, state and other local communities. Abadaba Lake will bring about infrastructural development of the place where it is located. When the lake is developed, it will enhance tourists' flow, which will ultimately lead to improved income to both the

host community and the government, generation of employment to the local people and many others.

The major objective of this study is to examine the challenges and prospects of developing Abadaba Lake for tourism development. The specific objectives the study aimed to address are to:

- i. identify the tourism potentials of Abadaba Lake ecosystem.
- ii. examine the factors militating the development of Abadaba Lake into a tourism destination.
- iii. determine the prospects of developing Abadaba Lake into a tourism destination.

Materials and Methods

Study Area

Abadaba Lake is located between the serene villages of Odenkume, Okwuohia and Umuegwu in Obowo Local Government and another small village on the other side called Umuezegwu. Obowo is bounded in the north by Ihite Uboma Local Government; in the south-east by the Imo River/Umuopara Umuahia, the capital of Abia state; in the south-west by Mbaise and in the north-west by Ehime clan of Ehime Mbanjo Local Government Area.

Data Collection

The instruments for collection of data were questionnaire, oral interview and observation. The questions were structured to enable the respondents answer the questions appropriately. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher, to elicit information needed for the study. This was validated by three research experts for content and face validity. A total of 280 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents as follows; host communities (133), officials of Imo State Tourism Board (80) and Imo State Ministry of Culture Tourism (67). In-depth interview was conducted on tourism officials and members of the council of traditional rulers of Okwuohia, Odenkume and Umuezegwu communities. Data collected with questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequency distribution and tables; and the results were ranked in their order of importance. The data generated through oral interview were analysed using ethnographic approach.

Results and Discussion

The study revealed that the natural attractions associated with Abadaba Lake include the serene environment, cool weather, fresh and muddy color water body, two close rivers/water bodies that do not

meet/flow into each other, boating, wildlife (mainly monkeys in Umuariam Game Reserve) and luxuriant vegetation. Abadaba Lake has a temperature of between 25°C and 34°C during the rainy season, with the lowest temperature ranging from 10°C to 20°C between June and September. The cultural potentials are *Iwa-akwa* (traditional rite depicting the attainment of manhood) which takes place every three years and *Mbomuzo* (general clean up) cultural festivals. Other cultural festivals include *Ntumaka*, which focuses on ancestral lineage; *Igbu-Ewu Ukwu*, which glorifies fertility among the female folks; and *Okonko* Masquerade. *Iwa Akwa* is celebrated with fun and excitement. This festival is celebrated by men of the same age bracket (known as Age Grade) born within a three year interval. The festival qualifies every young adult male to be involved in decision making process and contribute financially to the growth and development of the community while partaking in the associated privileges and rights. The date for the festival is chosen by the Council of Traditional Rulers between December and January on a particular market day within the four market days (*Eke, Ori, Afor, and Nkwor*). The celebration usually lasts for three days. This is graced with music, dance, food and drinks. The *Iwa Akwa* celebration attracts people from far and near.

Abadaba Lake has fresh and muddy color and it is surrounded by luxuriant raffia palm and bamboo trees. Its serene environment and cool weather provide good relaxation spot for tourists. The enchantment and serenity of the lake is quite captivating in a location that is sparsely inhabited. These beautiful features are good enough for any tourist to have a wonderful and exciting moment if properly harnessed. This agreed with the works of Ayodele (2002); Partnership for Development (2002), Atlas of Nigeria (2002) and Edet and Ijeomah (2006) that Nigeria is one of the richest nations on the earth in terms of tourism potentials. Also, the result supported the work of Fakiyesi (2008) that Nigeria possesses both natural and cultural resources which are capable of attracting tourists if fully harnessed. Plates 1 and 2 present the attractive vegetation and front view of *Abadaba* Lake and *Onuiyi* River, while the forest between them demarcates the lake and the river. The forest is a habitat for several species of birds that exhibit certain social behaviors particularly in the morning and evening hours which can tickle the fancy of tourists as they watch them.



Plate 1 & 2: Pictorial views of Abadaba Lake

Table 1 shows that change of government was the number one (92.9%) challenge that truncated the development of Abadaba Lake into a tourism destination. The uncompleted infrastructure and superstructures initiated at the Abadaba Lake by the first Executive Governor of Imo State were abandoned by successive governments and these were thereafter destroyed by the local communities. Individuals donated land for the construction of resort, but this was not completed.

Table 1: Challenges of Developing Abadaba Lake

S/N	Challenges	Frequency	Percentages	Rank
I	Change of government	260	92.9	1 st
Ii	Poor road network	240	85.7	2 nd
Iii	Lack of funds	220	78.6	3 rd
Iv	Lack of willingness/involvement of	210	75	4 th
V	Lack of government interest	200	71.4	5 th
Vi	Unavailability of infrastructural the facilities	180	64.3	6 th
Vii	Pollution of the lake	150	53.6	7 th

Source: Survey, 2015

But for the military intervention of December 31, 1983 Abadaba Lake would have been a major tourism destination in Imo State. Nigeria's attitude towards tourism development does not appear to have evidently changed. The country's tourism is yet to be fully harnessed and showcased to the western world because the government has not provided the enabling environment. This agreed with the results of Ngoka and Ogu (2011) who studied *Azumini* Blue River, Abia State. They found that site has not attracted the serious attention of the government.

The next in the list of problems affecting the development of Abadaba Lake is poor access road to the site representing 85.7 % of the responses. Though, an access road to the site was created over three decades ago, it was neither constructed nor maintained by the successive governments and the host communities. The road is now in a very bad shape. Furthermore, lack of funds with a value of 78.6% is amongst the major problems facing the development of Abadaba Lake. Other problems identified include the lack of private investors involvement (75%), the lack of government interest (71.4%), vandalism of the facilities (64.3%), and pollution of the lake (53.6%).

Table. 2: Prospects of Developing Abadaba Lake for Tourism

S/N	Prospects	Frequency	Percentages	Rank
i	Acceptance of tourism by the locals	260	92.9	1 st
ii	Availability of skilled and unskilled labour	250	89.3	2 nd
iii	Favorable policies on tourism by Federal Government	240	85.7	3 rd
iv	Absence of militancy and youths restiveness	230	82.1	4 th
v	Availability of cultural festivals	220	78.6	5 th

Source: Survey, 2015

Table 2 shows that 92.9% of the respondents accepted that Abadaba Lake can be developed into tourism destination. This agrees with the work of Obinwanne (2015) that the people understand the value and benefit of tourism. The high level of acceptance among the people is a clear indication that any effort channeled to develop Abadaba Lake for tourism will not receive opposition from the host community. Acceptance and willingness of the people to participate in tourism will guarantee cultural peace and harmony; and enabling environment for tourism to flourish. According to Ijeomah, Adedapo, Abimbola and Abedeen (2009), tourism cannot thrive in crisis. Overcoming cultural challenges could be difficult but very crucial for success to be achieved in tourism. Also, the availability of both skilled and unskilled labour (89.3%) adds strength to the prospects of developing the lake into a tourism destination. The host communities and environs could be a source of

unskilled cheap labour for the project. One of the universities in the state and other universities within the neighboring states are sources of skilled labour as they turn out hundreds of graduates in hospitality and tourism every year.

The study further revealed that favorable policy on tourism development by the Federal Government of Nigeria (85.7%) provides an impetus to the prospects of developing Abadaba Lake. The absence of militancy and youth restiveness (82.1%) within the host communities and environs depicts that Abadaba Lake has a bright prospect of being developed. Furthermore, the host communities have cultural festivals, most of which have been outlined earlier, that could help enhance tourism activities.

Table 3: Actions Needed to Develop Abadaba Lake

S/N	Actions	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
i)	Provision of adequate facilities	260	92.9	1 st
ii)	To partner with other stakeholders	250	89.3	2 nd
iii)	Embracing information technology	220	78.6	3 rd
iv)	Provision of security and enabling environment	200	71.4	4 th

Source: Survey, 2015

Table 3 reveals the actions that could be taken to develop Abadaba Lake. The highlights showed that the provision of adequate facilities with a value of 92.9% responses ranked first, followed by the need to promote partnership with other stakeholders (89.3%), and embrace information technology (78.6%). Finally, the provision of security and enabling environment (71.4%) ranked fourth in the list.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Abadaba Lake is a potential tourism attraction that is capable of attracting both foreign and local tourists to Obowo Local Government Area of Imo State if fully harnessed. Its attractiveness, serene environment, cool weather, fresh water body, two unique water bodies that do not flow into each other, and luxuriant vegetation provide are invaluable and captivating features for recreation, education and other activities. The availability of both skilled and unskilled labour, favourable policies for tourism development in Nigeria, absence of youth restiveness and militancy and willingness of the people to welcome any effort to develop the lake are among other factors that give the lake bright prospects for its development. In spite of these potentials and prospects, the lake project has suffered a major setback after the initial plan to develop it was abandoned more than three decades ago. It is

recommended that government, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should collaborate to provide the enabling environment and facilities needed for the development of this potential tourist site to meet the current tourism demand.

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