

## Tourism Potentials of Taruga Historical Iron Smelting Site

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### **Abstract**

*Archaeological sites are places where spatial clustering of various forms of archeological data such as artifacts, ecofacts and features are found in their original context. They have potentials for tourism since they contain relics of ancient civilization, for example, we can talk about Masada World Heritage Site - the biggest archaeological site, and one of the most famous tourism destinations in Israel. Consequently, the relationship between Tourism and Archaeology is increasingly being recognized, especially in the twenty first century where tourism has become an implacable socio-economic force. And following from the aforementioned, "federal and state agencies often view tourism as a way to use heritage resources in economic development" (Anyon, Ferguson and Welch in McManamon and Hatton eds. 2000:133). It is in line with this that Alagoa (1988, cited in Okpoko, A.I and Okpoko, P.U. 2002:57) affirmed that archaeological and historical data are part of the patrimony that must sustain Nigeria's tourism and economy. This paper examines the tourism potentials of Taruga, a famous historical iron smelting site within the Nok culture complex, using qualitative approaches. The paper argues that given its multifarious cultural product, natural attractions and proximity to the Federal Capital Territory, Taruga can be a viable tourism haven if well harnessed.*

**Key terms:** archaeological sites, tourism potentials, Taruga.

### **Introduction**

In Nigeria, many archaeological sites have been lost to development projects (see, for example, Kimbers 2006). In his typescript captioned *Preserving the Ethnographic and Archaeological Record in the Public Interest*, Okpoko, A.I. regretted that no meaningful rescue operation was done in the Federal Capital Territory which falls within the Nok culture area before project developments were undertaken. Equally, Garuba (1988, cited by Okpoko, P.U. in Andah ed. 1990:126), grieved over the neglect of archaeological exploration in

Borno State by government; arguing that: "Archaeological sites are sometimes synonymous with tourist centres due to their potentials which usually place them within the same qualification or requisite spectrum." This is not surprising since cultural resources management in Nigeria is placed low in the priority of successive administrations. The implication, however, is that many archaeological sites which could have been developed as heritage tourism sites to boost the socio-economic standing of host communities have been lost forever. It is widely acknowledged in heritage management literature that archaeological sites have enormous potentials and can contribute immensely to the economic regeneration of underprivileged areas (Hampton 2005); the community of Taruga is one of such areas. Accordingly, this paper examines the tourism potentials of Taruga Historical Iron Smelting Site regarded as one of the foremost iron smelting sites in sub-Saharan Africa. It is worthy of note that iron working is one of the earliest hallmarks of human progress, hence, any site with convincing evidence of early iron working inevitably constitutes irresistible attraction. Specifically, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the tourism potentials of Taruga Historical Iron Smelting Site.
2. To study other cultural and natural features of the iron smelting region that could be integrated with the archaeological resources in developing a robust tourism destination.
3. To suggest how to harness the tourism potentials of the iron smelting site.

The qualitative approach to enquiry (interviews) was used as the primary source of data gathering; this was complemented by secondary materials such as books, journals and the internet. It is hoped that the results of this work will add value to our efforts in tourism development.

### **Literature Review**

Archaeology serves multifarious purposes, for example, as a tool for nation-building (Lowenthal 1985). According to Pearson (in Barker ed., 1999:405), national monuments like Great Zimbabwe or the Athenian Acropolis act as metonyms for the nation-state. "Excavations at Masada in the 1960s fostered Israeli beliefs in their

historic rights to land, whilst Palestinians today claim that archaeological remains which record their ancestry in those lands are either ignored or bulldozed by Israeli archaeologists looking for Jewish remains" (Pearson, in Barker ed.,1999:405). From the perspective of applied archaeology, Erickson (1988) reported that an archaeological scheme along the Cusichaka River in Peru resulted in the unearthing of ancient stone irrigation canals fabricated by the Inca. The canals were deserted during the Spanish conquest and, after the canal system had been archaeologically documented, a programme of repair and clearance was started so that the canals may once more carry water from the mountains to irrigate arable land (Pearson, in Barker ed. 1999:408).

Archaeology is equally important in tourism development. For instance, Derefaka (1988) underscored the relevance of historical archaeology in the tourist industry of Rivers State remarking that: "The artefacts from archaeological excavations can help to fortify a deep sense of history which many Nigerian people have demonstrated and provide hope for the future" (Okpoko, P.U. in Andah, ed. 1990:126). More recently, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods of enquiry, Diminyi (in Okpoko P.U. ed. 2014:27) studied the Bakor Monoliths in Cross River State and suggested that the site will be of immense economic value if it is developed as cultural tourism destination, since the strengths and opportunities for cultural tourism development outweigh the weaknesses and threats. Indeed, "archaeological sites are themselves potential centres of tourist attractions if given the deserved attention" (Okpoko A.I and Okpoko, P.U. 2002:59). Thus, the extensive use of archaeological sites as tourism destinations has generated interest in the interaction of archaeological sites and tourism (Sharpley in Jafari ed. 2000:28). In this context, it is the archaeological heritage that is packaged as tourism product. Walker (2005) remarks that archaeological ruins are compelling to tourists because they are often genuinely interested in archaeology or history and want to view the archaeological remains firsthand.

In her study of *Changing Cultural Landscapes and Heritage Tourism Potentials of Ijaiye-Orile Archaeological Sites in Nigeria*, Olukole (2009) identified resources with invaluable resources with invaluable tourism potentials in the area to include: abandoned settlements of

historical significance to the Yoruba, evidence of migrations and cultural changes, defensive walls surrounding the abandoned sites, traditional industrial heritage of past metallurgical work etc. Because of the loss of certain aspects of the cultural heritage of the area due to urbanization, Olukole suggests the use of salvage archaeology ahead of development action to conserve the area's valuable cultural heritage which can spearhead tourism development for economic benefit in the area. Mustafa and Abu Tayeh (2011), in their study of the archaeological site of Petra in Jordan, found that the archaeological site is contributing 81% of total tourism sites entrance fees in the country. Another positive impact of the use of the archaeological site as tourism destination is the increase in the number of tourism facilities and services available in the area. Hijazeen (2007) quoted by Mustafa and Abu Tayeh (2011) also noted that local people in the Petra area have gained from cultural tourism by way of learning foreign languages and having their education financed.

However, conservationists are not comfortable in the use of archaeological and other cultural resources as tourism attractions because of the tendency for business thoughts to dominate decision making concerning cultural resources (see for example, Walle 1998). In their paper titled *Tourism and Archaeological Heritage: Driver to Development or Destruction*, Comer and Willems (2011) found that inadequately regulated and managed tourism has undermined the outstanding universal value of some, if not all of the heritage sites, and that the unbalanced attention paid to the economic benefits of tourism has not advanced the agenda of the world heritage convention, but instead threatens it. As they succinctly put it:

Archaeological sites and landscapes comprise a type of cultural resource that must be managed in special ways in order to preserve scientific and historical values. If tourism is not carefully and effectively managed at areas that contain archaeological materials, the scientific and historic values that can be realized only through the careful study of those materials will be lost irretrievably with the material itself (Comer and Willems 2011).

Moreover, in the writing of Sharpley in Jafari (ed. 2000:28), it is contended that the development of archaeological resources for tourism increases the speed of degradation of sites. The writer argues that:

As the intensity of visitation increases, costs to the resource also increase. Foot and vehicular traffic, human breath, exhaust, the construction of facilities to serve visitors, vandalism and the collection of artefacts or architectural remains for souvenirs all degrade archaeological resources. Furthermore, touristic development of any region, because it entails the construction of roads, sewage systems, airports, hotels and other elements of infrastructure, threatens archaeological resources even when they themselves are not the direct focus of tourism activities (Sharpley in Jafari ed. 2000:28).

In consonance with the aforementioned, Makinde in his paper, *Heritage Conservation, Management and Sustainable Development in Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove*, published in Okpoko, P.U. (ed. 2014:50), observed that the large number of visitors associated with the Osun-Oshogbo annual festival exerts great pressure on the site as some overzealous people climb and damage the cultural heritage. It is also noteworthy that aside from tourism, the general desire for economic gains could also undermine heritage sites. Osuagwu in Okpoko, P.U. (ed. 2014:11), citing Kankpeyeng (2005), for instance, reported that parts of the hill within the cultural landscape at Tongo-Tenauk (Ghana) have been given as concession to a quarrying company, thereby allowing degradation of the area.

Despite these concerns, Stritch (2006) cited from Jack (2011), maintains that archaeological resources as tourism product have been viewed positively by governments of some nation-states who believe that archaeological resources can be harnessed for economic development while promoting national identity. It is pertinent to state at this juncture, that most of the concerns of those who kick against the use of archaeological resources as tourism attractions can be managed where tourism is approached from a sustainable and

integrated perspective. In his work – *Preservation of Archaeological Heritage and the Tourism: the Case of Mexico*, Ernesto (2006) recommends an integrated approach to using Archaeological sites as tourism destinations. This entails the incorporation of all stakeholders' views in developing archaeological sites for touristic purposes. A major stakeholder is the local population who live within or around the archaeological site. Instances reveal that wherever sustainable tourism occurs, people in destination areas are integral part of the planning and development of tourism projects. For example, Tourism on the Pacific Island of Yap has been reported by Mansperger (1992) as a good example of sustainable tourism development. In this island, "the development of tourism has been slow, small scale, and mainly owned by local Yapese, resulting in successful resource protection" (Burr 1995).

### **Taruga and its People**

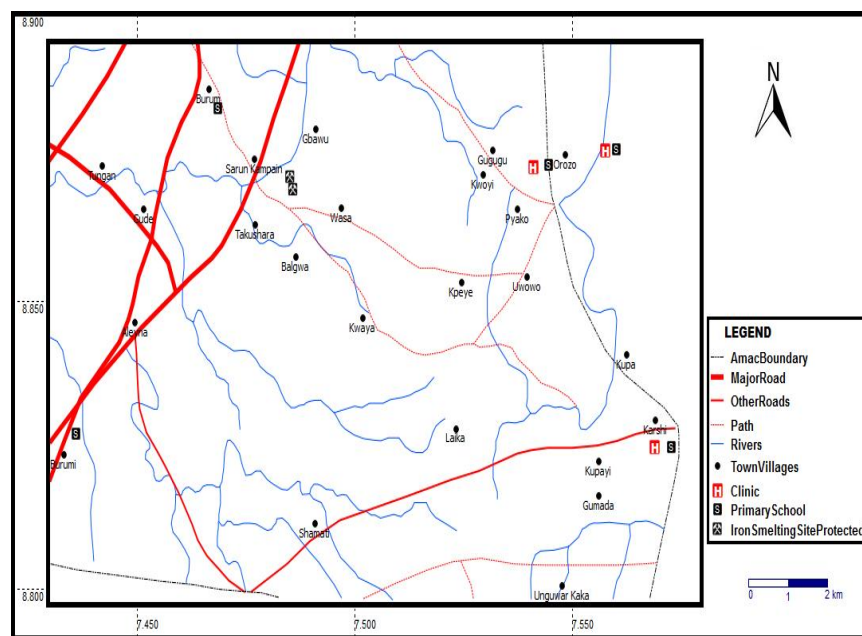
Oral interview revealed that 'Takushara' is the indigenous name of the community under focus. 'Taruga' is essentially a corruption of 'Takushara' which resulted from the inability of British miners to pronounce the original name appropriately. In this study, therefore, Taruga is used interchangeably with Takushara. Taruga is a small multi-ethnic community in Abuja Municipal Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory. Interview with the village head shows that the community has an estimated population size of about 1,600 inhabitants. The residential portion of the community is situated on a flat land surrounded by hills, rocks and valleys. It is a region of captivating landscape, rich vegetation and abundant mineral resources for example, columbite, white marble, tantalite, etc. Driving from Abuja City Centre (Area 1) to Takushara village could take about thirty minutes. Taruga community shares boundaries with communities such as Sabon Kampain, Balgwa, Gude and Burum etc.



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*Plate 1: A View of Taruga Community*



*Figure 1: Map of Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) showing the location of Takushara and the iron smelting site.*

Interview with the *Dakashi* (chief) of Takushara land disclosed that the community was brought to the limelight by British miners during colonialism, but has existed for a very long time. Data from the interview reveals that in the olden days, a combination of Hausa and Gbagyi people settled around a river at the south-east end of the community, this river is the key source of water to the inhabitants. As time passed by, the Hausa people who were working for the British mining company decided to shift across the river so as to live close enough to the mining area; other ethnic groups later joined the Hausa people to form a multi-cultural community. Today, Taruga comprises such ethnic groups as Gwandara, Gade, Nupe, Sagawa, Hausa, Gbagyi, Fulani and Kanuri etc.

The British miners who were popularly referred to as ‘captain’ came in succession. First to work in Takushara was Mr. Corney, followed by Mr Priestly, then Mr. G.E. Stanley who invited Bernard Fagg to study the area from archaeological perspective. Fagg became the first government archaeologist in Nigeria when he was appointed



assistant surveyor of antiquities in 1947. It is to Bernard Fagg that the pioneer work on Taruga Historical Iron-Smelting Site is credited. Lagos-based Daily Times Newspaper reported on August 13, 1988: "Here was a British colonial officer who, instead of projecting the image and power of the British, reversed all expectations and projected the image and [the] past of Africans ... It is our determination that the light he had lit ... may never dim" (Curtis 2005).

Bernard Fagg undertook controlled excavations in Taruga in the 1960s, finding both terracotta figurines and iron slag (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taruga>). The archaeological site of Taruga (Takushara) is one of a few iron smelting sites associated with the Nok Culture between 500 BC and AD 200. Taruga is one of the earliest occurrences of metal working in sub-Saharan Africa, dated to approximately 400 BC (<http://archaeology.about.com/wd/terms/g/taruga.htm>.) Some time in October 2007, the Federal Government was asked to protect and rehabilitate the site in view of its tourist potential (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taruga>).

Its traditional leader is referred to as *Dakashi*, assisted by *Sarkin Padan*. Takushara people are very hospitable, the community has a government primary school, but quite unfortunately, there is no secondary school. The result is that the children of Takushara go through untold hardship in order to get secondary school education. There is also a women Islamic school where Moslem women are taught the doctrines of Islam. There are three religious groups in Takushara Community: Christianity, African Traditional Religion (ATR) and Islam which is the dominant religion. However, there is peaceful co-existence among the various religious groups.

Five major economic activities can be identified in Takushara: farming, mining of marble, trading, pottery making, and cow rearing. The major farm produce of the community are yam, cereals like maize and guinea corn. The white marble is used in the production of items such as white chalk, glass, tablet, vim and fertilizer etc. Takushara traders bring their goods to Takushara Market Square for sales. Interestingly, the Takushara market square serves not only as a center for marketing, but also as a place where people spend their leisure time.



### Research Results and Discussion

Taruga Historical Iron Smelting Site has great potentials for tourism if it is well harnessed. This is true because archaeological sites contain relics of ancient civilization, as such, people are always driven by curiosity to see and admire such elements of past civilization, or relics of the achievements of their forebears. Describing the site, Alpern (2005) reports that:

The Taruga Site consists of a three-acre flat terrace in a well-watered, wooded valley about 55 miles south-west of the village that gave the Nok Culture its name. Bernard Fagg... excavated 13 iron-smelting furnaces there in the 1960s. The furnaces were all thin-walled, freestanding clay shafts over foot-deep slag pits cut into decomposed granite. Surviving furnace walls rose about eight inches (20 centimetres) above the ancient ground level... Shaft diameters ranged from 14 to 41 inches. Tuyere fragments slag, charcoal, and iron objects were also found on the site, and abundant pottery suggested a settled community. Unlike other Nok culture sites, Taruga yielded no polished stone axes, hinting at a full iron-using society. Terracotta figures found at Taruga made clear the connection of the furnaces to the broader Nok complex. Fagg suggested that the sculptures might have been objects of worship to insure the success of iron smelting and blacksmithing.

Scenes which can be packaged as tourist attractions include: relics of British miners' existence in the area such as car park, car service pit, and British miners' house etc. Another is Bernard Fagg's reconstructed house, which local people refer to as *gidan mai juju*. Information from oral interview reveals that Bernard Fagg brought a lot of terracotta figurines uncovered during tin mining around Jos, and stored them in a particular house. Local people believed that the white man, Bernard Fagg, used the terracotta objects to make charm, thus, they referred to the house as *gidan mai juju*, which means 'house where objects for making charms are stored'. Taruga iron smelting site with special reference to the pit furnace, and Taruga iron smithing

site which houses hundreds of grinding stones are other tourism potentials in the area. The iron smelting site is locally known as *makera*, which implies 'place where iron is produced'. A transect walk in Taruga shows that the iron-smelting site is separated from the smithing site by a distance of about twenty minutes; while the distance from the community to the iron smithing site is about twenty-five minutes. The iron smelting site is as charming as it is captivating; it is a quintessence of a tourist haven.

The people of Taruga, in collaboration with Tourism and Historical Sites Development Unit under Cyprain Ekwensi Centre for Arts and Culture (formerly Abuja Centre for Arts and Culture), have done the little they can to preserve the heritage site. One of their efforts is the attempt at reconstructing the house where Bernard Fagg is said to have lived using locally sourced materials. The people have also re-roofed and repainted the British miners' lodge and detailed a security man to the lodge. Participation of local people is of utmost importance in managing heritage sites. In her study, *Managing Sacred Sites in West Africa*, Osuagwu in Okpoko P.U. (ed 2014:9), remarked that most sacred sites in West Africa were managed for centuries through the world view of local people highly associated with myths and legends. The people, she contended, see themselves as part of the landscape and objects; and feel they must be fully involved in matters concerning them. This belief helped to secure sacred places from the devastating effects of logging, fuel wood collection, poaching, overgrazing and agricultural encroachment etc.



**Plate 2: An Aerial View of Taruga Iron Smelting Site**



*Plate 3: Remains of a Taruga Pit Furnace*



*Plate 4: Taruga Grinding Stone*



*A section of Bernard Fagg's house under reconstruction.*



*Plate 5: Views of British Miners' Lodge at Taruga.*

### **Other Cultural and Natural Tourism Features of Taruga**

In developing the tourism potentials of Taruga Historical Iron Smelting Site, it is necessary to integrate other tourism resources of the community into the development so as to create a robust tourism destination.

### **Scenic Landscape**

For lovers of nature, Takushara community is a place to visit as it has a physical environment that is not just lovely but, also retains its original features. Takushara is one of the few areas in the Federal Capital Territory that have what may be referred to as rainforest vegetation. The charming combination of shrubs scantily distributed on a flat land with rich green grasses on one hand, and hills capped with flamboyant vegetation among those imposing rocks would certainly enthrall even the eccentric. In addition to these is the



melodious sound of birds chirping away on the high trees, and the presence of a spring known as *Takoiye*. The spring has a little waterfall which can be developed. All these combine effectively to evoke a sensation which can thrill every nature lover.



***Plate 6: Takushara Scenic Landscape***



***Plate 7: A Beautiful Spring at Takushara***

### **Masquerade Festivals**

Another potential tourist product in the community is the masquerade festival of the Gade and Gwandara ethnic groups. The Gade and Gwandara people are ethnic groups with very similar cultures; they occupy the northern range of Takushara land. They

have a number of masquerade festivals such as *Ashama* and *Ogango* of which *Ashama* is very popular.

Oral interviews reveal that *Ashama* masquerade festival is celebrated after each year's harvest, usually between December and January. *Ashama* is the name of the deity that is believed to have protected the Gade and Gwadara people during the era of slave trade. *Ashama* is said to have defended the people and kept them on alert during raids for European merchants. Slave trade in Africa, as we know, started at the later half of the fifteenth century with the arrival of the Portuguese sailors at the African coast. It spanned a period of four and half centuries. The *Ashama* masquerade festival is celebrated after harvest because of two reasons. One is to thank *Ashama* for guiding the year's farming activities including harvest; and second, to express their gratitude to *Ashama* for protecting them during the dreaded period of slave trade.

*Ashama* masquerade celebration lasts for seven days; it usually begins with the performing of a sacrificial ritual with a black goat, a cock and hen. After the ritual, *Ashama* masquerades go round the village to invoke *Ashama* deity to bless the farmland before the real activities begin. Festivity starts with the converging of masquerades at the village square for interesting displays. Great feasting and merriment accompany the exhilarating display of the masquerades. Families prepare for the celebration with edibles like pounded yam, rice and beni-seed soup etc. People, including those invited from nearby villages, eat and drink to their satisfaction.

### **Eid-UI-Fitr Festival**

Eid-UI-Fitr Festival, the biggest Muslim festival, can be a viable attraction in Takushara community because the various ethnic groups that make up the community are predominantly Muslims. Eid-UI-Fitr Festival, which is also referred to as 'festival of the breaking of the fast', is celebrated as soon as the new moon is sighted at the end of the month of fast – *Ramandan* ; this usually takes place between October and December of every year depending on when the moon is sighted.

According to <http://islam.about.com>, the festival begins with the distribution of alms (*sadaqatul'l-fitr*), recitation of two *rakahs* of prayer led by the *imam* (a Muslim priest). After prayers, the *imam* ascends *mimibar* (pulpit) and delivers the *Khutbah* (oration). There is also the

slaughtering of ram by the *imam* to signal the actual commencement of the celebrations. Oral interview with the *Sarkin Padan* (deputy to the chief) of Takushara revealed that Eid-ul-Fitr celebration, among the Hausa people in Takushara, is graced with the performance of Hausa cultural dance known as *Jita*. The chief instrument for this cultural dance is a local band called *kalangwu*. The interesting thing about Eid-ul-Fitr festival in Takushara is that ethnic groups showcase their cultural dances and masquerade at the village square; this makes the gathering epitomize a carnival of some sort. During colonialism, the various cultural groups performed for the white men at the iron-smelting site where Bernard Fagg worked and lived. The people received gifts from the white men after their cultural displays. This can be revived.

### **Suggestion and Conclusion**

From what has been said, it is very lucid that Takushara, otherwise known as Taruga, is a potential tourism destination. Its tourism resources are made manifest by the historical iron smelting site which was discovered during colonialism. Concerted efforts should be made by concerned bodies such as government, investors, tour operating firms, and culture and tourism institutions to harness the enormous tourism assets of the community. Benefits which can accrue from the development of these potentials include: improved rural infrastructure, basic education, poverty reduction, improved health services, development of traditional skills, arts and crafts, conservation of biodiversity etc.

Agro tourism is one form of tourism which can be developed in the community since it is an agrarian society. Agro tourism is very much related to rural tourism. In this type of tourism, tourists visit on day tours or can stay overnight in farms, livestock ranches or plantations with a view to observing and/or engaging in agriculture. Agro tourism, therefore, offers tourists the opportunity to experience the local cultures and natural environment of host communities (WTO 2002). It must be stressed that agro tourism in the community of Takushara, as well as other communities, should be appropriately planned and monitored in order to bring about local economic growth and at the same time, avoid or mitigate social and environmental damage to host communities. This can be achieved through the following ways:



**Awareness:** As a first step, the people should be enlightened on tourism and the benefits that can accrue from it. Awareness creation is very necessary in order to secure the consent of local people. This is very important because no viable or sustainable development can be without the support and participation of local population. For instance, one of the researchers' fieldworks in Taruga could not have come to fruition if the local people did not put in their little effort in conserving the area. Again, if not for the data and guidance provided by indigenous people, the research would have been incomprehensive. These and many more reflect the advantages of encouraging popular participation in harnessing tourism potentials of various communities. It is, therefore, essential that Takushara people be placed at the forefront of planning and development of tourism resources in the area.

**Local Infrastructure:** Tourism officials and government should provide the needed infrastructure for tourism development at grass root level. For example, the community in question should have good access road, clean water supply system, dependable communication network, and adequate accommodation for visitors etc. The people should also be enlightened on community cleanliness since tourism thrives on clean environment.

**Pre-visit Engagement:** There is need for series of meetings and engagement between tourism managers and community leaders prior to tourist visits so as to ensure that **they** are successfully handled. Tourism officials should educate tourists on the need to respect the norms of local people, while on their own part; community leaders should communicate the result of the meeting to their people, and the importance of presenting good image of their community as no tourist would want to re-visit a destination that is not hospitable.

**The Use of Qualified Tour Guides:** Group and individual tours should be accompanied by well-trained tour guides and should be communicated to the community. Unscheduled visits by tourists should not be encouraged to avoid unnecessary embarrassment to tourists or local people.

**Entitlement for Host Community:** The host community should be entitled to a stipulated fee for every visit. The proceeds from tourism should be used in community development programmes like building of schools, medical clinic, roads etc. Given its multi-ethnic nature, Takushara can showcase a variety of cultural dances, music and masquerade performances which can thrill tourists and subsequently, attract additional fees. Furthermore, local people can be encouraged to produce local crafts which tourists would relish buying as souvenirs. Local people can as well establish kitchen where local dishes are served to tourists. These and many more would entice tourists to spend their money to the benefit of the local population.

Again, tourism officials should monitor the tourism programme as it develops to make sure that problems are detected and corrected on time. As tourism develops in Takushara, nearby communities with tourism potentials can be integrated in the programme to form a tourism circuit. This would help to spread the benefits of tourism to more local communities.

Conclusively, the community of Taruga (Takushara) has what it takes to be a unique tourism destination in the Federal Capital Territory. Good enough, the Historical and Tourism Sites Development Unit under Abuja Centre for Arts and Culture has recognized the tourism potentials of Takushara and has designated the iron smelting site as a protected area. The proximity of the community to Abuja is an added advantage, because the availability of the basic infrastructure for tourism development in the capital city of Nigeria will serve as a catalyst for the development of the tourism resources of the community.

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