GROWING THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY THROUGH TOURISM SUB-SECTOR: OGUTA LAKE RESORT AS A REFERENCE

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.33281/JTHS20129.2020.1.5

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Abstract
The study focused on asserting the impact of tourism as an alternative/option in boosting Nigerian economy. Over the years, tourism has been seen as one neglected sub-sector with huge economic contributions to Nigerian nascent Democracy. This sub sector has been under invested by the Nigerian Government, as a matter of fact, making the sub sector under-utilized by the tourist. Tourism centers on events and other natural attractions in the Nigeria polity. It is necessary to follow the trends of advanced nations who invest a lot into the tourism sub-sector. Tourism in Nigeria has not risen to zenith of its potentials yet, it still remains a veritable sector of the economy that needs to be developed as it can cone with huge advantages. The study investigates the relevance of tourism on economic growth of Oguta Lake Resort in Imo State Nigeria.
Keywords: Tourism, Economy, Development, Culture Nigeria

Introduction
Majority of the developing countries around the world benefit greatly from tourism as it has a good effect on their economy. World over, tourism is an essential source of revenue for different countries. Apparently, statistics indicate that the development of the tourism sector has a big share in the economic growth of a nation. Today, tourism is no longer leisure but an activity that has captured the attempt of economist as a major source of foreign exchange for developing countries.

It is a truism that tourism could be referred to as one of the fastest and all growing industry globally apart from the technology sector.

Developed nations try to develop both tourist sites, standardize operations, improve infrastructure such as electricity, airport, railways, roads, seaports that greatly support tourism. The substantial growth of the tourism activities clearly marks tourism as one of the most remarkable economic and social phenomena of various countries of the world, in this context, Imo State of Nigeria in particular.

Tourism is a priority in the programmes of most developed and developing governments. The purpose of tourism development will only be optimally successful when supported by the potentials of the area in the form of natural attractions and tourist attractions. When this is done, tourism activities in general will have widespread impact on economic development of the area under review. This can support the economic movement of the people, open pockets of arts and culture including the activities of utilization and preservation of the potential of natural resources to be known by every tourist. The rich potentials of the physical and human resources necessitated the establishment of tourism boards in all the states within the country so as to harness and develop the existing tourism potentials of Nigeria. This great effort from the government has encouraged and increased the rate of tourist arrivals especially in states with unique tourism potentials such as Imo, Abuja, Cross River, Enugu, Anambra, Lagos states among others. In Imo State, the rate of tourist arrivals is quite alarming due to the numerous tourism potentials in Oguta Lake Resort.

The success and sustenance of tourism depends majorly on the level of infrastructure and local people's involvement in tourism development processes in the area. An effective tourism project could provide and create positive attributes to destined areas such as the provision of employment opportunities; foreign exchange and revenue generation, protection of natural environment and delivery of quality tourist experience. Tourism provides the largest level of opportunities in most developed countries of the world. It creates employment for young people and adults.

Tourism which has developed dramatically over the last 3 decades is said to continue growing as societies become more mobile and prosperous, obtaining more information on recreational services. These countries have increased their tourist arrivals to the destination (Oguta, Wonder Lake Resort).

Oguta Wonder Lake is the largest natural lake in Imo State. It covers about five miles (8.05km) long from east to west and a mile and half (2.41km) wide. It was originally used by colonial administration in 1960 majorly for the purpose of evacuating palm produce by the United African Company (UAC) but was later opened up for commercial purposes. The tourist attractions include the blue and clear lake which is good for swimming and sightseeing. It has a golf course with 18 standard international gulf cups, Relic of war, (mini bunker) which then served as the marine base for Biafran Navy during the Nigerian Civil war of 1967 – 1970, cruise boat services, mini children Recreation Park and standard hotels for lodging.

Recently, studies in Nigeria and Imo State have shown that since 1999, there has been an observed steady rise in the number of tourists visiting the region to attend events such as business summit, cultural festivals, conventions, new yam festivals, marriage ceremonies, conferences, crusades, sports competitions and seminars. Others visited for the purpose of spending their holiday or to have a first-hand experience of the natural and cultural attraction in the region. This paper therefore seeks to reveal the usefulness of tourism in Imo State, its relevance to the localities that has attraction centers like Oguta. It shall further examine the benefits of tourism to host community.

Methodology

Documentary sources were used in eliciting useful data for the study. Examples of secondary sources are books, academic journals, discussion papers and internet-based documented materials. Data collected were analyzed descriptively.

Importance of Tourism

Tourism in Nigeria has not risen to the zenith of its potentials yet. It remains a veritable sector of the Nigerian economy that needs to be developed as it can attract huge societal development. This can be actualized in the following areas:

Employment: Provision of employment opportunity is viewed as one of the most vital advantages of tourism in Nigeria. The unemployment rate in the country is very high and tourism can provide job opportunities for positions like guides, restaurant attendants, coach services, various positions in hotel services and others. It will create a great opportunity for business development, which could be evidenced in the production of local goods as local souvenirs for tourists and other useful packages. All these amount to the indirect provision of additional revenue to the local community.

Additional Income for Host Communities: Tourists like to spend money on local attractions. Likewise, people from local communities also spend more money. A huge range of basic human requirements are purchased by tourist in cities. In addition international tourists usually come with their national currencies that would be exchanged to Nigeria national currency thereby providing foreign exchange. These foreign currencies help to stabilize the economy of local communities and individual persons in the area. Tourism also bring diversification to the local economies, it helps in the development of new forms of income, thereby increasing the creativity potential of local business persons. Currencies from tourists may work as an insurance policy for the local government. It is also important for rural communities whose main source of income is based on agricultural activities. Communities need support from more than one sector of the economy for economic turn-around. It can also be noted that tourism generates revenue and wealth to the investors of different nations all over the globe and Nigeria is endowed with

various attractions and resources that can hold tourists spellbound as well as provide abundant business opportunities to Oguta lake indigenes, while increase government earning.

Infrastructure: When tourists come to the local communities, the level of infrastructural development increases. More tourists' influx will attract provision of new roads and public social amenities for the people. Better facilities attract more tourists and great advantages for the people who enjoy them. It will provide enough revenue to build schools, hospitals, ports, among others for the host communities.

Social Advantages: People can enjoy fantastic cultural advantage from tourism. Tourists come with new cultures and ideas; therefore, you can witness the diversification of cultures in most cities of the world that are often visited by tourists. Local cultures could also be promoted by tourism, for instance tourists can pay to watch local dances and buy local souvenirs. Tourism also had become major force to reckon with in the global trade. They play a vital role in the social and economic development of their host community and equally have the potential to preserve heritage.

Economic Advantage: It is a fact that environmental pollution will discourage a lot of tourists from visiting a country. This invariably means that dirty and overpopulated cities cannot be attraction for the tourists. This is why communities that are involved in the tourism sector of the economy, spend more on cleaning their cities.

Tourism as pointed out earlier, involves travelling for business and pleasure. It is currently a dynamic industry which can help the economy of many countries, but Nigeria is yet to invest and utilize the proceeds there from. Some countries even go extra mile, to develop their entire environment and great tourist attraction centers like Dubai, China, UK and other developed parts of the world. Tourism impacts on people and industries round the globe. In fact, it is one of the indices of development in a country.

Result: A review of the growth and the development of the Oguta Ameshi communities of Oguta Local Government Area show that, tourism influences their employment status; additional income for local communities (especially their fishing industry); diversification of their economy and infrastructural development; social advantage, economic advantage and many more. Based on the aforementioned findings; it is recommended that all principal stakeholders in the tourism sub sector should be involved in the planning, execution of tourism projects and that tourism activities be organized all though the year to ensure more tourist visitation and avoid seasonality in the tourism sub sector of the Nigerian Economy.

Challenges of Tourism in Nigeria

The problem of tourism in Nigeria could be associated with the total neglect of the sub-sector by various administrations in Nigeria. This sector of Nigerian economy has been viewed by many as not having the capacity to inject into the development stride of the economy. Hence, some people even

regard the sector as a "festival sector". In this regard, the problems confronting the sector did not just exist, but has resulted from misguided orientation, misdirection, mismanagement and misappropriation to delisting of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism by the Federal Government.

Also, the regulations of Tourism in Nigeria has not reflected the tourism ideals of the nation, the facts are very glaring and discreet, the managers of tourism boards in Nigeria are basically investors or workers employed through political appointments. They have no basic knowledge of tourism. The professionals in this key economic sector are relegated to the background by politicians. Hence, the policy making body is sick which by extension would lead to the demise of the sector.

Additionally, the indigenization of the Nigerian Tourism Sector is another militating factor. The managers of this sector have no capacity, as they lack the know-how in the economic sub-sector. The level of infrastructural development to most sites is poor and sometimes non-existent. This singular defect does not encourage tourists to visit the sites. Another drawback to tourism in Nigeria is multiple taxation by various levels of government.

Recommendations

Having X-rayed the contributions of Tourism to Nigeria economic development, the following recommendations are proffered:

- The government should enact indigenous tourism friendly regulations, to facilitate the activities of tourists/visitors and investors.
- The government should invest/make regional budgetary allocation to the sub-sector to enable the board rebuild the dilapidated tourism sector in Nigeria.
- The institutions/agencies managing tourism activities in Nigeria should be monitored and controlled by Nigeria tourism professionals.
- The tertiary institutions studying Hospitality and tourism management should as a matter of fact, properly train the resource persons who would administer professionalism in the sub-sector.
- There should be training and retraining of the staff of Tourism Board of Nigeria, to be in line with best practices in the sector.
- Tourism expatriates coming to work in Nigeria should and must pass through the School of Hospitality and Tourism to acquaint them on the Nigerian Hospitality and tourism business environment.
- Individuals and corporate organization should be encouraged to invest in the tourism sector, to create more wealth and employment opportunities for Nigerians.
- The government should conduct forensic audit of tourist attractions in Nigeria to know the nature of tourism assets as well as determine their individual commercial viability.

- Abandoned tourism resorts/facilities across Nigeria should be completed or leased to private individual for effective management.
- Nigerian government should speed-up and develop tourism by making her agencies more viable and tourist friendly.
- Finally, there should be a day set aside as a Nigeria National Tourism Day to be hosted by various tourism sites on a rotational basis to create the awareness and impact of tourism to development of Nigeria economy.

Conclusion

It is no longer news that Nigeria's tourism sub-sector is largely under-developed, under-utilized and neglected by various successive administrations. The most disturbing aspect of it is the present administration that echoed diversification of the economy but has grossly pushed aside this economic subsector for others perceived viable. Tourism is both a domestic and an international affair. It is stale news that, government lack entrepreneurial know-how and dearth of actionable knowledge of how to map out layout for tourism economic development in Nigeria. The problems are legion. However, these complexities are not without great remedies. This study seeks to bring to bear some of the ways through which tourism, when harnessed could do economic wonders to Nigeria development agenda in the years to come. To cap it all, holistic budgetary funding of the sub-sector will orchestrate economic fortune to the Nigeria economy, which Oguta Lake Resort is currently doing in the economic tourism of Owerri, Imo State.

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