RURAL TOURISM AS A TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Pius Williams Wuam
Department of Geography
Aminu Saleh College of Education, Azare
Bauchi State
Pwilliams6068@gmail.com

And

Ibrahim Dauda
Department of Educational Foundations
Federal College of Education (T) Gombe
Gombe State
Ibrahimdauda640@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
Nigeria is a country with great prospects when it comes to tourism. It boasts of diverse landscapes with beautiful scenery and many tourist destinations with historic importance. It is in the light of this that this paper focuses on rural tourism as a tool for sustainable development in Nigeria. In an attempt to do this, the paper looked at the concept of tourism and rural tourism, types of rural tourism and the benefits of rural tourism on host communities. Equally, the negative impacts of tourism on host communities and the measures for preventing these negative impacts were discussed. The paper also highlighted sustaining and developing rural tourism in Nigeria. It was concluded that a well-planned tourism industry brings physical, social and economic benefits to rural destinations, making the industry an important contributor to the global economy. However, rural tourism is not a panacea to rural problems, but it has a number of positive attractions that make it one of the many opportunities that rural communities might have to adopt to improve productivity and income. Amongst others, it was recommended that increased collaboration between all stakeholders involved in the tourism industry will enhance productivity.

KEYWORDS: Rural tourism, Sustainable development

INTRODUCTION
Tourism is considered to be the highest employer of labour in the world today. This stems from the fact that the multiplier effect of tourism activities for countries that have a well-organized tourism sector is tremendously felt in all ramifications of their economies. According to Majid, Zaman and Medugu (2017), rural tourism plays a major role in forming the economic structure of a country and transforming an impoverished society into an affluent one. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2017) (United Nations Specialized Agency responsible for
the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism) claimed that tourism is the world’s largest industry with annual revenues of over $3 trillion dollars. Tourism is said to provide over six million jobs in the United States, thus making it the country’s largest employer (UNWTO, 2017). A well developed and planned tourism industry is a gate way to global peace. Therefore, it holds that any country which has the potentials for tourists’ attraction is actually destined for international reputation in the global economy. Physical, social and economic benefits are associated with the tourism industry of any country, provided it is well planned, developed and effectively managed. Rural tourism can help in shaping the society. However, tourism is not a panacea for rural problems, but it has proven to have a number of positive attractions which is one of the many opportunities that rural communities might consider to improve productivity and income.

THE CONCEPT OF TOURISM AND RURAL TOURISM

Tourism in simplistic terms means travel for pleasure. It may be international or within the traveler’s country. According to Gontul (2009), tourism is the travel and stay of people away from their usual residence for the purpose of leisure, recreation, pleasure, business, etc. Similarly, Abegunde, Adegoke, Onwumere and Dahiru (1990) noted that a tourist is one who travels away from his home for sightseeing or pleasure. Abegunde et al. (1990) further stated that a tourist resort is a place that holds some attraction for tourists or holiday makers and which has special facilities for making them comfortable. The World Tourism Organization opined that tourism does not just imply the mere perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only, but also, as travelling to and stay in places outside one’s usual environment for the purpose of leisure. Ofune (1984) describes a tourist industry as one concerned with the business of catering for tourists. On the other hand, Iwena (2012) describes tourism as a process involving the visit of people to places of interest where they can relax, derive pleasure and entertainment. Furthermore, Peter (2003) posited that tourism is the act of discovering the free gift of nature and how man prevents them from extinction. World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2010) sees tourism as a collection of activities, services and industries that deliver a travel experience, including transportation, accommodation, eating and drinking establishments, retail shops, entertainment, business activity facilities and other hospitality services provided for individuals or groups travelling away from home. However, the focus of this paper is on rural tourism, therefore, according to Wikipedia (2016), rural tourism is defined as the “country experience” which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Similarly, www.igi-global.com (2019) posited that rural tourism (both domestic and international) occurs in rural environments and involves rural experience.
TYPES OF RURAL TOURISM

Smith and Eadington (1992) identified three types of rural tourism which are as follows:

1. **Mass and Alternative Tourism:** Mass tourism is characterized by large numbers of people seeking culture holidays in popular resort destinations. On the other hand, alternative tourism which is sometimes referred to as “special interest tourism” or “responsible tourism” gives emphasis on the contact and understanding of inhabitants’ way of living and natural local environment.

2. **Natural Based Tourism or Ecotourism:** This is sometimes called recreation based tourism. It is the process of visiting natural areas for the purpose of enjoying the scenery, including plant and animal wildlife.

3. **Agric-tourism:** This refers to “the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation. It includes taking part in a broad range of farm based activities, including farmers’ markets, roadside stands, “pick your-own” operations, etc.

**Benefits of Rural Tourism**

Rural tourism which is a growing industry in developing countries promises a lot of benefits to rural development. Government of Alberta (2010) identified some of the benefits of rural tourism as follows:

1. **Job Retention:** Activities of tourism promote cash flows which assist in job retention in services such as retailing, transport, hospitality and medical care, amongst others.

2. **Job Creation:** Job opportunities are created in areas such as hotel and catering trades, transportation, and retailing and in information/heritage interpretation.

3. **New Business Opportunities:** Tourism generates new opportunities for industry. Rural tourism facilities such as the expansion of complementary businesses like service stations and new businesses are created to cater for tourists needs for hospitality services, recreational activities and arts and crafts.

4. **Opportunities for Youths:** The tourism industry is often promoted as an exciting and growing industry suited for the energies and enthusiasm of young people. Career options are enhanced with the opportunities for training and direct investment in running tourism business, especially those within small communities.

5. **Service Retention:** Visitors’ information service can be provided by existing outlets such as shops, thus increasing income flows if payment is made for acting as information outlets.
6. **Community Diversification:** Rural tourism assists by diversifying income sources for forest communities if the special qualities of the forest environment for recreational use are realized and developed.

7. **Rural Tourism Enhances and Revitalizes Community Pride:** Tourism encourages conformity to an ideal image of community which can result in growth of personal ties and community solidarity.

8. **Preservation of Rural Culture and Heritage:** In rural tourism, the “sense of place” is a fundamental element in both the tourists’ and host community’s feelings of what makes the area attractive to visit and live in. This sense of place is maintained partly through rural museums which play a vital role in preserving heritage.

9. **Increase Arts and Crafts Sale:** Arts and crafts have a special place in the cultural heritage of regions and nations. Tourism can assist arts and crafts, both by recognizing their importance and by purchasing craft products.

10. **Landscape Conservation:** Landscape conservation is an important form of heritage protection. Tourism in this regard helps in the conservation of the natural vegetation and animal life.

11. **Environmental Improvements:** Environmental improvements such as village paving and traffic regulation schemes, sewage and waste disposal can be enhanced by tourism revenues and political pressures from tourism authorities.

**Negative Impact of Tourism on Host Communities**

Despite the numerous benefits of tourism to rural destinations, experience has shown that tourism can equally impact negatively on host communities. Such negative consequences can undermine the sustainability of the tourism industry and the entire destination area. Some of the negative impacts of tourism include:

1. Increased demand for land in rural areas which may inflate real estate prices, potentially putting the cost of housing beyond the reach of the average resident.
2. Potentially higher rate of crime.
3. Spread of contagious diseases such as tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS to the host community by tourists.
4. Loss of language of the host communities.
5. Abuse of tourism resources by the tourists e.g. pollution, poaching, vandalism.
6. Capital flight and economic leakages. Most highly placed workers in a tourism industry are usually not indigenes of those communities, therefore, monies made in form of salaries and wages are not re-invested in the communities and this leads to capital flight.
7. Invasion of privacy of host communities as the activities of tourists will expose them to public domain.

Preventing Negative Impact of Rural Tourism on Host Communities

Negative impact of tourism on rural communities can be prevented by carrying out impact assessment of every tourism project for proper decision making, determination of carrying capacities of each project, research and monitoring of tourism activities to ensure that sustainability is guaranteed through adherence to standards and ethics, designing code of ethics for tourists and awareness campaigns on the benefits and ills of tourism on a destination must all be done. Such awareness campaigns prepare the local communities to manage the consequences of tourism effectively.

Sustaining Rural Tourism

There are key factors that make rural tourism successful; these factors are briefly discussed below:

1. Community Involvement: For an area to be considered a successful rural tourism destination, there must be collaborative effort or agreement between public and private sectors. Community involvement is a key element of the equation.

2. Proximity to a Generating Market or Gateway: This implies that rural tourism destinations must be easily accessible to potential visitors through reliable transportation networks.

3. Product Development: For successful rural tourism, there must be investment in tourism related infrastructure, and a range of activities to satisfy different tastes of visitors.

4. A Visitors’ Centre: Rural communities are expected to have welcoming centres where visitors can freely seek information on local attractions, activities, as well as accommodations, and ask questions and get answers from people who are knowledgeable about the area.

5. Partnership Collaboration/Cultural Heritage/Welcome Centres: There is need to create and leverage on potential partnerships with cultural/heritage segments. This may help to provide value-added services for consumers, including providing directions and creating awareness for rural tourism locations and historical/cultural activities, successfully differentiating them from other destinations.

6. A Quality Brand and Regional Label: A quality brand label may increase awareness of the destination among its identified target market segments.

7. Funding: The long-term sustainability of tourism rests on the ability of community leaders and tourism professionals to maximize benefits and minimize costs.
Developing Rural Tourism for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the top tourist destinations in Africa. However, the tourism industry in Nigeria has not been developed to its full potential, particularly, when one considers the massive tourism potential the country is blessed with and the expected benefits to be derived (Nwamanah, 2018). The largest and most populous black nation in the world is blessed with a lot of beautiful, natural attractions ranging from abundant hills, waterfalls (Kura Falls and Assop Falls in Plateau State), springs (Wikki Spring in Yankari Game Reserve, Bauchi State), lakes, rocks (Olumo Rocks in Ogun State and Zuma Rocks in Suleja), mountains and caves scattered across the length and breadth of the country that attract and fascinate tourists from all over the world. Other natural and man-made attractions comprising flora and fauna in the country remain untapped. In spite of all this, Nigeria still ranks outside the top ten international tourist arrivals in Africa. Besides, the World Economic Forum scores Nigeria 2.8 (on a scale of 1-7) and 129th in the world on its travel and tourism competitiveness index (Nwamanah, 2018). Nigeria therefore, is a country with huge tourism potentials waiting to be explored. Luckily, most tourism attractions in Nigeria are located in the rural areas. Some of these attractions as pointed out by Odiugo and Ogeah (2007) and Iwena (2013) include the following:

1. Yankari National Park in Alkaleri LGA of Bauchi State
2. Borgu Game Reserve in Niger State
3. The Kainji Dam site in Jebba and the Shiororo Dam in Niger State
4. Bar beaches in Lagos, Lekki and Badagry all in Lagos State
5. The National Theatre in Lagos
6. Five star hotels like Sheraton (Lagos and Abuja), Nicon Hilton (Abuja), Durban Hotel (Kaduna), Federal Palace Hotel (Lagos), etc
7. The Kura and Assop Falls in Plateau State; Agbokim Waterfalls in Ikom, Cross River State
8. The Zuma Rocks (Suleja) Niger State and Olumo rocks (Ogun State)
9. The Museums in Lagos, Benin, and Ife
10. Traditional Palaces such as that of Ife, Benin and Sokoto
11. Some traditional festivals such as Argungu fishing festival (Kebbi State), Igbo Masquerades in Enugu
12. Wild life park/zoo in Jos
14. Freedom Park, Lagos
15. Aso Rock and the Presidential Complex, Abuja
16. Agodo Park and Gardens and the University of Ibadan Zoological Garden, Ibadan.
17. Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State

Nzedo (2010) also noted that there are huge tourism attractions in Adamawa State which include: Gashaka Gumti Natural Park at Tounga LGA, Bwasu Hot Spring in Lamurde LGA, Kamala Peak and the Sukur Kingdom at Madagali LGA, Kiri Dam at Shelleng LGA and Three-Sister Rocks at Song in Song LGA.

The government pays less attention to the development of the natural and man-made endowment in the country thus limiting the country to be sustainable and yield maximum return on investment. It is the opinion of the authors that if well managed and developed, the country stands to benefit immensely from these tourist sites through income generation and employment opportunities for the teeming population of the country. This will curb youth restiveness and pave way for national development and sustainability.

PROBLEMS OF TOURISM IN NIGERIA

According to Nwamanah (2018), Nigeria has great prospects when it comes to tourism. A country with diverse landscape, beautiful scenery and many destinations with historic significance should have a thriving tourism sector. But this is not the case as Nigeria is faced with numerous problems which hinder the development of its tourism industry. Some of these problems include: poor infrastructure, terrorism and security challenges, misrepresentation of Nigeria abroad, lack of proper management, lack of proper data base, relegation of indigenous culture, inadequate investment and funding, air travel problems, lack of policy implementation, low budget allocation, crime rate, political unrest, medical/health care concerns and lack of awareness.

No country of the world can afford to ignore the significance of tourism to its economic, social and cultural development; hence Nigeria is blessed with many natural and man-made endowments. It is in the light of this therefore, that Nigeria needs to show case its tourism potentials to the world, likewise the development of the tourism sector. The government needs to create an enabling environment for public-private investment to develop the nation’s tourism and aviation’s for the purpose of attracting more tourists for economic growth. With adequate security measures in place coupled with the reposition of the tourism sector to yield maximum return on investment, the tourism industry will experience a boost and thus usher in the much talked about sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of this paper, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. To avoid the breakdown of law and order at a tourist destination area, law enforcement agencies should be deployed 24/7 to check crime and criminality.
2. There is the need for collaboration between the federal and state governments and all those concerned with managing the affairs of the tourism industry to make it more effective.

3. Advertisement and jingles should be carried out in media houses to ensure that areas housing tourists’ attractions are known all over the world.

4. Governments at all levels should pay adequate attention to tourist areas in terms of spreading even development to the people in the area in order to prevent agitations for resource control.

5. Government should ensure adequate development of all tourist attractions in the country, so as to provide employment for youths and put the country on the path of sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

Tourism has been truly found to increase business, income and employment in rural destinations and is also seen to assist in social and economic development. Rural tourism has many potential benefits such as employment growth, an expanded economic base, repopulation, social improvement, and revitalization of local crafts. Rural tourism encompasses a huge range of activities, natural or man-made attractions, amenities and facilities, transportation, marketing and information systems. Tourism is an important contributor to the world economy. However, statistics show that Nigeria needs to do more to address some important problems that seem to be militating against a thriving tourism industry. Be that as it may, GOA (2010) noted that tourism is not the panacea for all rural problems, but it has a number of positive attractions. It is one of the many opportunities that rural communities might consider to improve productivity and incomes.

REFERENCES


