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HARNESSING TOURISM RESOURCES IN NIGERIA FOR ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION: PROSPECTS AND OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is richly blessed with diverse resources of touristic value which can be harnessed for economic diversification; leading to the prosperity of the people. However, the country has continued to rely on oil resources, making it squabble as a mono-economy state; while her tourism potentials remain largely untapped and the resources thereof under-utilized. The prospects of economic prosperity when tourism resources are harnessed for economic diversification are quite enormous and largely supported by the literature. However, strategic implementation and operational management of the process pose a great challenge. The study found that these challenges are not insurmountable; and that unflinching commitment to the process by government and relevant stakeholders is sine-qua-non to achieving the objectives which may include job creation, poverty alleviation, improved standard of living, and increased foreign exchange earnings. Based on these, it was recommended that government should put policies in place that will open up the sector for investment by private investors; as a matter of urgency, the government should tackle the insecurity problem in the country because investors and tourists alike want to be in a friendly and safe environment; and that government should explore the option of public-private partnership in developing tourism infrastructure in all parts of the country where tourism potentials exist.

KEYWORDS

Infrastructural Development, Job Creation, Poverty Alleviation, Public Private Partnership, Tourism Stakeholders.



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Overview of Tourism and the Nigerian Economy

Nigeria is blessed with both natural and material tourism resources that can be harnessed to accelerate her economic development by serving as a revenue and foreign exchange mechanism. To be very specific, the country is blessed with tourism resources such as beaches, unique wildlife, tropical forest, magnificent waterfalls and great works of art; some of which have been developed into tourist attractions for both foreign and local tourists (Umoh & Ndu, 2013). Tourism resources availability and services play very important roles in stimulating socio-economic development of many countries (Holloway, 2001; Okpoko et al., 2008). Its impact on the social, economic, cultural, and educational and international relations of nations makes it a very important activity for national sustenance and continued development (Ekundayo & Abutu, 2015). This is because tourism plays a major role in easing (but not limited to) the political, social and economic problems that characterize underdeveloped countries. It equally helps in the development of urban centers. The concept of tourism has undergone many investigative studies in relation to how it can be used to solve some economic problems; making it to be a very significant tool for poverty alleviation, attainment of the millennium development goals (MDGs) and sustainable development (Olorunfemi & Raheem, 2008). These revelations have led many governments' of developing and underdeveloped countries to start appreciating the need to not only commit enormous financial resources to the sector but also becoming intentional about it in terms of plans, policies and provision of basic tourism drivers (tourism infrastructures). Tourism is seen as a means of local community development, job and employment creation at all levels of government in both developed and underdeveloped nations such as Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Australia and the United States, Kenya, Cuba, and Srilanka (Hall & Jenkins, 1995).

Tourism is the key to the growth of the economy of any local area, state government and national government. According to Filion et al., (1994), tourism is said to be one of the fastest growing economic activities in the world. It has been appraised as one of the largest foreign exchange earners throughout the world if given a very good attention. It could contribute to the preservation of the environment if it is planned and implemented in an environmentally and socially friendly manner. Tourism has been branded as a possible economic instrument that enhances economic development while at the same time being advantageous to the environment and local social condition without any form of damage to the environment (Reynold & Braithwaite, 2001). It is an activity that contributes to a better understanding of places, people and their cultures.

Prior to now, the backbone of Nigerian economy used to be agriculture but the discovery of crude oil in the early 1970s, drifted governments attention from agriculture-based economy to the oil economy. The too much attention given to oil sector, encouraged and influenced a lot of rural-urban movement in search of blue-collar employments in the oil sector, government offices and industries. The over concentration on the oil sector was so much that other sectors of the economy that could have created much needed revenue were neglected and relegated. Tourism happened to be one of the affected sectors. It was not too long ago when the government of Nigeria initiated plans on how to develop the tourism sector as a means of engendering economic diversification so as to escape from bad economy and enhance the socio-economic wellbeing of Nigerians. For this to be successful, Nigeria's tourism industry depends on its sustainability. Therefore, for tourism to be sustainable, its development plans must take into consideration both the present and future economic, social, environmental and ethnic impacts in the host regions. In Nigeria, there are many tourist attractions

and these include the Ikogosi Warm Spring, Owu Falls, Niger-Benue confluence, Assop falls and Wikki warm springs among others. All these attractions if well-developed and economically packaged have the ability to drive the economic development of Nigeria as a country so as to ensure sustainability.

Concept of Resource and Tourism Resources

Resources have been defined by Okpoko and Okpoko (2002) as the phenomena that consist of the prosperity and constituents available to an individual or nation which can be used to realize desired purposes. These resources are grouped into two namely; natural resources and cultural resources. These resources are tremendously vital for the nation in terms of tourism development. Hence, tourism resources are those materials and wealth readily made available to a country to achieve its tourism goals. Tourists are constantly searching for attractive resources, different and special, that offers them specific tourist activities (Paul, 2012). On the other hand, the demand for a tourism experience is particularly related with special demands of tourists because of the desire to discover other places (Jurėnienė, 2016). It is clear that natural and cultural resources are important factors underlying a country's travel and tourism competitiveness (Okoli, 2001; Mihalic, 2013).

Natural Resources

Natural resources have been defined by Crouch and Ritchie (1999) as the original nature of the essential properties of the environment, which includes the flora and fauna species. Changet al (2016), opined that the tangible features of land can become a resource only if they are described by the society. The environmental resources or the natural resources are measured as one of the foremost attractions for tourists in making travel decision of a destination particularly in the framework of rural tourism (Lane, 2009; Mihalič, 2013). Hence, it is the need to conserve natural resources in order to preserve the quality of the rural tourism potentials (Sok, 2010; Reimer & Walter, 2013). However, Chang et al (2016), noted that if the locals make use of certain environmental resources, they may develop a strong character about shielding and using them sustainably. Natural resources are one of the rudiments that are needed for successful international tourism marketing; and success in nature-based tourism lies in proper levels of tourist consumer services, as well as high environmental quality (Boley et al., 2014; Muresan et al., 2016)

Cultural Resources

Culture is the continuing conducts, standards, attitudes and traditions shared by a group of people and transferred from one generation to another (Myers, 2005). Cultural resources can be used in place of cultural heritage as it is used in United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other literatures. Similarly, Sarttata (2010) clarified cultural heritage as products emanating from antiquities, artworks, monuments, sites, heritage buildings, and historical urban areas with the characteristic of inherent values. As noted by Liu (2013) cultural resource occupies an important role in tourism destinations, due to the reason that millions of people travel across the globe in a quest to just experience this type of heritage. Moreover, there is the need to satisfy tourist inquisitiveness to experience other people in their true environment and to view the physical exhibition of their lives as expressed in arts and crafts, music, literature, dance, food and drink, play, handicrafts, language and ritual (Dewar, 2005). There is also the urge in people to experience different types of heritage; there by providing the 'push factor' for movement to places where cultural tourism can be experienced. Cultural sceneries can be divided into "rich non-material and material attributes

acquired within the society and conveyed through generations” (Okpoko & Okpoko, 2002). However, Ogundele (2001) subdivided them into archaeological and ethnographic resources. All these are cultural resource features of any given society which potentials could be harnessed for tourism development (Ogundele, 2001; Okpoko & Okpoko, 2002).

Nigeria’s Reliance on a Single-Product Economy and the Implications thereof

Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural and human resources that are capable of driving the economy to self-sustainability. Unfortunately, the nation has over the years continued to depend largely on crude oil as its major source of economy at the detriment of other sectors; thus, qualifying her as a mono-product economy. Ajani and Kalu (2017) postulated that a single-product economy is an economy that is solely or most partly driven by only a major economic product; which is responsible for the economic sustenance of the country’s economy. This according to them leaves the economic life of such an economy at the mercy of the availability, relevance and currency of that product. In support of this postulation, Robert (2012) opined that the only way for such economy to thrive and potentially meet the needs of its citizenry is, if the product fares well at the international market; otherwise, the consequences would be dire for such economy if the product performs poorly. Nigeria’s major revenue and chance of economic survival is hinged on oil price in the international market because, it funds virtually all capital expenditures. Thus, the free fall of the Nigerian economy is credited to its over reliance on the single source of income “crude oil” and the economy tends to suffer when the price of oil is less. Sanusi (2011) as cited in Ajani and Kalu (2017) outlined some of the consequences of decline in crude oil price or domestic output to include huge evaluation of the naira, breakdown in revenue reserves and an enormous spike in deficits capable of making some states unable to meet up with civil servants’ salaries. This raises the concern of renewability in resources which has become a major cause for worry in Nigeria as oil is a non-renewable resource capable of drying up in the nearest future. If this happens, the effect is better imagined than experienced; and indeed, in the words of Ifeanyi et al (2015) the economy might likely not survive such a scenario as there will be a drastic revenue shortfall. Moreso, given the recent inventions and investments in solar, wind and bio energy by more advanced economies, continued dependence on oil revenue becomes catastrophic for Nigeria and her citizenry.

Concept of Economic Diversification

Economic diversification can be likened to the act of structuring a country’s economy as system by which multiple streams of wealth creation and income generation is considered and developed instead of dependence on single income source. (United Nations climate change, 2018). The enhancing of income generation and economic output through different funnels of sectors to strengthen a country’s economic base is referred to as economic diversification (Owanet al., 2020). Economic diversification is also the recognition of other sectors’ potentials in contributing to the healthy sustenance of the economy in such a system that a collapse in one sector will not entirely crash the economy. A study by Eko et al (2013) indicated that growth and development are likely in a multi-economy system when savings from excess sectors are earned into deficit sectors of the economy. Similarly, Samuelson (1968) posited that adopting a multi-income generating system will be a great plus as it will reduce the possibility of running an unstable economy. In the case of Nigeria, her economy is heavily dependent on the price action of the international oil market; and given the recent decline in the price of crude, her development is stalled, stagnant and has left her economy in a very harsh condition where over 60% of her citizens live under the poverty line of 2\$ per day (Muttaka,

2015). This trend has raised the demand for economic diversification so as to unearth the potentials of other industries and sub sectors of the economy thereby helping to stabilize and prosper the nation. Some of the industries believed to possess these potential include tourism/hospitality, agriculture and manufacturing.

A CBN report in 2010, revealed that over 80% of the revenue of Nigeria is traced to oil produce leaving about 20% to other sectors. This is evidence that the country only thrives when the price of oil is advantageous and slides into recession once the price falls in the negative. Buttressing the need for economic diversification, Adedipe (2004) opined that it is an economic strategy that gives an economy a number of means for revenue generation, while laying foundation for all round sustainable development. Some of the benefits of economic diversification include growing the export base of the economy with the attendant increase in export revenue, increase in employment opportunities, development and growth of potentials in untapped or underutilized sectors of the economy etc.

To mobilize the economy, the country must galvanize and harness all that is available to her; and by doing so, must provide a conducive business environment that will encourage private investment and partnership in critical areas of the economy such as agriculture, manufacturing, education, healthcare, tourism and training of its population. Given the harsh nature of the Nigerian economy, the country easily slips into economic recession whenever oil prices fall and the resultant effect becomes a decline in foreign earnings (Uzonwanne, 2015). Imminently, if the Nigerian government pays attention to diversifying the economy, it could lead to sustainable economic growth. This is because increased diversification flattens the curve of doubt and volatility in the world oil market; employment generation and economic performance increases; and the economy will move towards sustainable growth (Uzonwanne, 2015). According to Suberu et al (2015), for diversification to be possible, the stakeholders must provide an enabling business environment, critical business and social frameworks such as strong currency exchange, competitive and friendly commercial policies, political and economic stability and the provision of a smart roadmap/blueprint that will guide the process.

The Tourism Option for Economic Diversification in Nigeria

Several factors have necessitated the call for diversification of the Nigerian economy. One of such factors is the spate of insecurity in several parts of the country; coupled with sabotage by agitators from the oil producing states which adversely affects oil production. Tourism is one sector that can guarantee numerous benefits for a sustainable growth from the over reliance on the oil sector (Ayodele et al, 2019). Buttressing this view, International Monetary Fund – IMF (2012), reported that there is an urgent need for service industries such as tourism to be developed for the purpose of diversifying the economy. Accordingly, this would boost income and guarantee the foreign exchange earnings needed to support local business development and improve the standard of living of the people. Thus, as Nigeria contends with the challenges of revenue reduction, tourism has been acknowledged as a genuine option for sustainable development. This is evidenced in some countries like Spain, France, Italy, Australia, USA, Canada, United Arab Emirate etc that diversified their economy with tourism. These countries understood the importance of tourism in economic growth and invested in its potentials. Hence, tourism has become a major source of economic diversification for many countries (Ayeni & Ebohon, 2012; Dwyer & Spurr, 2011; Herb, 2009).

Global tourism data has continued to show tourism's growing influence and potentials for economic diversification and growth. World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC] Highlights (2019) indicated that the travel and tourism sector accounted for 10.4% of global GDP; 319 million jobs globally (i.e. 1 in 10 jobs) and generally grew by 3.9%, outpacing that of the global economy which grew by 3.2%. The same document indicated that for Nigeria, travel and tourism contributed NGN6,448.0BN (USD18,629.8MN) to the GDP, representing a 5% contribution; accounted for 3,374,900 jobs which represents a 4.7% contribution to employment; while international visitor impact stood at NGN559.8BN (USD1,617.4MN), representing 2.7% of total exports. This impressive performance of the sector which is even projected to grow in the coming years, has demonstrated the sectors potentials and ability to diversifying and growing the Nigerian economy. Apart from these, scholars (Balaguer & Cantavella, 2002; Brida et al, 2008; Cyril & Gbadebo, 2008; Khalil & Waliullah, 2007; Mirsha & Mohapatra, 2011; Soraya, 2011; Zortuk, 2009) have also shown research evidence that buttress this fact. For instance, Balaguer and Cantavella (2002) in their examination of 'the role of tourism in the Spanish long-run economic development' using vector autoregressive(VAR) method discovered that economic growth in Spain was significantly enhanced by steady growth in their tourism sector. Similarly, Khalil and Waliullah (2007) examined 'The Role of Tourism in Economic Development of Pakistan 1960-2005'. Using Error Correction Model (ECM), the study sought to examine the relationship between foreign earnings and economic expansion (measured by GDP) through tourism. The findings revealed that economic diversification was necessary for tourism development in Pakistan. On their part, Brida et al (2008) investigated the impact of tourism on the Long-Run Mexican economic growth. They employed Toda and Yamamoto correlation test; as well as vector error correction model(VECM) and found that there is a positive and strong relationship between tourism expenditure and real GDP. Zortuk's (2009) study on economic impact of tourism on Turkey's economy, used co-integration tests to establish a unidirectional causality from tourism arrivals to economic growth. While Mirsha and Mohapatra (2011) analysing the relationship between real GDP and foreign exchange earnings in India for the period 1978 - 2009, used VECM to find that there is a long-term direct effect of tourism activities on economic growth of the country. No doubt, these studies x-rayed the economic potentials and importance of investing and developing tourism as an alternate means of revenue and income generation for a country. They affirmed that tourism helps to reduce the rate of unemployment, all eviate poverty, improve living standard and most importantly, has a multiplier effect on other critical sectors such as transportation, trade/commerce, manufacturing, health and communication.

Tourism Resource Development and the Need for Supportive Infrastructure

This study has already established that Nigeria is blessed with lots of tourism resources; most of which are still at their raw and undeveloped state. For emphasis, all the different types of tourism resources are in quantum in almost each of the thirty-six (36) States of Nigeria(Eja et al, 2012). Some of these tourism resources are natural while others are man-made; ranging from hills, spring falls, caves, lakes and mountains as well as cultural festivals, historical sites and monuments unequally spread in Nigeria (see table 1).

Table1: Natural and Man-made Tourism Attractions

| Natural Tourism Attractions | Man-Made Tourism Attractions |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Oceans | Festivals and Traditional Display |
| Vegetations | Exclusive Historical Events |
| Geographical and Geological sites | National Monuments |
| Waterfalls | Arts and Crafts |
| The Nigerian Slave Route | Sites and Museums |
| Wildlife, Games reserves and Wetlands | |

Source: Adapted from Eja, Ukwayi and Ojong (2012).

On their part, Okpoko et al cited in Umoh and Ndu (2013, p. 115-119) captured an extensive listing of the tourism resources in Nigeria. They categorized them into ‘natural attractions’ and ‘cultural/historic attractions’ and grouped them into five circuits capturing most of the 36 states of the federation including the federal capital territory. These attractive natural gifts and exciting cultural festivals provide fascinating places for leisure, recreation, adventure, entertainment, relaxation and curiosity (Bola, 2010). Nevertheless, these benefits will never be fully realized if these resources are not fully developed with the accompanying infrastructure such as roads, hotels, electricity, and pipe-borne water among others. The needed development must be localized in such a way that enhances long term viability (Butler *et al*, 1993); with embedded sustainability tenets (Ndu, 2018) and for the benefit of all stakeholders especially, the host community. One way of achieving this is by adopting the World Tourism Organization’s [WTO] (1999) recommendations for sustainable tourism development in Sub-Saharan Africa. When these recommendations are followed, it guarantees well-planned and managed tourism with the potentials of conveying economic benefits to host communities and reducing poverty; as well as conserving natural and cultural assets. Other potentials include:

1. Infrastructural development and improvement of facilities at the local levels occasioned by tax revenue generated from tourism activities.
2. Revenue generation and economic diversification to rural and host communities occasioned by foreign exchange earnings from international tourists.
3. Development of cottage industries as a result of the quality of services and recreational resources provided.
4. Stimulation of the interest of host community inhabitants in events and activities outlined for tourists.
5. The possibility of having foreigners become permanent residents especially if the locality is safe and a pleasant for habitation.

Tourism is a composite phenomenon and the inventory of its component factors, therefore, must go ‘hand-in-glove’ with acknowledgement of the general development objectives and characteristics of the country under consideration; more especially, now that tourism market is on the positive drive, customer satisfaction must be the major focus of any tourism producing state (Sitikantha & Tapan, 2001). No place is too rural or local to be visited. If the tourism attractions are properly developed, packaged and presented in a marketable manner.

Having listed the massive and rich tourism resources in Nigeria and the good opportunities (in poverty alleviation, diversification of the oil-based mono economy, employment creation, income redistribution and environmental conservation /preservation), it is important to note that yet, the milk and honey is allowed to waste untapped (Eja & Ajake, 2005). This is because of obvious challenges that bedevil the Nigerian tourism sector. Aniah and Eja(2006) have captured some of these challenges faced by both private tourism investors and government to include:

Tourism Development Component

To facilitate sustainable tourism development in Nigeria, one of the most important factors is the need for a strategic approach to tourism. Huge investment in tourism and most especially tourism supporting infrastructures are considered to be a priority project. The need for professional ground handling arrangements is also acknowledged (Gbadel, 2007). Tourism development is as old as Nigerian history, but is a sector fondly remembered in theory rather than practice. There is no clear-cut intention towards the sector; and this greatly scares away potential investors

Tourism Product Development Opportunities – New Tourism Markets

One of the tourism potentials in Nigeria mentioned as a catalyst for development is Cultural tourism. Mostly important in this respect is the opportunity of taking advantage of Nigeria's rich/diverse culture in holistic terms; and more specifically, targeting the Nigerian Diaspora with a tourism offer based on the slave routes (Eja, 2009). People also identified rural/village tourism, particularly in Northern Nigeria, where support is more likely to be achieved for a 'quieter' form of tourism. Larry(2005) mentioned that there are other considered types of tourism to have potential which include culture, rural, adventure, coast/beach and family holiday for the domestic market.

Current Tourism Markets

Findings by indigenous researchers and tourism practitioners (Bola, 2010; Eja et al, 2012) has revealed that almost 99% of foreign visits in Nigeria is business related. Eja et al(2012) pointed out that the main patronizing markets are Great Britain, Europe, Africa/India, and neighboring West African States. Business tourism has become a pillar of domestic tourism and "holiday taking culture" is yet to be developed in Nigeria (Bola, 2010). In view of the above visitors, there is a massive depletion of the supporting infrastructural development which is still very much below average for their relaxation and taste both at the tourism attraction sites and the intangible services such as accommodation, transportation, food and beverages (Parasuraman et al., 2005). Therefore, the business tourists will rather prefer to stay put on their business concerns and/or conference venues than to go see other places. Thus, they drastically reduce the economy of scale that comes with these visits. Other issues and challenges include:

Inadequate Infrastructure: Nigeria is currently not doing enough in terms of social infrastructure such as good motor-able roads, constant electricity, pipe-borne/portable water, constant communication supplies, good health facilities and other social amenities that are prerequisites for better tourism. These obviously, will affect patronage and tourist arrivals.

Lack of Awareness among the Local Communities: Communities are not aware of the potentials and prospects of some attractions around them; as such, they treat such potentials with levity.

Negative Image of Nigeria Internationally: Tourism does well in a friendly environment for both the tourists themselves and investors in tourism business. The insecurity issue in the country right now is on the high side and it has contributed to the de-marketing of Nigeria as a choice destination (Obioma, 2013).

Conclusion

Nigeria is blessed with all manner of tourism resources capable of diversifying and improving her economy when harnessed. These resources are far underutilized and not properly harnessed for the prosperity of the people. The over reliance on oil has further pushed the economy to bleeding ends; and there seem not to be clear-cut vision of what to do to save the economy. Diversifying the economy is a very big and prosperous option; but the big question becomes, diversify with which sector. The travel and tourism sector has received enormous study attention in recent times; while scholars and practitioners conclude that tourism has the potential of turning the economic trend to a positive and sustainable one. Given the array of tourism potentials in Nigeria, if developed, it can bring back the glory days of the economy in terms of job creation, poverty alleviation, improved standard of living as well as increased foreign exchange earnings.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that:

1. The government should put policies in place that will open up the sector for investment by private investors.
2. Government should partner with relevant stakeholders such as host communities, multi-national corporations as well as the international community to tackle the insecurity in the country because investors and tourists alike want to be in a friendly and safe environment.
3. Government should develop tourism infrastructure in all parts of the country where tourism potentials exist. This can be achieved through public private partnerships (PPP).

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