



# Eco-Tourism in Nigeria and Entrepreneurship Development

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**Abstract - Ecotourism helps in environmental protection, wildlife conservation, poverty alleviation and socio-economic development. It affects environmental, social and economic components of the community and the whole country. It has different forms which are named according to the preference of the country. Developed as well as developing countries, such as NEPAL, KENYA, NIGERIA, etc. are promoting ecotourism for sustainable development of the nation. The method adopted for this paper is the application of documentaries, journals, articles and observation approaches, a good understanding of the industry also.**

**Keywords: Benefit, Eco-tourism, Entrepreneurship, Potentials, Sustainable,**

## 1.0 Introduction

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the sustainable tourism industry, which focuses on wildlife conservation, environmental protection, poverty alleviation and economic development. *Hector Ceballos Lascurain* coined the term, "Ecotourism" in 2006 to describe the nature-based travel to relatively undisturbed area with an emphasis on education. There is no such universally accepted definition of ecotourism. It is differentiated from nature-based tourism as it helps in sustainable rural development and makes biodiversity conservation economically viable for local communities. Hector C. (2006) also opined that ecotourism is one of the preferred tools for conservation and community development in many rural areas. Its effectiveness depends in its potential to provide local economic benefits by maintaining ecological resource integrity through low-impact and non-consumptive use of local resources.

Ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism which embraces tourism in the biophysical environment in natural areas. It incorporates ecologically sustainable activities, conservation supporting measures and involvement of local communities. It focuses on capitalist development, community development, poverty alleviation, wildlife conservation and environmental protection. Traditional economic bases like agriculture, livestock and hunting are not compatible with protected territories so change in traditional economic activities can be done by shifting cultural attitudes, towards ecotourism enhancement.

Ecotourism provide jobs for the local people and a market for local products, it encourages cultural sensitivity in guest-host relations and acts as a catalyst for ecologically sustainable development (WTO 2002). But, planning is required to address the issues of ownership, management and coordination of protected areas. It enhances wildlife conservation and equitable sharing of benefits from ecotourism. It helps in the conservation of natural, cultural and built resources and maintains the quality of life of local area. With an objective of environmental conservation, it creates sustainable economic development and balances the conflicting goals of economic development and biodiversity conservation. Considering the sustainable principles and practices, it fulfils goals of biodiversity conservation, poverty reduction and business viability. In ecotourism, local people realize the importance of conservation and protect the environment in active manner (Hector C., 2006). They maintain national standards of atmospheric quality, sound quality, drinking water, sewage, lampblack and all kinds of establishments.

### 1.1 Aim

The aim of this paper is to see how eco-tourism can be conserved, developed for small-scale business for the benefit of the masses.

### 1.2 Objectives

The objective of this paper is to examine eco-tourism as a strategy for revenue generation, sustainability and entrepreneurship development. Examining how it has contributed and maximally on a local and national bases to the country economy as a major export earner like the petroleum and the agricultural sectors of the economy.

This is to be achieved through the appraisal of the tourism resources of the nation, neighboring African countries and Nepal. Also is the combination of both natural and human capacities to transform the industry into a job creating and foreign exchange earner that will meet the socio economic wellbeing of the nation at large while preserving or protecting eco (wildlife) for the coming generation.

### 1.3 Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of this study as a review research, we adopted the application of documentaries, journals, articles, internet visitation and observation approaches of ecotourism and entrepreneurship development, a good understanding of the industry also.

### 1.4 Statement of the Research Problem

The extent, to which eco-tourism serves as a strategy for revenue generation in Nigeria and a means of sustainable development; comes with inconsistency of reports and findings as some authors are rather extreme, limited in their research, limitations and findings. However, one thing is clear, that the vast tourism potentials of Nigeria is not maximally tapped (Ayeni, 2013:15)

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

It is of great importance to note that for research purposes in that the gains from eco-tourism development and sustainability is enormous and cut across the entire globe. Jobs are generated, revenues are earned, governments are engaged, residents and visitors affected or benefiting; the tentacles are all encompassing.

### 1.6 Scope of Study

The scope of this study is basically centred on eco-tourism conservation and entrepreneurship development in Nigeria, neighbouring African countries and Nepal.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Overview of Eco-tourism in Nigeria

Nigeria is endowed with several resources of international ecological and touristic importance which should serve as the bases for sustainable tourism development but has not derived substantial benefits from the tourism market (Ijeomah et al., 2018). With the largest population in Africa that can sustain domestic tourism, and many cultures which reflect in food and environment Nigeria is at advantage to attract both local and international tourists and therefore derive significant benefits for national development.

However, the ecotourism resources of Nigeria are not packaged and promoted. Tourism in Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges such as:

1. Poor tourism culture
2. High level of insecurity
3. The biodiversity components under serious threat
4. Poor global image
5. High rate of poaching and habitat destruction
6. Lack of infrastructures
7. Sabotage and so on.

The tourism attractions in Nigeria when developed, properly packaged and promoted can satisfy the curiosity of almost every kind of tourists; and this will bring about increased benefits such as massive employment, increased revenue generation, local empowerment, foreign exchange earnings, creation of market for local product and development of infrastructures (Ijeomah et al., 2005).

### 2.2 Ecotourism in Nepal

Ecotourism as a component of green economy contributes greatly for Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for government and private organizations. Developing countries such as Nepal have advantage in ecotourism as they have unique natural environment and culture. It generates employment for the unskilled workforce in rural area through community-led tourism activities for preserving natural ecosystems. Nepal is a small country with an area of 147,181 sq. km., having great diversity of topographic and eco-climatic features rich in natural and cultural heritage. It is renowned for its physiographic and eco-climatic variations, Himalayan ranges, natural beauty, protected areas, rich bio-diversity, spectacular landscape, extraordinary cultural heritage and mosaic of ethnic diversity. It is one of the most adventurous cultural and ecotourism destinations in the world which depends on the quality of the natural environment. Its main attractions are the highest mountain range in the world and many cultural and natural attractions.

There are many trekking routes and sites for eco-tourists to explore natural beauty throughout Nepal ranging from the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area and Illam in the east to Khaptad and Shuklaphanta National Park in the west. Nepal has a total population of over 23 million and consists of 59 ethnic groups and 101 spoken languages. It is the birthplace of Lord Buddha, the Light of Asia. It has a rich cultural heritage, where more than 1250 heritage sites have been identified and documented from 72 districts. Within Kathmandu valley, Kathmandu Development Committee has listed a total of 870 religious and cultural shrines and monuments. It consists of eight World Cultural Heritage Sites:

- i. Bhaktapur,
- ii. Patan
- iii. Kathmandu Durbar Squares;
- iv. Swayambhunath;
- v. Baudhanath;
- vi. Pashupatinath;
- vii. Changunarayan and
- viii. Lumbini (the birth place of Lord Buddha) combined with two world's Natural Heritage Sites: Sagarmatha and Chitwan National Parks.

These resources are the major attractions for the foundation and acceleration of tourism industry in Nepal. It is necessary to manage these tourism resources properly by mobilizing the local participation with sufficient considerations on the quality of supply side of tourism in order to attract the maximum number of tourists from different parts of the world. Nepal is one of the countries that receive the largest number of international tourists with rapid growth of tourism.

### 2.3 Eco-tourism Potentials of Nigeria

Nigeria is well endowed with various ecotourism potentials including diverse culture, biodiversity, and scenic landscapes. There is hardly any community in Nigeria without unique ecotourism attractions - unique culture, food and environment. The cultural foods of different tribes in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States and the hospitable manner the dishes are packaged and served to visitors have been commended by many tourists (Ijeomah *et al*, 2011). In Agulu, Anambra State, the chief priest 'Ezemmuo' uses a chicken to call out about 10 crocodiles from a river to satisfy curiosity of tourists that the community is endowed with the species. Monkeys roam about in Awka, Anambra State and can easily be sighted. Whale is found in Akwa Ibom State coupled with crab colonies that exist therein. The consistent stranding of Manatee in Itu of Akwa Ibom State made the community very famous among travellers in the early days – Many tourists usually gathered watching sea horses (struggling to get back to water) in the era when indigenes of Itu did not have the technology to kill the attractive species and therefore termed it a mamaid (Ijeomah *et al*, in press). The Itu indigenes believed that any attempt to have contact with the Manatee leads to the animal stimulating the person to laugh to death, thus the species moved undisturbed then. Various species of Python are found in south eastern Nigeria and the Niger Delta area. Python is considered sacred in many parts of Bayelsa state and therefore can easily be observed by tourists.

The wildlife resources of Nigeria, at national level, are packaged in seven national parks: Kainji Lake National Park, Cross River National Park, Gashaka Gumti National Park, Okomu National Park, Chad Basin National Park, Old Oyo National Park and Yankari that was downgraded to a game reserve (Ijeomah *et al*, 2011). It was the potential ecotourism prospects of Yankari for development that made the Bauchi State Government lobbied their way through the National Assembly for its release. Also, there are numerous game reserves in Nigeria that inhabit many wildlife resources.

### 2.4 Insights of Benefits Accruable From Ecotourism in Nigeria

Availability of attractive natural virtues is the indicator of potential success in the use of ecotourism for national development (Ijeomah and Aiyelaja 2010). Many countries where tourism is well developed and practiced has benefitted enormously in terms of infrastructure maintenance, national development and economic empowerment. Nigeria has not derived significant benefit from tourism however; an insight of few benefits in some areas of Nigeria will be highlighted. Falls have free supply of electricity; hence a lot of events take place in the playground of the destination at no financial cost. Similar things happened in Assop fall of Hawankibo where the inhabitants of the area are given free electricity and therefore energized. It was because of the Farin Ruwa Water Fall destination that the Abdulahi Adamu led government of Nasarawa State, established a police post and primary schools in the host community. The Nasarawa State Government also constructed 12 culverts for the water bodies to the destination. The frequent events including national World Tourism Day celebration that the destination hosted during Abdulahi Adamu led administration popularized the community. Ijeomah and Alao (2007) reported that the Farin Ruwa destination has been the ecotourism site with the highest percentage of

foreign visitors in Nigeria. Lives of many people are sustained through souvenir production and sales - the Naraguta souvenir centre in Jos Plateau State is a typical example (*Ijeomah and Edet, 2011*). Shells of periwinkle and oyster which should normally be thrown away in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria (where it is very abundant) can be filled to shape and sold as souvenirs by households when tourism thrives in the area (in the host communities). An Individual made ₦2,000,000 with ₦65,000 worth of investment in Argungun fishing festival. The lives of many boat operators and fish sellers in Oguta community are sustained through the market created by tourism to Oguta lake destination. The road leading to Port Harcourt beach was tarred in 2017 by the Rivers State government to create access to the eco destination. *Ijeomah et al (2005)* reported that an Australian couple saved three years' salary to visit the Wase rock, which is one of the only five permanent breeding places of the Rosy Pelican bird in Africa. The Argungun festival has brought about visitation of many foreigners to Nigeria and popularized the host state.

These tourism operations have created informal jobs for many people especially hoteliers, transporters and souvenir producers and sellers. The national parks, forest reserves, game reserves etc. have been source of employment to many people. Many restaurants in Oguta operate because of the visitors to Oguta Lake destination. Africa is popular because of its highest congregation of mammals on earth in the contemporary world. Fifty percent of international visitors to Kenya want to view wild animals and the main reason tourists visit Africa is to view games. (*Odunga and Maingi, 2011*).

Tourism brings about infrastructural development such as tarred roads, airports, hotels, power, railways and of course revenue generation. One of the major sources of revenue generation in Plateau State is tourism. Nigeria has different kinds of eco destinations which operate at different seasons. Thus, all season tourism can take place in Nigeria in places like caves in Enugu tourism complex, Mado cave of Plateau State. Awareness of an area as a tourism city and the consciousness of the inhabitants of the area to receive visitors is part of human development as that gradually becomes part of the people lifestyles. Cross River State is a popular tourism state similar to Plateau State and the awareness level of this amongst the inhabitants is very high. A performance of Asharuwa dance, Atilogwu and etc. promotes cultural preservation. Fishing festivals strengthens cultures that are already being weakened by religion and development.

## 2.5 Eco-tourism and Entrepreneurship Development

There are two different kinds of reason to look into Ecotourism and entrepreneurship.

- First, conservation is a very competitive field and sometimes a job can be a hard thing to find.
- Second, being in the ecotourism industry can be a way to marry your passion for nature and you are to be active in conservation with your entrepreneurial side.

Eco-tourism brings relatively powerful consumers into many countries, an important market potential for local entrepreneurs and an engine for local sustainable economic development. It is a powerful tool for growth in developing countries. According to WTO 2002, through focusing on the process of reducing leakages and maximizing linkages to the local economy, substantial growth could be achieved. However, success depends on effective marketplace value and quality of the products developed and upon meaningful community-private-public partnerships. Eco tourism can serve as a tool for poverty alleviation in differs ways ranging from individual perceptive in sustenance and generation of revenues. For instance, people engage in fauna (animal rearing) in form:

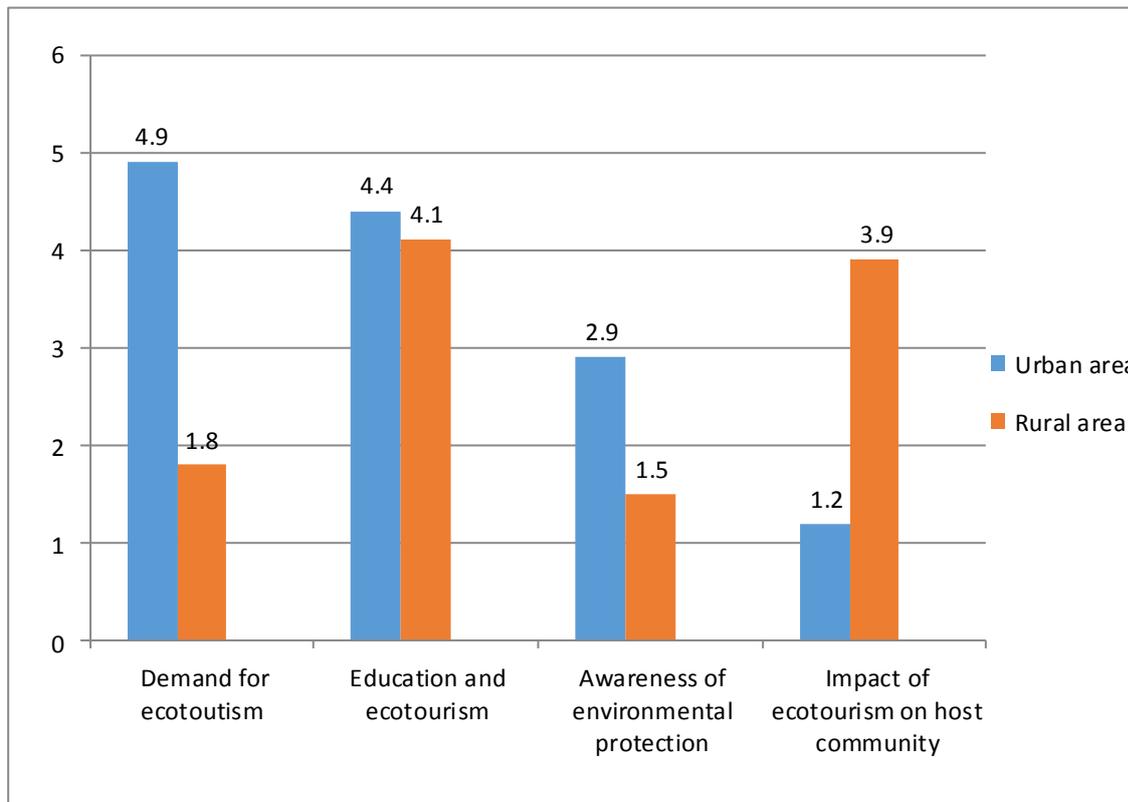
- Snail farming
- Fish farming
- Rabbit farming
- Poultry farming and so on

However, ecotourism is known to be a fast growing branch of the tourism industry. It focuses on showing people the natural world and its wildlife. Hence, nowadays people generate income in ecotourism in a diversified way through the above listed. Ecotourism has also been acclaimed as the best solution for attaining the often conflicting goals of conserving our planet's habitats and creatures, and improving people's quality of life through economic development of a region.

Ecotourism revenue generation as discussed earlier differ from one place to another, organization, group, private and public sector in respect to their perception. From this point of view, to the host community, the existence of a natural attraction server as a motivation to the establishment of accommodation, food and beverages facilities within the host region such as: hotel, motel, and resort, local and modern restaurant and Small and Medium Enterprises. This directly and indirectly serves as a means of revenue generation to the government likewise a strong tool to the reduction of unemployment within the community and neighbouring communities.

### 3.0 Findings of the Study

The major findings of this study based on the observation of the research work are graphically represented below and summarized under the following headings:



**Source:** *Authors' compilation (2020).*

From the above chart, it is observed that:

- Most of the tourists coming from urban areas prefer ecotourism to general tourism.
- We were able to deduce that level of education has some influence on the sustainability of ecotourism in the country; this is because tourism culture can be attained and practiced through education. Highly educated tourists have higher preference for ecotourism.
- Eco-tourists have a common interest to learn more about nature and the eco-tourist group consists of well-educated people who are aware of environmental protection.
- Several studies on ecotourism as a niche aspect of tourism has shown that ecotourism have positive impact on the local population in terms of income, employment and infrastructure.
- Entrepreneurship as an innovation in ecotourism is a kind of new ideas of creativity and production in the ecotourism sector of the tourism industry, is the process by which individuals and organizations generate new idea and put them in practice. These helps to create job, generate revenue and improve standard of livings.

### 4.0 Conclusion

Ecotourism has expanded fast and in a revolutionary way, it is an offshoot wave of environmental awareness. One of the greatest justifications for rural people to be involved in conservation of biodiversity is the promising effect of empowerment to be brought by ecotourism. Nigeria is endowed with attractions that can satisfy the curiosity of almost every type of tourist. The challenge is lack of promotion and packaging. Killing of elephant in Idanre, Ondo State shows that the level of awareness about tourist attractions and species of global ecological importance is still very low in many areas. Neglected species of wildlife should be focused on. Due to tourism's strong role in the nations and economies of the world, the need for tourism research is imperative

## 5.0 Recommendations:

However, Base on the observations and findings of this write up, the following are therefore recommended as the way forward for ecotourism and entrepreneurship development of the country:

1. Government should enforce wildlife protection laws and ensure guiding principles of ecotourism are observed.
2. The management of parks, forest reserve and game reserve should motivate rangers.
3. The government through the ministry of information and culture and in collaboration with tourism practitioners should amend national image abroad.
4. Monitoring of tourism growth and impact.
5. Change of attitudes and development of tourism culture by host communities and the general public.
6. Strengthen internal security and security in protected areas.

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