

Developing a Vibrant Tourism Industry in Southeast Region of Nigeria

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Abstract

Southeastern Region of Nigeria is endowed with rich array of heritage resources and potential tourist destinations which have the capacity to generate vibrant tourist traffic. Tourism, being one of the key areas of economic activity has suffered from neglect in the region and the consequent effect is poverty, insecurity, infrastructure facility deficit. This article attempts to promote tourism as a viable economic sector for sustainable regional development in the Southeast. The study argues that Southeast Nigeria can harmoniously come together and work to make their region an economic success story through tourism in West Africa. The article identified numerous sites that are famous for their cultural, historical and ecological features and examined their potential for sustainable tourism. It further highlights the action plans needed for the potential tourism resources to be properly harnessed.

Keywords: tourism, sustainable development, regional development, South East Region

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's largest growth industries contributing significantly to regional economic growth and job creation. It has continuously been a favourable regional development tool for several governments around the world (Telfer, 2015). Governments often turn to tourism in their effort to reduce economic inequalities and diversify the economy. Some develop the tourism economy, usually as part of broader regional development strategies due to increase in demand required by a general growth in business activities. Practical examples include the governments of Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Portugal, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, USA, Zimbabwe, and a host of others.

Many regions have recognized that tourism development provides an opportunity for economic and social development. This has made destinations to pursue tourism mainly for economic and social benefits (McKercher, and du Cros, 2007). Basically, tourism provides positive economic benefits which influence host region by creating employment both for the skilled and unskilled persons in the region. Tourism, through active promotion policies, has become a tool for integrating less developed regions or giving them equal access to the fruits of growth. It has the ability to shift development away from the densely populated areas towards less developed regions (Inskeep 1991; Gunn 1988; McIntosh and Goeldner 1990). It plays different and important roles in investment attraction, export development, strategic land development and regional growth. Where regional imbalances exist, tourism is seen as a way to generate jobs and create new income (Telfer, 2015). It can act to redistribute wealth from the richer metropolitan areas to the poorer peripheral

regions (Pearce, 1989). As rightly pointed out, an increased income allows for more amenities, attracts business and thereby increases agglomeration economies (Blair, 1995). In addition, tourism attracts infrastructure development which encourages further tourism investment. Based on this, various Governments have created tourism policies specifically for underdeveloped regions to attract tourists and as well grow and restructure their economies.

Southeast region of Nigeria is a region of great variety, endowed with rich array of heritage resources and potential tourist destinations (Okpoko, 2012). The range of rich cultural, historic landscape and ecological features, the total size of its population and the variation in its physical and serene environment, provide rich opportunity to develop a vibrant tourism industry in the region. As rightly pointed out, destinations with special natural, cultural or historical attractions are adopting tourism for development (Telfer, 2015). Despite all these endowments, tourism industry has suffered from neglect and the resultant effect is poverty amidst plenty. The need arises to develop the numerous cultural heritage-based tourism, nature-based resources and hospitality opportunities in the region into a vibrant and viable tourism industry. Tourism development in the region can trigger regional economic growth. The growth of the region's resources and business sectors will attract more investors, tourists and equally drive economic growth in the cities, states and region. To accomplish this goal, it is necessary for Southeast region of Nigeria to upgrade its tourism resources and facilities up to international standard, designate and develop a number of socially and historically significant sites for tourist consumption.

The south eastern region comprises nine of Nigeria's constituent states namely Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and Rivers. They are found within the South East and South-South belt of Nigeria, bordered to the south by the Atlantic Ocean and to the East by Cameroon. By virtue of the geographical locations, the states are found with the fringes of Savanna and tropical rain forest regions with evergreen vegetation belt. The diverse ethnic groups living in the region have a long history of participation in trade and travel, and are known for their intercultural harmony and unprecedented economic successes.

Post-colonial southeastern Nigeria continued to be an oil producing, agricultural and commercial economy which was one of the fastest growing in the world. But in the face of over population, high unemployment, and rising inflation, the government recognized an urgent need for economic diversification. Earnings from oil, the backbone of the Nigerian economy from South-South and parts of South-East geo-political zones in the context of today's Nigeria political zoning, have been dwindling for several years and the export processing industry is not as lucrative as it once was, leaving tourism to pick up the slack. The recognition of the increasing role and prospects of tourism in the global socio-economic sector immediately attracts attention, especially as Nigeria is bountifully blessed with abundant land mass and tourism resources yearning for exploration and exploitation. The Nigerian Federal Government appreciated this in 1976 by promulgating Decree 54 of 1976, which created the Nigerian Tourism Board and State Tourism Committee – as governmental agencies charged with matters relating to tourism development. These bodies, in 1992, through Decree No. 81, were upgraded to Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation and State Tourism Boards (Doublegist, 2013). Their activities have helped to promote tourism which is now a robust industry but with potentials of high elastic growth and an increasingly vital part of the nation's economy.

Tourism is now part of the solution and future of Nigeria as the nation now looks beyond crude oil. Otumba Runsewe, (Culture Digest, 2009) rightly pointed out that there is no better time to sell the non-oil wealth of Nigeria, than now. Therefore, Regional development through tourism is crucial to achieving the goal as it forms the basis for attracting international tourists into the regions and country. There is need to have appropriate structure to control operational standards in the industry. Some guidelines for development must be laid down in order to preserve resources, ensure complementary benefit between areas and define tourism poles. Therefore, this article focuses on the nine (9) states that make up the eastern region of Nigeria,

namely; Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Edo, Enugu, Imo, and Rivers. They are considered as Southeast region of Nigeria based on the rationale identified by Higgins, and Savoie, (1988) which shows that National economies are aggregations of regional economies which vary in the degree of integration and some kinds of resource management are best studied and executed at regional levels as the resources are best defined in terms of space. Okoye (2017) argues that the success of regional integration at the ECOWAS or other higher level is dependent on the integration of in-country zones, states, local governments and communities based on commercialization and integration of their economic, cultural and other assets. Presently, there is an increasing trend towards greater collaboration in tourism at many levels.

This article explores the tourism resources in various segments of Southeast region of Nigeria. It attempts to identify a wide variety of tourism resources in the region which when harnessed, developed and managed properly, will serve as a catalyst for generating a vibrant tourism industry and the development of other sectors. It further identified development opportunities in the region and suggests development strategies that will ensure sustainable tourism that drive and grow the economy of Southeast Nigeria. It argues that Southeast region of Nigeria stands to benefit socially and economically through the development of these areas of economic activity with immense potential. Therefore, setting up mechanisms to improve the competitiveness and quality of tourism at regional level for regions in Nigeria, is key to ensuring the sustainable and balanced development of tourism at national level.

TOURISM AND THE REGION

Regional demand for tourism continues to be high despite international and domestic terrorism in passenger planes and boko haram insurgency, communal conflicts, and the spread of deadly diseases such as avian flu and ebola virus. Tourism persists as a tool for regional development. It has reached almost all regions of the world and has benefited certain types of region like the peripheral regions of Europe and Whistler Ski Resort in British Columbia, coastal region of Emilia-Romagna in Italy, Island region of Java in Indonesia, Caribbean Island mountainous region of Valais in Switzerland, urban and historic region of Ile-de-France in France (Sharpley, and Telfer, 2015). Also, regions with exceptional natural resources like; region of Quebec in Canada, Arizona in the United States, rural region of Queensland in Australia, very remote/rural region of Muskoka Toronto in Ontario, region of Greenland in Denmark or regions undergoing industrial restructuring like Niagara Region of Ontario and Nord-Pas-de-Calais in France. International regions like; Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia triangle, Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand triangle and the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines collaboration (Telfer, 2015).

States in the eastern region of Nigeria like many other destinations expect to benefit from tourism development at regional level. Tourism is the free movement of people to destinations outside their usual places of residence and work, on a temporary basis, as well as the service industries created to satisfy the needs arising from the movements, within regional, national or across international boundaries, for leisure, adventure, health, business, religion, sports, etcetera, short term travel, at least for one day and not more than one year (Sharpley, 2015). This definition covers expenditure on transport, accommodation, purchases and services, from when the visitor leaves home, until he/she returns. The impact of such visits and activities on the socio-economic, political and physical environment of the host communities and visitors themselves are included in the totality of tourism experience. Tourism is an important driver of economic, social, and cultural development in both developed and developing countries (Long, 2012). Tourism can play a major role in enhancing cultural understanding between nations and people. The tourism industry is labour intensive being the greatest employer of labour in the world today and also provides entrepreneurial activities. Tourism creates more jobs per unit of investment than any other industry. Socially, it promotes peace and harmony, brings social integration and creates employment. Environmentally, tourism when properly developed and managed, serve as regional mechanism for protecting natural environments, preserving historical, archaeological and religious monuments, and stimulating the practice of regional/ local

cultures, folklores, traditions, arts and crafts, and cuisines. Economically, it brings many benefits to the regions' growth, tourist products and linkages to other sectors and local industries of the region such as agriculture and fisheries. Government and private sector also benefit through the generation of foreign revenue, financial returns on investment, taxation on tourists environment, employment creation and income generation.

The south-eastern region of Nigeria with special natural cultural and historic attractions can turn its tourism resources into export by attracting tourists. Using the criteria developed by Smith (1995:199), the region possesses the characteristics that define it as a viable tourist destination zone. These include sets of cultural, physical and social characteristics that create a sense of regional identity, their natural physical characteristics and economic features, attractive beaches, significant amounts of raw materials, large population, the availability of water resources, vast areas of land, distinct topography of the regions, and the availability of transportation system. Therefore, tourism development should be given top priority in the region.

Identifying South Eastern region of Nigeria for regional tourism development will help to restructure programmes for the redistribution of wealth, create employment and develop tourism attractions and infrastructures in the region. Therefore, tourism can be used as a major source of income in the region given the form of development and tourism product available. Shopping tourism has recently increased in the region like construction of shopping malls, convention facilities along with hotels, restaurants and gift shops. As rightly proposed by Okpoko, (2012) Southeast Nigeria can build their economies around commerce, events and entertainment. And can equally pursue concentrated enclave type tourism development which will open her up to competition from other tourist regions and over time; the demands of tourists for more amenities will increase. This is because tourism has the capacity to spread to the surrounding regions if close linkages and collaboration are established. This is proposed towards a creative economy and its wider application, which will have positive impact on the whole region. Worthy of note, place making activities, when done effectively, are key elements or future drivers for economic growth, cultural resilience, enhancement, and increase in quality of life of persons in the region. However, cultural industry should be developed by the public and private sectors and embedded across all regional priorities. Of course, addressing the need for a vibrant cultural scene in the Southeastern region of Nigeria will have the benefit of developing a larger creative and cultural economic sector, which in turn may also mitigate the impact of a future decline in the economic contributions of the oil and gas sector in Nigeria.

The region has some required tourism infrastructures to support tourism development. Lots of existing tourist attractions has the potential to support the development of sufficient attractions that will attract tourists to the region. There are great potentials for regional sports tourism in the region. It also has the capability of supporting tourism planning agencies and marketing initiatives to guide and encourage future development. Most importantly, the region is accessible to a large population base. Therefore, it is consistent with the experiences that the travel consumer is seeking.

It is instructive to note that scholars are beginning to recognize that local stakeholders at receiving destinations, who are supplying tourism products, are also an important, but commonly overlooked part of the tourism equation (Chambers, 1997: 2). Governments, private agencies, local communities and individual workers hold a great deal more power in deciding the path of tourism as demonstrated by the fundamental acts of designing, building and marketing tourist space (Davis, 2001: 129). Much of the existing tourism literature centers on either economic cost/benefits of tourism or on the tourist – who the tourist is, what the tourist expects, and whether or not the tourist is a satisfied customer.

The focus of the research presented here shifts the focus from the tourist, or 'demand' side of tourism and looks instead at functions of a receiving destination or the 'supply' side of the equation, which holds that

growth occurs in a region due to an increase in the supply of resources available, or because existing resources are used more efficiently. This is to say that development of a vibrant tourism industry in Southeast of Nigeria can generate growth throughout the region. It is noteworthy that local populations are not passive actors in tourism development, but are as important, if not more important, than tourists in shaping cultural heritage tourism. This form of tourism can be a vehicle for region building whereby state inhabitants involved in the development of cultural heritage attractions become increasingly familiar with shared pasts of the variety of people who make up the region. This greater sense of attachment to places and feeling of belonging, go a long way to build regional identity which is immensely beneficial to a multi-ethnic region like Southeastern region of Nigeria.

TOURISM POTENTIALS /ATTRACTIONS OF THE REGION IN NIGERIA

The region is blessed with enormous tourism resources and facilities. Apart from its heritages, landscape and ecological features, the region has the size, the population and the diversified attractions that can be harnessed for viable tourism development. The challenge is how to convert the available potentials into a dynamic reality.

The attractions are listed as follows:

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN SOUTHEAST REGION OF NIGERIA

ABIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arochukwu Caves • National War Museum, Umuahia • Akwete Weaving Center, Akwete • Long Juju of Arochukwu • Arochukwu Long Juju Slave Routes • Azumini Blue River, Ukwu East • National Museum of Colonial History, Aba • Aba Central Market • Museum of Antiquities • Umudike Museum • Iguabia • Amakama Wooden Cave • Ohafia War Dancers • Ishiagu Pottery Works • Omo Ukwu Temple • Ekeigbere Sacred Forest • Eziofri Cave, Amaekpu Ohafia • Isi Imo Tourist Site, Umunneochi. • Umunneochi Cave, Ahaba Imenyi. • Ngodo Cave, Isuochi,
AKWA IBOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ibeno Sand Beach • Ibom Mobil Oil Treatment Plant • Ekpo Masquerade Festival • Agbokin Water Falls • Ibom Golf Course • Oron Museum/ Monument • Wonder Tree at Ikot- Ekpene • Opobo Boat Yard, Ikot-Abasi

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christmas Festival • Oron, Aquatic facilities • Lord Lugard Residence • Amalgamation House
ANAMBRA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ogbunike Cave, Oyi LGA. • Ufuma Waterfall • National Museum, Igboukwu • Igbo-Ukwu Groove • Ikenga Virgin Forest • Ezu Nwobinagu Lake, Nawfia • Agulu Lake, Agulu • Agulu-Nanka Erosion Site • Otu Ocha Sand Beach • Niger Bridge Asaba • Owerre-Ezukala Cave & Ogba Waterfall, Orumba South LGA • Iyiocha/Amaekpala Lake (Aguata LGA) • Ofala Festival • New Yam Festival • Trinity Tree, Enugu Otu, Aguleri • Rojeny Tourist Village, Oba. • Onitsha Main Market, Onitsha • Nri Museum • Idemili Cultural Centre • Ajali Cave • Obutu Lake, Ndikelionwu (Orumba North LGA) • Blacksmithing at Awka and Nkwerre • Okpu Ana Natural Spring, Ukpok • Uzoiyi Cultural Festival, Umuoji • Odinani Museum • Butu Lake, Omogho • Obu Ofo-Nri Museum • Mkpokiti Acrobatic Dance Troupe, Umunze
BAYELSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oloibiri Oil Museum • Brass Beach • Slave Transit Hall, Akassa • Sea turtle Breeding Ground, Akassa • Kaiama and Odi • Akassa Raid Graveyard • War Boat, Aleibiri • Cultural Festivals (Ekpetiama Okelede new yam Festival, Odemimion festival, Otuoke, etc.
CROSS RIVER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obudu Cattle Ranch, Obudu • Cross River National Park • Calabar Marina Resort • Drill Ranch, Calabar

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oban Hills, Cross River State • Coercopan, Ishie Close Calabar • Tinapa Business Resort with Spiraling Ox-bow Calabar River • Calabar Cultural Carnival • Kwa Falls, Kuja • Boshi Games Reserve • Agbokim Waterfalls, Ikom • Ekpe Masqurade • National Museum, Calabar • Rock with foot prints • Alok and Nkarassi Monoliths Ikom, Cross River • Mary Slessor Cottage • Soaring Plateaus of Mountain tops of Obanliku, • Rain forests, Afi,
EBONYI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amanchor Cave, Afikpo • Okposi in Uburu and Enyigba Salt Lakes • Unwana and Ndibe Sand Beaches, Afikpo • Abakaliki Golf Course • Fati Abubakar Amusement Park, Abakiliki • Abakaliki Green Lake • Slave Market Route, Ezza • Islamic Centre, Afikpo • Rice Mill Industry Abakaliki • Quarry Industry Abakaliki • Fertilizer Blending Plant • Green Lake Abakaliki • Ogbodu Conical Mound
ENUGU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nike Lake Resort, Enugu • Zoological Garden Enugu • Mmanwu Festival • Milken hill, Enugu • Coal Mines Enugu • Ugwueme/Udi Hills and Range of Silicon Hills at Enugu and Nsukka • National Museum of Unity, Enugu • Awhum waterfall, Awhum • Ogelube Lake • Polo Amusement Park • Africa Princess Resort, • Ezeagu Tourist Complex • Ani Ozalla Lake. • Macdavos Resort, • Eastern region parliamentary building, • The old government lodge • Enugu golf course

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enugu zoological garden • Bona Gallery • Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) sculptural garden and art gallery, • The University of Nigeria, Onuiyi Haven • Ngwo Palm Forest • Iva Valley Coal Mine Museum • Ezeagu and Opi Tourism Complexes, Enugu • Akwuke Tourist Beach, Enugu
IMO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oguta Lake Holiday Resort, Oguta • Ikeji Festival, Arondizuogu • Palm Beach Holiday Resort, Awo-Omama. • Zoological and Botanical Garden, Nekede • Amusement Park and Owerri zoo • Owu and Okoroshi masquerade festivals • Rolling Hills Okigwe • Mbari Cultural and Art Centre, Owerri • Ozuruimo Festival • Imo Wonder Lake Resort • Awo-Amana • Ahajioku Festival • Oro Owerri • Ada Palm Plantation Complex • Amadioha Shrine • Nworie River • Edemili Lake • Ngwu Spring Natural Water • Abadaba Lake Resort • Eze Silver Ibenyi Ugbala II Palace, Orlu • Iyi Ogidi Spring • Iyi Okwu Spring
RIVERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isaac Boro Amusement Park, Port Harcourt • Monument of King Jaja of Opobo • Port Harcourt Tourist Beach • Iffoko Beach, Elem Ifoko, Opobo/Nkoro • Okirika Aquatic Stadium • National Museum, Port Harcourt • Port Harcourt National Park • Songhai Farm Holiday Resort Bunu Tai • Oil Refinery, Alesa-Eleme • Ogoni Land • Slave ports, Brass and Bonny • King Jaja monument and Palace, in Opobo • Opobo International Boat (OIB) Regatta • Ellah Lake in Obrikom, • Ndoni Beach along the bank of the River Niger,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alakiki estuary in Mgbutanwo, Emohua. • Agaja Holiday Resort, Bonny and Bonny Bar Beach • Elephant Colony, the sea shore and the Oyorokoto seashore, Andoni Local Government Area. • King Amachree Monument, Buguma. • Kula Beach in and Akuku-Toru local government area • Obete and Agba Ndele beaches as well as in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area. • Excavation site, Ke. • Odum Festival, Okrika and Ogu. • Owu Festival • Iria Masqurade Festival • Isaka Holiday Resort and Coconut Estate, • Dawase Island, Kono Beach, Angalabo Beach, Opobo Waterfront and Beach, Ogbegene Waterfront. • Ellah Lake
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Source: www.nigerianbulletin.com and <https://www.mydestinationnigeria.com/regionalinfo/southeastregion>

The identified potential and developed attractions can be grouped into three, namely; Natural attractions, Cultural attractions and Man-made / Built attractions.

Natural attractions include: Caves, Beaches, Hills and Mountains, Ocean, Rivers and Lakes etcetera. Cultural attractions include: Ancient historical places and sites, Cultural Festivals / Carnivals, Museums and Monuments of various dimensions, while Manmade/Built attractions includes: Game Reserves, Holiday Resorts with natural sceneries, Modern Parks and Recreation Centre, Holicruise etcetera. Based on the identified tourism resources above, the natural attractions dominate other attractions.

Tourism depends to a great extent on the natural or manmade attractions around which destinations are developed (OECD, 2006). As a consequence, the attractiveness of a travel destination relies heavily on its cultural and historical assets, as well as on its authentic culture and well-conserved nature (RCI, 2012). The diverse resources above are an indication that the region is very rich in tourism, recreational and cultural resources which have the potential to be developed and upgraded to international standards. Cultural and leisure, eco/sustainable tourism, adventure tourism and agri-tourism already account for a large share of the total tourism demand today and have significant prospects for growth in the region. But some of them have not been developed as tourism products to the standard that even the most patriotic domestic holidaymaker will accept. Many of these assets have over the years remained as potentials, with limited effort to be preserved, documented, developed and sold to the outside world as a way of promoting tourism. They have mostly remained either undeveloped or, if developed, soon fall back into disuse after episodes of poor refurbishment and maintenance. Whatever is invested goes to waste because they cannot attract adequate patronage, some assets are poorly maintained. Therefore, to fully meet the demand in the tourism sectors, the relevant offer needs to be developed, which in turn depends on governments' efforts to preserve the natural and cultural heritages, develop traditional crafts and products which are integral parts of the national heritage in the region.

Having identified the special natural, cultural and historical attractions in the states, most governments in the region have recognized and adopted tourism as an option for sustainable development. In Cross River State, tourism development has significantly transformed Calabar into a natural dreamland where most fun-seekers and tourists desire to visit. The state government has given tourism development a top priority in the programme of the government through state funding and providing resorts such as Obudu Cattle Ranch, Canopy Walkway, Monolith sites, Reform Lake, Cross River National park, Mary Slessor's Residence in Creek Town, Cercopan, Tinapa Business Resort, Marina Resort, National Museum, Aqua-vista, among others. This has increased tourists visit greatly and has made the state a major tourist's destination. In Rivers State, the government has established an agro-tourism resort; Songhai Farm in Tai which is contributing positively to the local communities and attracting tourists.

The packed cultural festivals and carnivals such as Ofala festival in Onitsha, Calabar carnival and CarniRiv in Port Harcourt are one among many that are packaged to attract tourists from different parts of the world. The growing recognition and proposed development of several iconic site depicting abodes of iconic personages is good attempt to preserve and salvage the regions heritage sites and icons. The demand for natural, cultural and historical tourism has grown in recent decades. Countries need to preserve and enhance their natural and cultural heritage, for example by supporting traditional crafts and products and by preserving the environment. As rightly pointed out, destinations with special natural, cultural or historical attractions are adopting tourism for development (Sharpley, *et al.*, 2015).

Business tourists are equally attracted daily to Onitsha main market and Aba Central Market to buy goods and sundry motor parts. The region would make enormous income from hospitality business against the backdrop of high-heeled businessmen and women who throng Onitsha, Nnewi, Aba, Port Harcourt, Oron, Ikom, etc. In Owerri, the State government has made huge investments in hospitality aspect of the tourism industry which is presently attracting tourists to Owerri. Great need arises to match the increasing population of people seeking for leisure and relaxation centres which will equally help to improve the revenue base of various States in the region.

The public-private partnership platforms are now being created in the ownership structure and spread of investment in tourism for the region through different states. This is witnessed, in the development of tourism resorts such as Obudu Mountain Resort, Tinapa Business Resort, Agulu Lake Resort, Oguta Lake Resort, Nike Lake Resort. Others include provision of infrastructural facilities to support tourism development for purposes of harnessing the rich tourism potentials in the region.

Investment Opportunities in the Region

- Leisure and entertainment facilities – water sports, biking, archery etc
- Cultural and educational components
- Educational centre for rain forest experience
- International class tourist accommodation and catering facilities
- Art Gallery /development of a functional theatre to accommodate the entertainment needs of the public.
- Tourist centre and facilities in cave sites
- Regional Tourism Event and Sponsorship
- Upgrading of Historical Sites
- The tourism operators and stakeholders have the opportunity to take part in a number of training and networking, skill development, marketing and promotional initiatives.
- Develop new tourism destination website that will more effectively promote the region
- Good quality malls and restaurants

Great commitment towards regional development through tourism is required from national and regional leadership. Given that rich tourism resources are available in the region. Therefore, Government Fiscal policy is critical factor in attracting investment in the tourism industry agglomeration. This can be through investment into general infrastructure such as security, power supply, portable water, transportation (road, water, rail and air), information and telecommunication, accommodation, medical, emergency and disaster management facilities, specific tourism infrastructures like; access and parking facilities at tourist sites, safety and security management facilities, provision of tax incentives, influencing exchange rates and development of human capital resources to drive the industry.

DEVELOPING A VIBRANT TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE SOUTHEAST REGION OF NIGERIA

Sustainable tourism industry in this region can evolve with an increase in events and substantial investment in nature based tourism activities and cultural heritage activities. Strong regional economic growth and sustainability can be achieved and supported through the adoption of environmental sustainability principles and development of an infrastructure and investment attraction pipeline. Hall (2000) is of the opinion that meeting the conditions of sustainability is a major political, economic and environmental issue that requires new ways of thinking about development and growth along with the role of individuals, governments and the private sector. Community and stakeholders involvement in tourism development is vital.

In another dimension, Okpoko (1998) suggests that efforts need to be made to harness cultural resources by delimiting them into circuits. This implies that tourism infrastructures such as accommodation, transportation, electricity, communication, waste disposal, security, sustenance facilities and many more are to be provided to support tourism development in areas designed to attract visitation.

State role at regional level remains significant as they play a central role in the restructuring of places in accordance with the interests of tourism capital (Bianchi, 2009). They have an impact on how tourism is used as a vehicle for regional development. According to Hall, (1994c), the main institutions of the state include 'the central government, administrative departments, the courts and judiciary, law enforcement agencies, regulatory and assistance authorities and a range of semi-state organizations. Others include political parties, trade unions and industry associations (including tourism and hospitality) that receive money from the state. In essence, the responsibility for tourism involves many organizations, whose cooperation is critical to the success of the industry.

Tourism is basically a private sector activity and a supportive and enabling business environment is a major prerequisite to attracting investments and to making business enterprises in the industry sustainable. The state provides an enabling environment for the tourism industry suppliers to coordinate their activities and equally assist in promoting tourism activities. Business environment for tourism industry requires establishing effective institutional and regulatory framework and instruments while the government helps in coordinating, planning, formulation of legislation and regulation, developing of entrepreneurship, providing incentive, community tourism and attention protection. Strong partnership between government and industry is highly required. Applying a partnership model that recognizes the distinct roles of government and the industry is critical. Both parties should understand, support and participate in the overall vision for tourism development in the region. The focus must be to offer compelling, high quality tourism experiences that reflect the distinctive attributes of the region exceeding visitor expectations and demanding attention. And to remain competitive, safeguard its market share, distinguish its product and diversify its market, it will involve an increased budget provision. This implies that the region has to jointly create the attraction as well as the interest that will bring the millions of tourists and develop a regional marketing strategy that will make the region useful to the world.

Given its goal of promoting tourism as an economic sector, increasing visitor arrivals is important in this respect. The tourism sector is expected to play a major role in this direction, since statistics show that it is one of the highest revenue generation sectors of the Nigeria's economy accounting for more than 5 per cent of the annual GDP. Attracting world class event to the region, including regional sport events, cultural festival/carnival etc, requires "judicious and effective" advertising as well as partnerships with private tourism agencies from countries which make up the tourism market. In this case, flight connections bring mutual benefits to regions and countries involved, facilitating business and leisure tourism that stimulate the retail, hotel and restaurant industries, generating revenue and employment.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

- Develop nature based tourism and cruise tourism through NGO's.
- Organize biennial tourism industry stakeholder's workshops.
- Secure a regionally, economically and socially balanced pattern of investment and development.
- Increase accessibility (by land, air and sea) to the states in the region.
- Encourage cross-border collaboration using growth triangle. This helps to strengthen the economic and social links, decrease barriers within the region and allow greater flows of goods, capital and labour across borders.
- Promote increased international cooperation and collaboration between regions and influence interaction beyond borders.
- Strategic policy approaches to tourism development in the region.
- Develop Private/Public Partnership (PPP) and community involvement in tourism.
- Develop, maintain and improve tourism and transport infrastructure.
- Establish backward and forward linkages like large-scale hotels being able to make wide variety of linkages with the local agricultural sector to purchase local products. The economic benefits to the region are improved when linkages are developed and maintained with local industry.
- Grow business tourism; develop the local souvenir industry and establish supportive structures for skills development.
- Place branding, entrepreneurship, information and communication technology and innovative tourism promotion and networking.

The researchers suggest a phased development approach as developed by Butler (1980). Regional Tourism development of Southeast region of Nigeria should go through stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, etc. In doing this, sustainable tourism development should be the guiding principle at every stage of tourism development in the region. The essence of this is to allow for a longer period of social and environmental adjustment which creates opportunity for local population involvement. Therefore, Southeast region of Nigeria stands to benefit socially and economically through the tourism development, an area of economic activity with immense potential.

CONCLUSION

Vibrant tourism industry in Southeastern region of Nigeria can be developed and sustained to generate growth and development if strategies that will benefit local businesses, the community and visitors to the region are put in place. This requires delivering quality and professional tourist services, because, developing the right skills allows countries and regions to offer higher-quality products. Moreso, participating in activities that will effectively promote tourism in the region, developing a marketing strategy and maintaining a regional destination website to increase tourist visitation will make the region tourists destination choice.

This article identified existing and potential tourism resources in the region. The development of these resources as tourism product is of paramount importance if the region is to be developed as a destination of choice for tourists. This will help to generate jobs, and create new income, thereby making tourism one of the major sources of income in the region. A great tourism development and investment opportunities are readily available in the region, but does not require the government to do what the private sector is able and willing to do. Investment in tourism is government, public and private sector responsibility, as the government creates conducive environment for tourism to thrive, the public ensures its sustainability while the private sector drives and contributes to sustainable development. Close cooperation and collaboration is highly needed for developing a vibrant tourism industry in southeast region of Nigeria.

There is need for long-term plans with realizable targets which will help to allocate and make best use of scarce resources effectively and properly. It will also support the incentives of private stakeholders, and harness clustering and other administrative tools to guide and organize tourism development. There is need to maximize the positive impacts of tourism while minimizing the negative impacts on the environment and social life of the people. Great requirement for flexibility and caution in carrying out tourism activities in the region is important as tourism operators / stakeholders are encouraged to work together to develop rich tourism potentials of the region that will encourage visitation to the region. Stakeholders support and patronage is necessary for the long-term sustainability, and financial viability of tourism attractions. They need to work closely with State Tourism Board to improve visitor experiences and raise awareness of tourism support throughout the region. There is also need to establish strong linkages among the eleven states that make up this region. This article implores event organizers across the region to deliver quality and professional events for the enjoyment of visitors and the community.

Sound urban and development planning has given a much-needed boost to tourism development and is encouraged in this article. Planning improves the siting of investments and the timely provision of infrastructure that can anticipate changing needs, and minimize overcrowding and friction between different user groups.

A vibrant and sustainable tourism industry will evolve as a result of an increase in events and substantial investment in cultural heritage and nature based tourism activities in the region. Further studies can be carried out on the place of tourism in regional development in Nigeria. Research on cultural tourism resources of the region and its impact on regional economy is another important research area. This allows imagination about a future that is well informed, responsive and responsible across different social and business groupings and interests.

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