ASSESSING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN TOURISM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF ARINTA WATERFALL TOURIST RESORT, IPOLE ILORO EKITI STATE

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Abstract:

Tourism development and finance is seen as a very viable means of economic development for any country. Apart from generating wealth for the economy, tourist sites also enhance community cohesion and promote peace within the host community. Tourism needs a high level of planning and this has to involve the local community in order for them to have a sense of attachment to the site.

This paper reviews the Arinta Waterfall in Iloro Ekiti, Nigeria. it presents the report of a research into how engaged the members of the community are regarding the resort. Interviews were held with key stakeholders in the community and in the state planning authority. Questionnaires were also distributed among staff of the resort as well as community members randomly.

The result shows that the community members don't feel attached to the tourist site hence; there is a strong tendency for them to blame the lack of development and public awareness of the resort of the government officials.

This paper however recommends that Community engagement and impact of development must be given high cognisance as lack of community acceptance can have adverse effect on any development; and that there is a need for tourism promotion and awareness. It is indeed disheartening when majority of people living in a neighbourhood are oblivious of the vast natural endowment within their community. Community interest and social capital can be

developed through coordinated attempts and effort by the developers and planners by designing sustainable means of engaging with local community groups.

Introduction:

Tourism can be said to be a very nebulous phenomenon; meaning different things to different people. In quantitative terms, a tourist and thus tourism is usually defined in terms of a person who travels for non- business reasons more than 50 miles from their everyday place of residence and sometimes overnight. It is around this definition or ones like it that most travel statistics- departures, expenditures are compiled and computed. As stated by Agba et.al. (2010), tourism is a business entity that provides places and events to occupy people while they are on holidays; in its original thought, tourism was seen as a source of relaxation and sightseeing.

According to Kareem (2008), tourism has continued to drive itself onto the radar of developing countries' policy makers as an important foreign exchange earner. The growth of tourism has been sustained at 7-12% per year in most developing countries in the last five years (ODI, 2007). Tourism is the world's largest industry and so is of vital importance to the global economy Bardgett (2000). Its contribution has risen dramatically over recent decades. According to Bardgett (2000), in 1999 travel and tourism were directly and indirectly responsible for generating 11% of world GDP and 200 million jobs across the global economy.

Dieke (2003) suggested that the benefits of tourism are usually felt at two levels: macro or national, and micro or sub-national level. At the first level, tourism is expected to foster economic growth through foreign exchange earnings and an increase in state revenue and, at a second level, an improvement in people's well-being in the areas of job creation, revenue or income distribution and balanced regional development. In this respect tourism is described as an industry although it has no single production characteristics or defined operational parameters.

According to Tosun and Timothy (2001), tourism development planning does not have a unique definition. However, with the recent growth of mass tourism world-wide, tourism planning has become a specialized area and it has developed its own specific techniques, principles, and models while drawing on general planning methodology.

Generally speaking, tourism planning has been defined as a "process based on research and evaluation, which seeks to optimize the potential contribution of tourism to human welfare and environmental quality" (Tosun and Jenkins, 1998). Tourism development hence involves broadening the ownership base of such advantages so that more people benefit from the tourism industry, skills development, job and wealth creation and ensuring the geographic spread of the industry throughout the province.

The central purpose of this paper is not merely to discuss the importance of tourism development in developing countries, but rather to emphasis the significance of community engagement in the process of harnessing maximal potentials of tourist destinations in order to ensure community acceptance of such developments. Community members are key stakeholders in any place undergoing redevelopment (Ijasan 2011). The locals live and work within these areas, and redevelopment often directly impact upon their understanding and enjoyment of their place. Tosun and Timothy (2001) stated categorically that 'lack of community based approaches' is one of the key shortcomings of tourism development. According to Reiser and Crispin (2009), if the locals do not believe in, or become engaged in the process, then they may actively work to undermine the effort of the development agency.

Case Background and Current State of the art

Socially, tourism promotes peace. The Nigerian government even promoted tourism during the civil war and in 1969 (at the end of the war) the theme of the years' tourism was 'tourism for peace and understanding' Da'Silva (2001). Tourism exposes people to new "worlds or environments and life style thus making participant to learn about new environments. In Nigeria, the vast tourism potentials such as table mountains beautiful landscapes, colourful folks, overwhelming serenity wildlife, waterfalls and other rich festivals, architecture, and craft has necessitated towards the existing tourism drive in the country.

Before 1958, no effect was made towards the development of tourism in the country. Travels undertaken by Nigerians were mainly in the form of official and visits to relatives. By 1958, an advisory committee was set up by the federal government to look into means by which the tourism industry could be promoted. The committee had its first seating in February 1958. This committee could only achieve a little from their seating; they made some recommendations and reports. However, in its determination to develop and promote tourism into an economically, socially and political viable industry, having joined the World Tourism Organisation WTO in 1963 (when it was still the International Union of Official Travel

Organisations IUOTO) the Federal Government of Nigeria on July 10, 1990 in Lagos formally approved a tourism policy for Nigeria with the following objectives:

- Increasing the inflow of foreign exchange through the promotion on international tourism
- Encouraging and developing domestic based tourist enterprises
- Fostering social integration among the various groups in the country
- Promoting and encouraging active private sector participation
- Preserving our cultural heritage and monument
- Making tourism a preferred commercial sector

It can be assumed that with the inclusion of 'encouraging and developing domestic base tourist enterprises' as one of the objectives of the tourism policy, the Federal Government has an agenda for the local inhabitants of the geographical location of the tourist attraction. It wouldn't come too much of a surprise that even though, there are many tourist centres in Nigeria, according to Aiyelabola (2006), tourism is largely neglected. In an industry that has the capacity to employ millions of people and currently targets an annual earnings of over $150 Billion according to Bello Gada (2009); it comes as a surprise that in a survey by Ayodele et al. (1990), only 55% of Nigerians were aware of tourist destinations in their area, out of this figure, 46% of them were academics from higher institution of learning; a negligible 5.75% and 2.30% were among government civil servant and business executives respectively. Even with the rebranding Nigeria campaign, these figures have not changed much. This demonstrates a chronic case of unawareness and seeming lack of interest at least on the part of the respondents.

Statement of the Problem/ Research Question

Unawareness of tourist centres and the lackadaisical approach of residents to the centres within their community have shown that there is a need for conceited efforts on the part of tourism regeneration planners and local development officials to engage with the local communities in order to promote tourism at community levels. This paper reviews the opinion of the local residents as regards the challenges and prospects of Arinta waterfall tourist center. It also surveys the level of awareness of the people of Ipole Ekiti in relation to the Arinta waterfall located in their community. The main question posed by this paper is

'using Arinta waterfall as a guide, what are the main problems of tourism development in Nigerian communities'?

Methodology

The data collection instrument used by the researcher to obtain data for this research includes randomly administered structured questionnaires. Two hundred and twenty (220) questionnaires were administered with One hundred and ninety four (194) completed and returned. Due to the perceived educational level of the people of the community, institutions of learning and the community health center was targeted. Furthermore, aside personal observation, data was also collected from various secondary sources such as journals, thesis, research papers and textbooks. 15 semi structured interviews were conducted with some of the staff of the resort centre and village heads as a mean of exploring the background information regarding the village. This served as a basis for the questionnaire design as it provided some of what the management of the centre reckons militates against the development of the tourist centre. The results from the survey exercise were also compared to those of the 1990 research by Ayodele and Falade where high levels of lack of awareness were recorded among respondents. It was however noticed during visitation to the resort that there was no element of planning or community engagement in the process of the little development seen at the site of Arinta Waterfalls tourist centre.

Case Centre

Arinta Waterfall is in Ekiti state Nigeria. Ekiti state is located between latitude 7^025 and 80^05 north and between longitude 4^045 and 5^046 east. Although politically a new state, Ekiti is surely a state of the future. The state has many natural resources that are yet untapped. A combination of factors, both geographical and socio-cultural makes the state a good tourist destination in the country. Because of its size and physical location, spans several vegetation belts. The equatorial climate provides radiant sunshine most of the year.

The project town Ipole Ekiti is in Ekiti West Local Government Area in Ekiti State. It is necessary to analyze the basic infrastructure and because this will help in proper planning. The existing infrastructures and the socio- cultural values of the people is appraised as these are useful in knowing the existing condition of the town. The basic amenities that make life in Ipole-Iloro much more meaningful to enhance the people include: Education- 8 primary schools, 2 secondary schools and 1 technical college. Health – 1 basic primary healthcare centre. Religion-3 main groups of religion i.e. Christians, Muslims and traditional worshippers

Discussion of findings

Interviews:

This section discusses the findings from the interviews with the staffs of Arinta waterfalls and community leaders. It presents the emerging themes for what they perceive to be major problems of the center, what they reckon should be done and ultimately what the center can achieve, should it be operated at a maximal level.

The problem identified with tourism in Arinta waterfalls planning and development by the management of the centre includes: transportation, lack of good infrastructure, poor communication systems, poor communal facilities, shortage of staffs, lack of ethnic unity, poor research facilities, poor access routes, lack of benefits accruing to the host community. The management pointed that there was poor maintenance culture on the part of the people of the host community who happens to be the main visitor to the place. They however were quick to add that the culture of maintenance if the people is likely to improve since they are willing to have tourism development.

The motivation for tourism to Ipole includes: curiosity, health reasons, recreation and education. The management made it clear that from personal interaction, they concluded that most of the visitors are educated and that the sexual distribution of visitors is even i.e. near equal number of male and female.

They noted that the town is a peaceful one; the people are willing to support the system. There is need for the people in rural areas to have a sense of recognition (not to see the center as mere ancestral inheritance). From the interviews with the management, the respondents stated that if this centre is properly planned to a befitting standard, it has the following potentials:

1. It is where people will be encouraged to take their holiday and vacation.
2. It will lead to a sense of community cohesion between the members of the community.
3. It will help revitalise the local economy especially the housing market and land value.
4. It will provide tourism at a reasonable cost.
5. It will boost the region since the state has not shared in the general economic development of the nation (more so since Arinta Waterfall is not included on cometonigeria.com).
6. It will raise the utilisation of resort plant and stabilise employment.
7. It will create new jobs and facilities that will benefit the whole community

8. It will enable people (Nigerians) to get to know their country better.

Questionnaires:

Having discussed the findings from the management of the waterfall, this section presents the findings from the survey. It presents the profile of the respondents, their awareness and participation in the management of the waterfall as community members, problems militating against the center and what they propose as possible solutions to such problems.

The profile of the respondents showed that the majority of the dwellers in the host community of the tourist site were farmers or not specifically employed in any form 24% and 30%. 15% were artisans, 10% were civil servants, same for traders and 11% were retired at the time of the survey. Of the 194 returned questionnaires, 159 respondents stated that they were not involved in any way with the planning, development or improvement of the tourist site. Even 102 of the 159 stated that they have not visited the site in the past 10 years. Also noted was that 54% of those that said they were involved have not visited in the past 5 years. This corroborates the results of the survey by Ayodele et al (1990) which said only 55% of the respondents had any knowledge of tourist attractions in their community.

The questionnaire also enquired about what the respondents felt the major problems of the attraction were and the results are shown on Table 1 below:

Reason	Frequency	Percentage %
Inadequate government intervention	165	85
Difficult terrain	87	45
Lack of interest	154	80
Bad usage by the tourist	10	5
Emigration of the youth	99	51
Communal conflicts	12	6

The result on table 1; shows that like most Nigerians, the host community blames the government for lack of good facilities at the center with 85% choosing this as one of the main challenges of this site. Everyone seems to opine that the majority of the responsibility of the site rests with the government; although the management of the centres sees things differently. Next to that at 80% is the fact that the respondents are simply not interest in the centre. This presupposes that they don't do anything to invite people to the place or see it as any of their business to see to the progress of the center. 51% of the host community respondents confirmed that the center lack development due to the massive emigration of the youths which they opine are much needed for the promotion and everyday running and

maintenance of the center. They ascribe the emigration to 'Lagos movement' where majority of the youth in the community look forward to their Lagos migration (the commercial nerve center and former capital of Nigeria) during school breaks. Other problems includes; difficult topographical terrain with 45% and communal conflicts with just 6%. This is a strong indication that Ipole Ekiti is a peaceful community. There was more or less no blame on the tourist themselves with just 5% of the respondents putting the blame on bad usage by the tourist. This again differs from the result from the interview where the management of the center attributed some of the blame to the maintenance culture of the visitors.

At this point, one may need to ask what they suggest be done to alleviate the current run down state of the facility. 164 respondents suggested that the everyday running and management of the center be devolved to private investors who will ensure maximum returns from the vast potential of this attraction. Only 10 people said the management should remain with the government. This corroborated some of the suggestions of the village heads suggesting that government run commercial centres are always underperforming and hence suggests that the place should be managed under some kind of Private Public Partnerships (PPP) but with specific terms stressing the employment of their local workforce.

They also suggested that the locals should be consulted before any meaningful development of the place. The result showed that 124 of the respondents are willing to contribute to the development of the center if given the opportunity and if given the assurance that their suggestions will be taken on board. This is in tandem with the suggestions by the management when they stated that people are willing to assist the system if given the right kind of support.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the empirical data available for this research and after a careful descriptive analysis of the collected data, some recommendations are made. In planning, development or redevelopment of tourism in a community, there should be a special focus on sustaining both the rudimentary nature of tourist activities as well as the possible advantages of it. Since tourist centres are ultimately government regulated and owned, the government should provide a sustainable and conducive environment for tourism investment to strive. Finance, which is very crucial to any development project, should be provided either by the government, private sources or PPPs, but subject to community opinions and suggestions through adequate consultations and engagement.

Community engagement and impact of development must be given high cognisance as lack of community acceptance can have adverse effect on any development. If tourism is planned well, it will be a source of opening up the rural areas which will balance tourist demands, local human, cultural and natural resources.

There is a need for tourism promotion and awareness. It is indeed disheartening when majority of people living in a neighbourhood are oblivious of the vast natural endowment within their community. Community interest and social capital can be developed through coordinated attempts and effort by the developers and planners by designing sustainable means of engaging with local community groups.

In summary, this research reveals that the level of awareness and general visitation to tourist centres is low. This is arguably due to inherent lack of tourism culture, lack of publicity and inadequate promotional activities coupled with low level of development of tourist destinations and low consumer incomes. Giving the chance, local residents have the capacity to positively influence the outcome of tourism developments in their community. They can be active drivers of change and promotion; being the immediate members of the community, there is a need to ensure that they accept the development, in this way, there will be a sense of belonging on the part of the locals and this will in turn give them the feeling that the success or otherwise of the development is their collective business.

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