DEVELOPING AND SUSTAINING NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE BASE FOR TOURISM AND EMPLOYMENT IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nasarawa State is one of the states in Nigeria that is endowed with natural and cultural resource bases, and this holds much potential for tourism and employment. A major setback for developing and sustaining tourism in the state rests on the fact that successive governments have not been committed to diversifying the state economy (especially the tourism sector) due to over-reliance on revenue allocation from the federal government. This paper is couched on the premise that developing and sustaining the diverse natural and cultural resource bases in Nasarawa State for tourism will greatly accelerate employment and increase the socio-economic development of the state. The paper explores data from secondary sources, and adopts the content descriptive approach in the analysis of data. The paper highlights the diverse natural and cultural resource bases that abound across Nasarawa State; which include the famous Farin Ruwa Waterfalls in Wamba, Peperuwa Lake in Lafia, Hunki Ox-bow Lake in Awe, the Eggon Hills and Caves, Mada Hills and numerous cultural festivals across the state. The paper recommends that in order to attract both local and foreign tourists all year round, there is need to fully commercialize the natural and cultural resource bases in the state. And this will be in line with what is obtainable in Western countries and some African countries like Kenya, Egypt and South Africa where tourism has been well-developed and sustained.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries both in developed and developing countries, that has employed hundreds of millions of young people worldwide. This explains the reason for the increasing interests in tourism research in the last few decades. For example, Ekechukwu (1990) observed that tourism as an important growth-industry in the last few decades has made tremendous strides in several countries both in Africa

and elsewhere in the world. He further opined that it has contributed up to 20% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in countries like Kenya and South Africa. And the reason for this positive development are the tourism policies and programmes these countries have been able to formulate and implement towards sustainable economic development and growth (Ekechukwu 1990).

Nigeria is one of the countries on the African continent that is endowed with rich natural and cultural base resources. They have been revealed for almost a century by the numerous archaeological, anthropological and historical researches in Nigeria. For instance, Ekechukwu (1990) observed that a number of natural and cultural resources have been identified in Nigeria, and most of them have been published in reputable journals both nationally and internationally. The country is, no doubt, blessed with numerous natural and cultural attractions that include waterfalls, lakes, hills and other archaeological/ historic sites. These numerous natural and cultural base resources are usually areas of exceptional scenic beauty and charms or depict awe of nature's gift. For example, some state governments have taken it as a responsibility to develop and sustain them for tourism and recreational purposes.

In Nigeria, there are well-known natural base resources that reflect scenic beauty. They include the famous *Ikogosi* warm spring in Ekiti State, the *Erin Ijesha* water-falls in Osun State, *Wikki* Warm spring and *Bima* Hills in Bauchi State, *Idanre* Hills in Ondo State, the spectacular gullies in *Udi*, Anambra State, beautiful Jos-Plateau and other landscapes of exquisite beauty located in the several parts of the country. More importantly, Nasarawa State in North-Central Nigeria is one of the states that are particularly blessed with abundant natural and cultural base resources for tourism potentials. They include the famous *Farin Ruwa* Waterfalls, *Eggon* Hills, *Ox-bow* Lake and the historic Keana Salt Mines among others. Besides, various cultural resources include numerous festivals and dances can be identified among the different cultural groups in the state.

This paper maintains that developing and sustaining the diverse natural and cultural base resources in Nasarawa State for tourism will greatly accelerate employment and equally increase the socio-economic development of the state. For example, Iyimoga (2010) argued that Nasarawa State is particularly blessed with abundant tourism potentials when effectively harnessed for formation of economic base for the development of the state. This, in the long run will no doubt increase the internally generated revenue (IGR) of the state. For this to be actualized,

the paper draws attention to the need for both the Nasarawa State government and other relevant stakeholders like the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) to provide the necessary funding so as to fully tap and harness the abundant natural and cultural base resources in Nasarawa State in order to project the state as a major tourist destination in Nigeria.

However, these lofty potentials of the state have not been effectively harnessed and developed to world class standard so as to attract tourists, especially outside the country. Some of the challenges identified for developing and sustaining tourism in Nasarawa State rest on the fact that successive governments have consciously refused to diversify the state's revenue base because of over-reliance on revenue allocation from the federal government. Also, in spite of the enormous endowments of the state in tourism potentials, little or no effort has been made to showcase or market the diverse natural and cultural resource bases to investors in the tourism industry. As a result of the foregoing, socio-economic growth in the state is retarded, the creation of employment through tourism is quite insignificant, and the internally generated revenue from tourism is disappointingly paltry. Consequently, the state has continually remained helpless, and perpetually relies on the federal monthly allocation to meet its numerous challenges in the payment of workers' salaries and infrastructural development among other pressing needs.

Sources of Data and Method of Analysis

This paper relies on secondary sources, which include text books, journals, conference proceedings, internet sources, magazines, newspapers and other periodicals. It also adopts the content analysis approach that is basically descriptive.

Conceptual Issues

Concept of Tourism

The World Tourism Organization (2000) defines tourism as the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their environment, for not more than one consecutive year, for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited. Therefore, a person that engages in tourism is one that consciously undertakes a tour, usually for the purposes of experiencing new and captivating scenery or events (like waterfalls, sandy beaches, mountainous hills etc.), pleasure, information or education. More

significantly, tourism connotes, in this context, the mobilization of a people's natural and cultural resources, especially those aspects which make a people unique from other people, viz: what distinguishes Africa and Africans from non-Africans (Andah 1990 p.116).

An important factor that attracts people to engage in tourism is the uniqueness of the natural tourism sites and the exotic display of cultural festivals, music, and dances etc. No doubt, it is the novelty in each society's natural and cultural base resources that serves as a symbol of attraction for tourists to visit a place or community. For example, scholars like Lawuyi (2011) stressed that tourism implies a sense of exploration, and of an ecstasy of seeing the spectacular, of witnessing the strange, the extraordinary thing beyond the range of the everyday observation or occurrence, as many places can offer. In this light, tourism means a situation where people move out of their everyday surroundings to catch a glimpse of a totally different environment that may include natural habitat or exotic cultural performances like New Yam festival or boat regatta.

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1982), tourism is defined first as the practice of travelling for pleasure, and second as "the business of providing tour services for tourists." *Chamber's Encyclopedia* (1969) views tourism as a term used widely to describe a kind of travel which has two main characteristics: "that the traveler's concern means to return home after a comparative short time, and that the money they spend is money derived from home not earned in the places visited." Similarly, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1981) defines tourism as travelling for recreation or the industry involved in guiding and accommodating tourists. On his part, Olokesusi (1987) defines tourism as the movement of people within or outside a state or nation for experiencing leisure, culture, sports, education, religion, conference or health reason. The identified feature of the aforementioned definitions is that they all stressed people's temporary movement from one destination to another. But, most significantly is the fact that such movement is aimed at achieving certain desires, which include pleasure-seeking, appreciating the diverse gifts of nature and cross-cultural studies among others.

Concept of Employment

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1997) defines employment as the "state of being employed, especially when it is done to earn money." The aforementioned definition is an attempt to explain that employment is directly linked to an individual performing a task that comes with

monetary reward or remuneration in form of rent, wages or salary. In contemporary industrial societies, employment can be defined as a situation whereby a person actively engages in work and receives remuneration such as salary or wage. Fulcher and Scott (2007) argued that due to the advent of industrialization in modern societies, work activities became synonymous with employment. In this context, employment involves a situation where an individual earns his/ her livelihood by engaging in productive activities with the aim of meeting daily needs. Employment requires people using their physical abilities, intellectual capabilities and technological prowess to earn financial/ reward. Some core employment opportunities in the tourism industry are: Tour Guide, Hotel Manager, Receptionist, Caterer, Photographer, Bi-linguist, Swimming Instructor, Curator, Conservator, Cultural Consultant, Community Liaison Officer, etc.

Concept of Natural Resource Base

Natural resource base in this paper refers to all the natural endowments located within a particular society, and available to humans in such environment or eco-system. In its broadest sense, it comprises the spectacular nature's gifts to a particular community, which include: waterfalls, hills, rocks, valleys, mountains, springs, trees, lakes, groves, etc. It is pertinent to point out for the purpose of this paper that Nigeria has diverse natural resource base that includes the *Idanre* Hills in Ondo State, the *Ikogosi* Warm Spring in Ekiti State and the *Yankari* Game Reserve in Bauchi State among many others.

Concept of Cultural Resource Base

Cultural resource base refers to the rich cultural traits indigenous and unique to a particular community. In its broadest context, it comprises the festivals, diets, architecture, beliefs, songs, folklores, dances, drama, metallurgy, wood work and sculpture among others. Cultural festival is one of the most captivating aspects of cultural resource of a people. As Awofeso (2013, p. ix) succinctly puts it, "I am drawn to traditional festivals (in whatever form they come) and experiencing them as I do, always a pleasure for me..... photographs of masquerades are constant feature of festivals in Nigeria. They pull the crowd and give an idea just how colourful the ceremonies can be."

In actual fact, some cultural resource base may be in their natural forms as we have with historic and ethnographic materials; or they may consist of partial remains and the traces of past use as with archaeological sites,

(Lipe, 1984). Cultural resource base could also include historic landscapes found in and around a particular community. For instance, Lipe (1984) shared the opinion that people in all human societies attach names, myths, and affective value to features of the environment they inhabit. In this regard, certain landscape features in some Nigerian communities like the Olumo Rock in Ogun State and Ogbunike Cave in Anambra State can be classified as cultural resource base due to the special value these landscapes have towards the people and the society in general.

Theoretical Orientation

Environmental Sustainability Theory

The paper further explores the environmental sustainable theory. This theory centres on the preservation, conservation and development of a region, country or community in such a manner that nature, environment or socio-cultural relations are not adversely affected, not in the least possible way, to jeopardize the future generation. In the context of the tourism industry, environmental sustainability as a theory helps to conserve the environment including both the natural and cultural resource bases for the collective benefits of the communities and development of the tourism industry as well. Environmental sustainability as an ideology originated as a result of the deteriorating state of many natural resources, which also include man-made resources around the environment or habitat across the world. This means that the natural resources have terribly diminished in relation to biodiversity, thinning ozone layer, noticeable greenhouse effects or even discrimination against large population (Holden, 2009). The principles of environmental sustainability have urgently developed as a response to these challenging natural disasters.

Research on environmentally sustainable tourism is theoretically oriented to the pragmatic goals of environmentalism, with the notion of sustainability in tourism conveyed from the wider discourse of sustainable development (Saarunen, 2006). Research in sustainable tourism is largely underpinned by ethical considerations of the society-environment nexus (Holden, 2009). The discourse of the relationship between tourism and the natural environment was initially aimed at accelerating the growth or development of tourism, which was charged with subordinating environmental issues to economic interests (Kousis, 2000). However, Holden (2009) observed that despite more than twenty years of advocacy work for the sustainable development of tourism, the extent to which tourism relationship with the natural environment has actually improved

leaves much to be desired. But, despite this setback, copious research on environmental sustainability of tourism has increased and still ongoing. Since the 1970s, possibilities have been explored for tourism to be an instrumental tool for the development of rural economies as a means to generate or create employment, especially for the growing youth population (Holden 2009). However, it is becoming more factual that there are more recorded failures than successes in making tourism a ready alternative for employment. This no doubt has direct correlate to unsustainable policies and programmes often formulated in many developing countries including Nigeria.

Some Notable Natural Base Tourism Resources in Nasarawa State

One well-known natural resource base in Nasarawa State is the famous *Farin Ruwa* Waterfalls in Wamba Local Government Area. The falls is found along the boundaries of Plateau and Nasarawa States under the Bokkos and Wamba Local Government Areas of the two states (Amuwa, 2017). The *Farin Ruwa* Waterfalls stands out among other African waterfalls because of its significant height compared to other falls. For example, at its descent from the Jos Plateau, the water drops a total height of about 150 metres (432ft). This drop is higher when compared to the popular Victoria Falls in Eastern Africa, which drops a height of around 108 metres (354ft) during its descent (Amuwa 2017). Hence *Farin Ruwa* is one of the highest waterfalls in Africa. The name *Farin Ruwa* is derived from a Hausa language phrase, which literarily means "white water" but, connotatively means "sparkling (colourless) water". The waterfalls is about 120 kilometres from Lafia, the Nasarawa State capital, and 30 kilometres from Wamba town. It is also about 150 kilometres from the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The waterfalls first came to public notice in the 1950s by the then British colonial rulers. *Farin Ruwa* falls was not well-known until the creation of Nasarawa State in 1996. The breath-taking natural beauty of the waterfalls is quite astonishing and amazing. *Farin Ruwa* is just as spectacular as the famous Niagara Falls in Canada, Victoria Falls in Zambia and the *Kurara* Falls located in Adamawa State of Nigeria. The spectacular nature of the high level of the *Farin Ruwa* Falls, which is about 150 metres high and 50 metres wide, is absolutely incomparable with other falls in Nigeria. The *Farin Ruwa* Falls, as a result of its sparkling colour, appears in the distance to the inhabitants of the *Farin Ruwa* community like a spiraling, whitish mist on the mountains (Amuwa 2017).

The *Farin Ruwa* Falls vaults off a cliff edge, and descends the steep slopes of a mountainous escarpment, and the roar of its cascade breaks the pristine air, welcoming both tourists and visitors to the magnificent home of the most beautiful waterfalls in Nigeria (Amuwa 2017). The Falls itself, just as its people, have a sense of hospitality, and welcome tourists with an infectious warmth and feeling of love. The clean, crystal clear showers, which are often regarded as sacred by the habitants, can be seen hitting the foot rocks of towering granite hills, blowing a cloud of water vapour at its plunge pool. The *Farin Ruwa* waterfalls is connected to not only the Plateau but also the Benue Valley. The falls is geographically located in an area of heavy rainfall due to the mountainous nature of the environment. The escarpment forces the moisture-bearing wind to rise and deposit its moisture content on the mountains. This has given *Farin Ruwa* falls an almost constant volume of water supply during the rainy season in central Nigeria beginning from March-November (Amuwa 2017). The decrease in the volume of the falls is noticed during the dry season, which occurs from December-March. But, the decrease is for a short while as the falls regains its normal water volume when the rainy season commences.

Also, in Lafia Local Government Area, there is the famous *Peperuwa* Lake (Iyimoga 2010). *Peperuwa* Lake is an elongated natural lake situated at the north-west of Assakio town. *Peperuwa* Lake as a natural lake often attracts fun seekers during weekends and festival periods such as Christmas, New Year and Easter. It provides a suitable place for relaxation, picnic and sightseeing to the lake visitors. The waterfront features include animal attractions like hippopotamus, duck, geese and fishes among other aquatic creatures. The lake has other potentials for swimming, games, camping, sports, etc.

Similarly, in Nasarawa *Eggon* Local Government Area, there is the famous *Eggon* Hills and Caves. Scholars have observed that it is estimated to be at least, 1,500 metres above sea level, making it one of the highest peaks in Nigeria (Iyimoga 2010; Akoye 2015). The Hills is believed to be bigger than the entire Ibadan city when one views all the rolling mountains together. According to oral tradition the Hills serves as home for eight communities that reside on the mountains; they include: *Ogbagi-Tudu, Lamga, Aboshon, Lizzi, Wangibi, Neko, Wakama* and *Ezzen*. The Hills has a typical village setting, houses built with mud and sprinkle of brick structure and farms which extends to the homestead (Akioye 2015). At the break of morning, one can hear the chirping of birds, crowing of the cockerels and the whistling of some types of animals. The *Eggon* Hills is blessed with precious stones such as tin, aqua marine, topaz, and quartz. The Hills is

also blessed with a lot of baboons that serve as meat for many households. The spring water on the Hills is another notable natural phenomenon that provides water for the *Eggon* people (Akioye 2015).

From oral tradition, it takes about two hours for an experienced person to successfully climb the *Eggon* Hills, and about three hours for a first time climber to successfully climb the Hills. There are different sizes of rocks on the *Eggon* Hills. The rocks have for a long time attracted many tourists since the colonial times. Some Europeans settled at the peak of the Hills, and constructed houses beside the slow-flowing streams and unique rock formations (Akioye 2015). Most notable of them is a particular flat stone called *Argbo*. *Argbo* is a very big rock that is able to take over a thousand people. Oral tradition has it that *Argbo* is considered as a sacred stone, and therefore draws a lot of tourists, both local and foreign, to the *Eggon* Hills some of whom come for religious pilgrimage every year. The pilgrimage lasts for seven days. A significant aspect of the *Eggon* Hills is that it gives people the opportunity to visit their ancestral home, especially for those who have not been home for a long time.

In Akwanga Local Government Area, a prominent natural base resource is the *Numa* Hills. It is situated at the outskirts of *Andaha Tawa* along *Akwanga–Fadan Karshi* Road. The Hills stands spectacularly with striking peaks and sceneries from its top. At the peak of the Hills, a person can conveniently and clearly view most parts of Nasarawa State and some parts of the Federal Capital Territory. The *Numa* Hills is a potential tourist destination for both local and foreign visitors.

In Nasarawa Local Government Area is the famous *Judu Ama* Stone. In recent years the *Judu Ama* Stone has become a significant tourist site. It has attracted people from different localities both far and near. The location of the *Judu Ama* Stone has waterfalls which equally serves as a tourism centre. The *Judu Ama* is a huge stone considered by the community a Blessed Stone. The stone gushes crystal clear and pure spring water from its inner sources, which people regularly visit and fetch for their domestic use.

In Awe Local Government Area is the *Hunki* Ox-bow Lake. It is located 30 kilometres away from the Awe town and 130 kilometres from Lafia, the state capital. *Hunki* Ox-bow Lake is one of the natural base resources found in Awe community. It offers an appealing scenery to tourists with some wildlife species such as hippopotamuses, manatees and fishes. The *Hunki* Ox-bow Lake has been neglected and not optimally developed as a unique

tourist destination in Nasarawa State. Similarly, Awe Local Government Area is blessed with *Akira* Warm Spring that is believed to have "curative powers". This explains the reason for the people of *Akira* village who visit there regularly to not only bath there but also drink from the warm spring. Water from the Warm Spring is warm and curiously gets warmer during the cold weather. The water brings out bubbles at regular intervals just like boiling water. An interesting aspect of the *Akira* Warm Spring is that during the rainy season, when the volume of water increases, reptiles like crocodiles openly float on the water surface. The crocodiles are very friendly and calm, and play with children unharmed, who come to swim along the banks of the warm spring. Akira village is also noted for salt mining in the past. Besides, the *Akira* salt mines is another natural base resource in Awe Local Government Area. There is evidence of salt production by the early settlers in *Akira* village. Salt miners used the spring water for salt-processing. Akira salt mines is a major tourist attraction in Nasarawa State, although not much effort has been made by both the governments at the state and the federal levels to harness the cultural heritage of the community.

Some Notable Cultural Base Tourism Resources in Nasarawa State

The *Awuma* Dance Festival is celebrated by the *Rindre* cultural group in Lafia-North Development Area between March and April every year. It is celebrated to promote unity among the *Rindre* people, and equally serve as a forum for the appreciation of the cultural values of the people. The festival attracts visitors from both outside and inside the state. Also, the *Agree* Cultural Festival is another annual festival celebrated among the *Alago* people of the Assakio community in the Lafia-East Development Area. It is celebrated upon the sighting of the New Moon in December (Iyimoga 2010). The festival is done in commemoration of the movement of the *Alago* people from Assakio to the present location in Keana. Furthermore, the *Oguh* Dance Festival is celebrated annually among the Migili in Lafia-West Development Area in January. The festival is celebrated in honour of their ancestors who are acknowledged as heroes. The annual festival is a period for the people to reflect upon and appreciate the heroic feats of their fore-fathers.

In Akwanga Local Government Area, the notable cultural festival identified among the Mada group is the *Nzeh* Festival. The festival is celebrated every April to unite the people, and showcase their rich traditions. In Nasarawa Local Government Area, the annual New Yam Festival is celebrated every

January (Iyimoga 2010). The New Yam Festival is known as *Ogya*, which means a period of joy in acknowledgment of savoring nature's grace by living through the year to witness this historic event. The celebration of the festival takes place during the new yam harvest in January, before the proper harvest period. The leader of the farmers' clan will summon a meeting of his members, and arrange with them a date for the miraculous harvest of yams before the actual communal harvest commences. The farmers will usually select five persons from whom a miraculous yam harvest is expected. It entails each of the select members bring out a fresh yam tuber from the dry soil or water, usually a place that no yam was previously planted! Every member has his/her peculiar way of miraculous harvest of a "fresh yam" from an unexpected source. The first, second and third members that successfully produce the new yams in miraculous ways are given special awards. After this session of miracles, the leader of the farmers will declare the New Yam harvest open to the rest of the community members until the next new yam festival. The celebration of the New Yam Festival among the Nasarawa people, no doubt, adds economic value to the community. This is because during the festival period there are various businesses that involve an exchange of goods and services with the local people and visitors/ tourists that grace the festival. The New Yam festival provides ample opportunity for people to buy new dresses, shoes, foods, drinks, etc.

Among the Alago cultural group, traditional festivals like *Odu* and *Amiri* are celebrated on an annual basis where the youths and elders come out in large numbers to showcase their talents at singing, praise-singing, dancing, fluting and drumming. Also, traditional masquerades like the *Eku* perform at such festivals and during the installation of a new monarch: *Andoma*, Osana, or other traditional leaders or title-holders, as the case may be (Ammunadi & Ogar, 2010). Amiri festival is celebrated usually between February and March immediately after the farm harvest ends. According to Oyigbenu (2010), the major significance of the festival revolves around a thanksgiving to the ancestors for good harvests. But, where the harvests are lean, prayers are offered for bumper yields in the coming year. The festival creates an opportunity for members of the Alago ethnic group (at home and abroad) to commune and honour their ancestors. *Amiri* festival provides a rare occasion for the living members of the community, especially the non-residents in the local community, to come home and partake of the spiritual cleansing of the graves of the departed ones who have joined their ancestors. In its totality, *Amiri* is a festival of communal-ancestral worship and a time of festivity and merry-making (Oyigbenu 2010).

Similarly, the *Ogiri* festival is well-celebrated among the Alago people. It is essentially an annual war festival celebrated between the months of December and January (Iyimoga 2010). It often provides an occasion for the people to express thanksgiving to the ancestors and gods. The *Ogiri* festival is celebrated only on a particular day. It is by and large a very brief event that affords the young people to exhibit their physical strength; in essence, it is purposely a youth celebration of abiding hope and success (Oyigbenu (2010). The hallmark of the *Ogiri* festival is the array of masquerades that performs during the festival day. Therefore, the *Ogiri* festival is synonymous with masquerade performances. The masquerades appear in beautiful attires, colourful and active in their display of dance steps. In fact, the masquerades are the major attractions of the festival; they normally thrill the audience. The peak of the festival is when the spirits of the ancestors come in form of the masquerades and perform to the admiration of the audience.

Among the *Migili* cultural group in Obi Local Government Area, the *Odu* festival is celebrated. The festival is celebrated in the month of March (Iyimoga 2010) with the intent to appease the gods for their good deeds by preserving their lives and farm produce. The festival provides an opportunity for the *Migili* sons and daughters to unite and reinforce their rich cultural values. It also provides the opportunity for the distant and not-distant tourists to savour the ambiance of the exotic tradition and customs of the people.

Similarly, the famous *Kofar Fada* Dyeing Pits and Calabash Carving Centre located in Lafia are tourist sites. The Pits is among the oldest in North-Central Nigeria where the dyeing of traditional clothing of various designs and sizes is done. Both the pits and carving centre are as old as the Lafia city and are among the best destination-points for tourism in Lafia, the capital of Nasarawa State. Nasarawa-Eggon holds the *Awyenshe Kotso* Carnival yearly. The Carnival attracts both their sons and daughters from far and near, and lasts seven days involving lots of display of customs and tradition in the form of food delicacies, attires, dancing, drumming, recitation of folklores etc. A notable aspect of the Carnival is the food exhibition of a popular local bean meal prepared with palm-oil and black sesame seeds. It is complemented with a locally brewed alcoholic beverage, *burukutu* and the slaughtering of goats and cows to feed the guests. Curiously, the food is prepared by not the women but the menfolk.

The Keana Local Government Area boasts of the famous salt mines located some 67 kilometres from Lafia, the state capital. Historical evidence reveals

that the Keana salt mining industry dates back to the 13th century A.D./ C.E. Oral historical sources from the locality indicate that the salt deposit was discovered around 1232 A.D./ C.E. by one Akeana Adi during a hunting expedition (Ammunnadi & Ogar 2010). The salt is believed to contain some curative properties, especially those of easing constipation and other stomach ailments. A visit to the salt-mining site reveals material evidence of the extant ancient salt industry including huts, pots and ridges laid out for salt excavation and processing. The huts depict evidence of a people that have acquired some form of sophistication in skilled salt-mining. A first time visitor to Keana is greeted by the impressive line-up of mini-huts and an array of well-positioned pots on the large expanse of the meandering, neat salt river-bed. No chattering sound of grinding factory machines or the glittering of industrial metallic objects nor the toxic fumes of blasting furnaces. All one can see are aged women, passionate about their work of manual processing of salt from the surrounding vegetation and the musical rhythm of their sweetly clashing clay-pots. Their tireless efforts produce fine salt, the quality which is arguably richer than the normally processed salt by the modern salt industry in Europe, Asia and Africa, which requires fortification with iodine and maybe some other chemicals that could have their side effects in human consumption. The Keana salt mines means different things to several people. To the average Keana woman, it is a blissful source of livelihood deposited by the generous gods and handed down from preceding generations. To the tourist, it is a captivating scenery that thrills the aesthetic senses that leaves lasting memories.

Need for Developing and Sustaining Natural and Cultural Base Resources in Nasarawa State for Tourism and Employment

It is significant to stress here that the abundant natural and cultural base resources in Nasarawa State can help to diversify and transform its economy. The abundant natural base resources that include the *Farin Ruwa* Waterfalls, Ox-bow Lake and Mada Hills among others, readily serve as reference points for attracting tourists both locally and globally. Also, the array of cultural festivals celebrated across the different cultural groups such as the annual *Odu* cultural festival among the *Migili* in Obi Local Government Area and the *Ogiri* annual festival among the Alago in Doma etc. all need to be modernized and showcased globally. It is our view that if these natural and cultural base resources in the state are optimally tapped and harnessed a lot of youths will be gainfully employed and more money will go into the internally generated revenue (IGR) base of the state.

More strategically too, developing and sustaining the tourism industry in Nasarawa State will, no doubt, help to reduce the over-dependency of the state on monthly statutory allocations from the Federal Government. It is worthy of note that the internally generated revenue of the state has been ebbing in the last few years due to the dwindling crude oil price at the international market. Developing and sustaining the natural and cultural base resources are a major boost for employment generation and income generation in the state. In addition, the numerous natural resource bases in the state should be protected from trespassers and poachers whose conduct regularly infringe on those natural heritage sites. To this end, relevant government agencies should formulate laws and edicts to protect them as well as put credible structures to conserve them. Furthermore, the Nasarawa State Government should work in conjunction with the National Commission for Museums and Monuments and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to secure most of these natural resource bases as World Heritage Sites. This will further promote the tourism status of the state and attract more tourists both locally and globally.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, the following recommendations are hereby put forward.

i.) In order to attract both local and international tourists, most of the natural resource bases like the popular *Farin Ruwa* Waterfalls, Ox-bow Lake and others should be developed to international standard.

ii.) The Nasarawa State Government in partnership with the Federal Government should release special budgetary provisions for developing and sustaining the different natural and cultural resource bases in the state so as to attract tourists all-year-round.

iii.) In this regard, the provision and maintenance of these facilities will undoubtedly greatly transform the numerous natural resource bases in the state and put the state on the world tourism map.

iv.) It is hoped that the provision of these and other facilities will create employment for the teeming youth population, and in the long run, increase the internally generated revenue of the state and the federal governments.

v.) In order to attract both local and foreign tourists all-year-round, there is the need to fully commercialize the various tourist sites in Nasarawa State. This will be in line with what is obtainable

in Western countries and some African countries like Kenya, Egypt and South Africa, where tourism has been well-developed and sustained.

vi.) Private participation in the management of cultural festivals and tourism destinations will effectively boost the in-flow of tourists and improved revenue generation of the state.

vii.) The private sector should be actively involved in promoting cultural festivals by working hand-in-glove with government and the custodians of the cultural sites and activities so as to effectively reflect their roots and heritage.

Conclusion

Nasarawa State, like most other states in the country, have for a very long time paid lip service to the development and sustenance of the tourism sector. This is due to the fact that the state has not been able to formulate policies and programmes that will transform the sector owing to the lack of the political will on the part of the government. In this regard, a major hindrance to developing and sustaining tourism is over-reliance on monthly allocations from the Federal Government based on the crude oil revenue. This is a worrisome trend, especially in this twenty-first century when some other countries like Kenya, Egypt and South Africa that are not as much naturally endowed like Nigeria have optimally harnessed their natural and cultural base resources. One cannot but agree with Lawuyi (2011) who opined that tourism in Nigeria is being grown on an inconsistent, lackadaisical, and sometimes vague attitude to tours. This therefore, has undermined the buoyancy of the tourism industry in the country, and adversely affected the economic fortunes of Nasarawa State and Nigeria in general. As rightly observed by Ekechukwu (1990), tourism policy in Nigeria can best be described as "passive" as statistics on tourism traffic show that more people leave the country for holidays than enter it for the same purpose.

Besides, there is the lack of publicity and awareness of most natural and cultural base resources in Nasarawa State. It is pertinent to emphasize here that it is only when adequate and effective publicity, either through the traditional modern news media (radio, television and newspaper), or even the social media (internet, satellite, mobile phone), that the rich tourism potentials of Nasarawa State can be promoted in this twenty-first century. In addition, the Nasarawa State Government with its rich cultural heritage

can equally boost its tourism potentials by organizing annual carnivals, as it is being done in states like Cross River, Rivers and Lagos.

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