



TOURISM AS A STRATEGY FOR POVERTY REDUCTION FOR RURAL AREAS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF KUTIGI TRADITIONAL HAT AND FAN MAKING

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is regarded as the world epidemic disease that must be killed otherwise it will kill its victims. Poverty comes in different forms such as hunger, deprivation of social amenities by governments especially at the rural areas, inability to earn a daily living, inability to secure job opportunities which could be by government or private firms, and deliberate attempt to neglect certain section of the country either through tribe, region or religion. The study focused on tourism as a strategy for poverty reduction for rural areas in Nigeria, with emphasis on Kutigi traditional hat and fan making. Tourism is an industry that concerned itself with movement of people from one destination to another for the purpose of leisure and relaxation for a period of at least 24 hours. Tourism has diverse forms, however, the study centred on rural tourism. It is a form of mass tourism or alternative tourism which centred on rural natural destinations, handicrafts, and eco-tourism to enhance tourists' experience. The study use qualitative research and interview method to collect data for the study. Seven families, comprising of their heads were interviewed for a period of one week due to the fact that they were predominantly illiterates. The population of these traditional handicrafts range from 100 to 200 scattered among interior villages, and their monthly income is between ₦100, 000. 00 to ₦300,000.00 depending on the market demands of their products. The study therefore, found that rural tourism reduces poverty, creates employments, enhances living standard of the rural people, and develop rural areas.

Keywords: Poverty, Tourism, Rural tourism, Mass tourism, Kutigi, Rural area

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a process of visiting a location or places perhaps for the benefit of leisure and relaxation which provides economic benefits to the host communities. The benefits provided by tourism industry to the host communities, and governments are the single factor that makes tourism a universal provider of foreign exchange earnings, income generation, employment, and socio-cultural development of rural areas across the globe. It seems to be a catalyst for rural development and poverty reduction especially for communities and governments which have realized its potentials.

However, Yusuf *et al.*, (2017) found in their studies that rural areas and its people have not received developmental attentions it deserves on tourism potentials. Hence, rural areas, especially in Nigeria continues to be backward and known to be low income generators, and socially backward. They concluded that integration of rural areas particularly focusing on tourism becomes pertinent and necessary for the achievement of reduction of rural-urban migrations for white-collar jobs and other social amenities. It is on this premise that Henama, *et al.*, (2016) echoed that tourism attracts foreign exchange and foreign direct investments that

stimulates home economies. For instance, Henama, (2017) reiterated that tourism has become alternative survival strategies for South Africa government which before independent and the days of apartheid solely depended on gold mining, while a country like Nigeria is yet to develop its tourism potentials.

Globalization effects has not only necessitates countries, organizations, and individuals to restructure their economic base, but continually searching for alternatives like tourism as the most viable socio-economic development catalyst. Rodriguez-Pose and Hardy (2015) observed that informality is a distinct facet of tourism economies in the developing world and global world respectively. Therefore, tourism induces other industries such as transport, hospitality, agriculture, and manufacturing which consequently has direct, indirect and induce impact at the destination economy Gana, (2018). It should be borne in mind that the tourism destination experiences create backward linkages in other industries like aviation industry which serve as tourism supply chains impact.

The United Nation World Tourism Organization (WTO) (2004) reported that tourism is currently the world's largest industry with annual revenues of over \$3 trillion dollars; and that tourism provides over six million jobs in the United States, making it the country's largest employer.

Besides, the development of mass travel and standardization of tourist's services, it seems that people have turned to natural, preserved and clean environment which could be found in rural areas in search of an authentic experience. The attraction of rural areas to tourists is therefore connected with the possibility of satisfying needs for relaxation, vacations or holiday making, and gaining knowledge about people, cultural, and environment

which are natural in nature. It is on this premise that Petroman (2013) reported that the development of rural tourism are linked to the experiences of privileged social class (the feudal lords, the bourgeoisie, and the aristocracy) who spent their time in rural areas. More so, intensive development of rural tourism in rural areas linked to the year 1970 in developed countries, which has contributed to the strengthening of villages in economic and social terms.

Therefore, rural tourism visa-vis rural areas composed of high-quality natural resources, rich cultural and historical heritage, traditions, events, and handicrafts which are integrated for the betterment of tourists experience and relaxation which rural tourism focused upon. They however argue that due to the infancy of tourism as a developmental strategy in developing countries like Nigeria, there is need for more research to expose its potentials to individuals and nations. This was further corroborated by Koens and Thomas (2015) that although, policy makers have attached importance to tourism development in developing countries; this has been insufficiently examined by academic researchers. In line with these arguments, Abbas (2016) noted that despites efforts put in place by governments and individuals in reducing poverty in Nigeria, the outcome across the country remain worrisome. This study is therefore conducted to bridge the gaps in order to facilitate the attention of individuals and governments towards tourism as a strategy for reducing poverty among rural people in Nigeria with focus on Kutigi local fans and hats making. Therefore, the development and attraction of tourists to any tourist destination will not only enhance economic development but also it will open-up various employment opportunities for local people. Hence, the targeted area of rural tourism is summarized by World Tourism Organization (2004) in Figure 1 below:

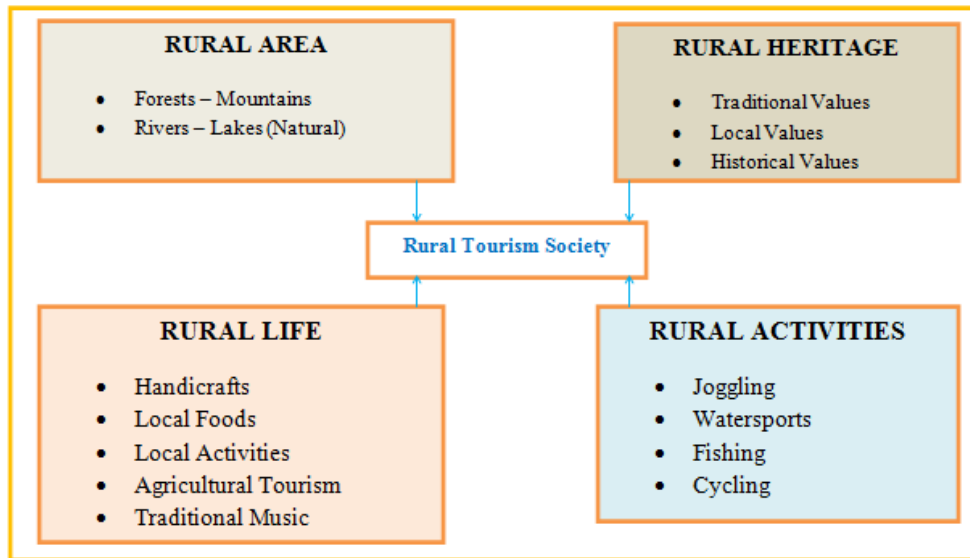


Fig. 1: Targeted Area of Rural Tourism.
 Source: WTO (2004)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

Kutigi is the Local Government Headquarters of Lavun LGA and has an area of 2,835 km² and a population of 209,917 (National Census, 2006). The people are predominantly peasant farmers, producing rice, sorghum, maize, millet and guinea-corn. There are two main seasons, the rainy season and the dry season with lush guinea savanna vegetation of herbs, shrubs and various tree species like *Daniella oliveri*, *Parkia biglobosa*, *Vitellaria*

paradoxia, *Vitex doniana*, *Terminalia mentalis*, *Khaya senegalensis* and *Ceiba petandra*.

Kutigi traditional handicrafts comprise of six families, and three of these families are Ndaceko, Dakpan and Cekpako and they are known for their specialization in local fan production. The other three families, the Wonko, Tsama and Wunru specialize in hat production. These local handicrafts Fig.2, were produced from the guinea corn husk which are gathered and sun dried after harvest.



Fig. 2: Samples of Handicraft Products from Kutigi.

The locals affirmed that an experienced weaver can produce five of the mats or fans in a day especially the ones without names inscribed on them while the ones with names takes a longer time and days to be completed depending on the number of letters the names carry. Rural tourism is an industry that occupies significant position in the affairs of an individual, people and communities due to the fact that its contributions to human development and capital generation are enormous. It is on this basis that Kutigi handicrafts, is viewed as a strategy for poverty reduction and promoter of rural tourism.

Thus, rural tourism aims at increasing net benefits of rural economy, conservation of cultural diversity, strategy for diversifying rural resources and alleviates poverty associated with rural dwellers in our society. It is liken to community- based tourism which serves as a catalyst for socio-cultural, environmental, and economic needs of the rural communities through offering of their products to tourist who visits rural tourism destinations. The rural communities benefit directly from the tourism industry and serves as a turn- around for small-scale enterprises and job creation, and thus uplifting the living standard of the local communities. Thus, the research questions for this study will include; does rural tourism reduce poverty level, create employment, enhance living standard of the rural people and develop rural areas.

Data collection

The study adopted an observational rapid field survey procedure as recommended by Malgosia *et al.*, (2013) which included combining data from survey, documentation, and information from key players, interviews and questionnaire. The interview was centered on four areas which included – poverty reduction through rural tourism, creation of employment, living standard of rural people, and development of rural areas through rural tourism. The study focused on traditional handicrafts, the popular Kutigi hats and fans making. Seven family heads with a population of 200 people were interviewed which was conducted among the scattered villages in one week.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Poverty reduction through rural tourism.

The interviewees reported that there was high demand for their products as souvenirs for wedding, naming, and housing warming ceremonies; especially those with names inscribed on them which cost between ₦4,000.00, ₦3, 000.00 and ₦1,000.00 each respectively. While those without names inscribed cost between ₦400.00, ₦300.00, and ₦200.00 each depending on their sizes. The total monthly sales ranges between ₦100, 000.00 to ₦300,000.00 depending on the demands and quantity to be supply in advanced.

This analysis demonstrated that local tourism industries indeed reduce poverty looking at the amount of money realized from the sales of local handicrafts like fans and hats as souvenirs. This is in line with the finding by Eneji *et al.*, (2016) that rural tourism is one of the fastest growing industries with an annual growth of 5 percent worldwide and represents 6 percent of the world Gross Domestic Product. This was also supported by Hailaly (2016) opined that tourism contributes significantly in socio-economic and cultural development of the rural communities. This means that if rural tourism is opened-up focusing on inter-state and international tourists patronize on local handicrafts, this will increase its demands, earnings, and thus have multiply effects on government taxes to provide social amenities to the citizens.

Tourism creates employment

The interviewees response as to the number of houses and an average number of people involved in making these local handicrafts; their response was that it comprises of 15 houses that has between 100 to 200 adults, and young people. These analyses imply that rural tourism actually creates employment. These families depend entirely for their daily earnings from these local handicrafts, and if rural tourism is encouraged through good policies and innovative skills among our youths, this will reduce unemployment in the country and fasten rural development. For example, the World Poverty Clock (2018) reported that 86.9 million Nigerians are living in extreme poverty and if rural tourism is encouraged it will reduce pressure on governments for white-collar jobs especially among the youths.

Rural tourism enhance living standard of rural people

The response of the interviewees with regards to rural tourism enhancing living standard is that the locals do not depend on the governments for their livelihood; rather, they solely depend on their handicrafts which they inherited from their forefathers. Their children are trained in schools from the proceeds realized from the local handicrafts. This assertion was supported by the findings of Strydom *et al.*, (2018) who reiterated that rural tourism serves as the spin around for small-scale enterprises and job creation, and enhancing living standard of the local communities. Rural tourism or handicrafts requires little capital for the take off as opposed to the modern businesses which requires reasonable capital that entails collateral securities, which the local entrepreneurs are unable to meet. It is on this premise that Ojo (2014) found that poverty is a world-wide epidemic that will continue to inflict rural communities except local tourism is strengthened to serve as strategy to reducing poverty at the local level.

Rural tourism develop rural areas

In response to the above, the interviewees reported that rural tourism develop rural areas through patronage of tourists who socialized with the locals, purchase their local handicrafts and encourages local set-up of eateries, super markets, lodgings, and organization of cultural music which tourists cherished most. This is in consonance with the

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findings by Bukola *et al.* (2018), affirmed that tourism development has a significant impact on sustainable economic development, and it has assumed a social dimension of poverty reduction in the developing world in addition to its traditional role of foreign exchange earnings. It can be inferred that rural tourism as an industry serves as an instrument of poverty reduction for rural areas especially among the under-developed and developing countries like Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Poverty is a world-wide epidemic disease that must be curtailed and one way of achieving this, especially among the developing countries like Nigeria is diversifying the economy to embrace tourism, with specially attention to rural tourism.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were suggested based on the findings of this study:

1. There should be good policies-framework in Nigeria towards the development of rural tourism
2. Inter- state and intra-state tourism should be encouraged
3. Rural infrastructure should be revisited among states' and local government authorities.
4. Indigenous and local handicrafts should be encouraged among Nigeria youths especially in technical schools.

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