



CHALLENGES OF ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS IN SELECTED STATES OF SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the challenges of ecotourism in selected tourist destinations of south eastern Nigeria. These destinations include: Agulu/Nanka erosion site and Ogbunike caves from Anambra state, Nekede zoo and Urashi river source from Imo state, Oferekpe waterfall and Okposi salt lake from Ebonyi state. Three sets of well-structured questionnaires (A,B and C) was used to collect the data. Questionnaire ‘A’ was administer to 50% of the total number of household in Agulu/Nanka (51), Ogbunike (42), Nekede (48), Dikenafai (54), Oferekpe (40) and Okposi(45), making a total of 280 household respondents. Another set ‘B’ was administered on 50 tourists from each site and ‘C’ was administered to 100% of staff respondents in Agulu/Nanka (18), Ogbunike (10), Nekede (24), Dikenafai (15), Oferekpe (8) and Okposi (12). Data collected were subjected to simple descriptive analysis. The results shows that the highest respondents on age (29.24%) fall into the age bracket (36-45) years, while the least (06.30%) were >60 years. The sex ratio was (67.47%) male and (32.53%) female, (46.48%) were married, (50.37%) were unmarried and (03.30%) were divorced. The tourists reception was warm in Agulu/Nanka erosion site (46.00%), Ogbunike caves (38.00%), Urashi river source (64.00%) and Okposi salt lake (60.00%) while indifference (54.00%) at Nekede zoo and poor (62.00%) at Oferekpe waterfall. Though the facilities were inadequate in all the sites but majority of the tourist indicated interest to repeat visit. The reasons for protecting eco-destination at Agulu/Nanka (44.83%) and Ogbunike (40.38%) site is tourism, Nekede zoo (43.55%) and Okposi salt (38.46%) lake is biodiversity conservation, cultural festival at Urashi (46.88%) and economic value (35.29%) at Oferekpe waterfall. The way of protecting destination in Agulu/Nanka site is planting trees (52.11%) taring of road (29.63%) at Ogbunike, molding monuments (30.19%) at Nekede zoo, building steps (64.06%) at Urashi river source, bush clearing (50.94%) at Oferekpe waterfall and community rules (40.74%) at Okposi salt lake. The challenges include deforestation at Agulu/Nanka, illegal hunting in Ogbunike caves, empty cages at Nekede zoo, lack of tour guards at Dikenafai, far distance at Oferekpe and crude method of salt production at Okposi salt lake. Also, it suggested publicity as a way of improving sustainable ecotourism in the study destinations.

Keywords: Ecotourism destinations, Conservation, Travel, Operations, Challenges, development.

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INTRODUCTION

The benefits a country or region derive from ecotourism depend largely on the quality of services, tourists inflow, frequency of visitation, caliber of tourists visiting eco-destinations and tourists expenditure pattern (Ijeomah and Okoli, 2016). This implies that the desired constant increases in level of benefits derived from ecotourism in a particular area depend largely among other factors on the rate of operations carried out in eco-destinations (Ijeomah, 2012). Tourism virtues are environment specific, as what attracts people differs from one person to another as influenced by variations in ecological, social, economic and /or cultural background; hence the value of a tourism site depends on the popularity of the tourism features as identified by tourists (Ijeomah, 2007; Ijeomah *et al*, 2007).

The world is full of natural resources that people exploit and appreciate but it is important to use these resources in a sustainable manner so that we can enjoy them and also make it possible for our future generation to enjoy it. (IUCN, 1980). South eastern Nigeria is rich in tourist destinations especially the community and government managed sites which makes her an ideal destination for ecotourism. Many activities are going on in these eco-destinations other than the main purpose and objective of establishing the sites. Some sites are for the purpose of education or for medical purpose (Guerra *et al.*, 2015).

Others are for cultural activities or exhibiting purposes while others are for conservation (Idumah *et al*, 2009). Many of these additional activities are carried out in ecodestinations because some of these destinations are fast losing their popularity (Kusler, 1991). (Oluwakemi and Jonathan, 2017) suggested that any other activities carried out in the ecodestination will be carefully done, taking precautions not to change the initial objective and integrity of the ecosystem; which produces economic opportunities to the local populace (Wood, 1999). Ecotourism practices looks at all the impacts of tourism, either positive or negative with the aim to maximize the positive and minimize the negative impacts (Nchor and Asuk, 2018). The United Nation Environment Program (UNEP) and World Tourism Organization (WTO) want ecotourism activities to be activities that take full account of the current and future.

Some activities like cultural, educational or conservation depend on the management of the site. Some of these attractive sites are managed by government, NGO or host communities while some of these locations have been constructed with tourists in mind, others have yet to be fully utilized (Ogunjinmi, 2015). Also, most of these ecotourism sites in south east are located in the rural communities that support their livelihood on these recreational and cultural activities (Omisora,

& Akade, 2009). Government and the host communities will need to actively participate in all decision-making processes to keep these activities from polluting the destination (Adetola, 2015).

Some of the cultural activities like 'ogba day' in Ogbunike caves will bring about people knowing the site. Limiting these activities in some of these sites will reduce the number of tourists visiting the place (Nwosu, 2006). As a result, the study also intends to evaluate the issues that will prevent continued ecotourism site development in south-eastern Nigeria (Okani, 2002).

However, the various methods used in managing these destinations should be tourist and environmental friendly, because these activities is an effective tool for sustainable development (Okpoko and Okpoko, 2002). If welcoming strategies are poor, tourists will not like to visit such sites again because good management strategies improve economic development (Briassoulis, 2002).

Some of these activities typically occur in community managed sites. Ekechukwu (2006) said that it should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such sites, other than damage to the environment (Fennell, 1999). Since ecotourism is environmentally friendly and responsible visitation and travel to relatively undamaged or undisturbed natural areas, to appreciate and enjoy nature including any cultural features that promotes and encourages conservation, visitor

impact and local activities should be negatively low (Diamantis, 2010). These activities should be educative and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of the local populations (IUCN, 2002). Ecotourism activities could have less negative and more positive impact in an environment (Umar, 2020). The negative impacts of these activities to a destination includes; damage to the natural environment, economic leakage and overcrowding. While the positive impacts includes; preservation of cultural heritage, job creation, wildlife preservation, landscape restoration, and more (UNEP and WTO, 2005).

Ecotourism activities creates opportunity for economic growth. In fact, these economic opportunities of ecotourism also led to the generation of support for wildlife conservation from traditional in private and public sector institutions (Christie *et al*, 2014) Ecotourism activities has also tremendously enhanced community wellbeing, support and development for wildlife conservation in communities living together. The desired sustained increase in the level of economic benefits derived from ecotourism operations in a particular area depends largely among other factors, the level of development in tourism destinations which is at a very low ebb in state and identification of potential ecotourism resources (Sabele, 2010).

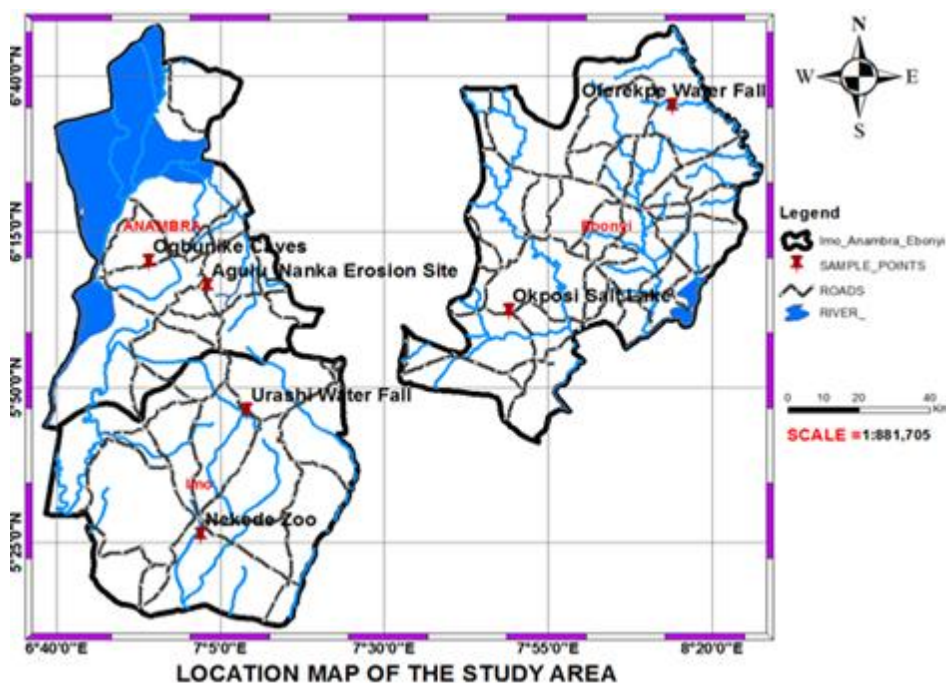
METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was carried out in six (6) different ecotourist sites within three states in south eastern Nigeria. These sites are: Agulu/Nanka erosion site and Ogbunike caves in Anambra state, Nekede zoological garden and Urashi river source in Imo state, Oferekpe water fall and Okposi salt lake in Ebonyi state. Agulu/Nanka erosion site cuts across Aniocha and Orumba North local government area of Anambra state. Ogbunike caves is in Oyi Local

Government Area located along old Enugu-Onitsha express road. Nekede zoological garden is in Owerri west local government area while Urashi river source of Dikenafai is in Ideator south local government

Oferekpe water fall is in Ikwo local government area while Okposi salt lake in Ohaozara local government area.



Data Collection and Analysis

Purposive sampling technique was used to select six ecotourism destinations from south eastern Nigeria. Agulu/Nanka erosion and Ogbunike caves were selected from Anambra state, Nekede zoo and Urashi river source from Imo state while Oferekpe waterfall and Okposi Salt Lake were

selected from Ebonyi state. Data for the study were collected through the use of three sets of structured questionnaires administered on the household, staffs and tourists who visited selected sites. The number of households in each identified communities was estimated (based on the average family size of 5-10) as was done by Onuchukwu and Ijeomah (2020) for southern Nigeria. The host

community of each destination was identified. Fifty percent (50) of household size in each community was sampled, 50 tourists from each destination was sampled while all (100%) the staff

RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of Respondents

The result on Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. In all the sites, the highest respondents on age (29.24%) fall into the age bracket (36-45) years, while the least (06.30%) were >60 years. The sex ratio was (67.47%) male and (32.53%) female. On marital status, (46.48%) were married, (50.37%) were unmarried and (03.30%) were divorced.

The civil servants were (40.50%), self-employed (37.48%) while the least (22.04%) are those that are not working. On years of service, (44.53%) have worked more than 11 years, (40.33%) have worked (6-10) years and the least (15.14%) have worked for (1-5) years. The highest respondents (76.31%) agreed that they have visited the sites more than 3 times, followed by (13.19%) who

in each destination was considered for data collection. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency of counts and percentages.

visited more than 2 times. The least number of respondents (10.49%) have visited just once.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Agulu/Na			Ogbunike			Nekede			Dikenafai			Oferekpe			Okposi			Frequency	Percentage (%)
	C	S	T	C	S	T	C	S	T	C	S	T	C	S	T	C	S	T		

AGE																				
20-35	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	--	1	0	--	1	0	--	1	142	21.29
	6	8	2	4	2	9	5	4	7	8		9	6		4	5		3		
36-45	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	195	29.24
	0	5	8	1	3	1	9	0	2	0	3	2	2	8	9	1	6	5		
46-55	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	--	0	1	0	0	172	25.79
	5	3	4	3	5	1	2	8	1	1	7	7	1		7	4	4	9		
56-60	1	0	0	1	--	0	1	0	--	1	0	0	0	--	0	0	0	1	116	17.39
	2	2	6	1		9	7	2		6	5	2	8		5	9	2	0		
>61	0	--	--	0	--	--	0	--	--	0	--	--	0	--	0	0	--	0	042	06.30
	8			3			5			9			3		5	6		3		
SEX																				
Male	4	1	3	2	0	2	3	1	3	4	1	2	2	0	3	3	--	2	450	67.47
	3	3	3	8	7	7	0	8	1	5	5	8	5	8	6	8		5		
Female	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	0	1	0	--	2	1	--	1	0	1	2	217	32.53
	8	5	7	4	3	3	8	6	9	9		2	5		4	7	2	5		
MARITAL STATUS																				
Married	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	2	3	0	2	1	0	2	2	1	1	310	46.48
	7	4	9	5	3	3	3	9	9	1	8	6	3	2	4	4	2	8		
Single	2	1	2	1	0	3	2	1	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	1	--	2	336	50.37
	4	3	8	6	7	7	2	4	1	3	7	4	5	6	6	5		8		
Divorced	--	0	0	0	--	--	0	0	--	--	--	0	0	--	--	0	--	0	022	03.30
		1	3	1			3	1				1	2			6		4		
OCCUPATION																				
Civil servant	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	0	0	1	2	1	1	270	40.50
	6	8	5	8	0	3	5	4	8	2	5	5	9	8	4	1	2	7		
Self employed	2	--	2	2	--	1	2	--	2	2	--	1	1	--	2	1	--	2	250	37.48
	2		2	4		9	1		2	3		7	8		0	8		4		
Not working	1	--	1	1	--	1	1	--	1	1	--	0	1	--	1	0	--	0	147	22.04
	3		3	0		8	2		0	9		8	3		6	6		9		
YEARS OF SERVICE																				
1-5 Years	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	--	--	--	0	0	0	101	15.14
	0	5	6	7	1	1	6	3	8	4	2	0				9	2	7		
6-10 Years	2	0	1	1	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	1	2	0	2	1	0	2	269	40.33
	0	4	2	6	4	5	0	9	7	8	5	3	5	7	5	1	4	4		
>11 Years	2	0	3	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	297	44.53
	1	9	2	9	5	4	2	2	5	2	8	7	5	1	5	5	6	9		
NUMBER OF SITE VISIT																				
Once	3	--	--	0	--	--	2	--	--	--	--	0	--	--	--	--	--	0	70	10.49
	8			6			2					2						2		
2 times	0	--	1	1	--	0	1	--	1	--	--	0	--	--	0	--	--	0	88	13.19
	9		6	8		6	7		4			4			1			3		
>3 times	0	1	3	1	1	4	0	2	3	5	1	4	4	0	4	4	1	4	509	76.31
	4	8	4	8	0	4	9	4	6	4	5	4	0	8	9	5	2	5		

Key: C = Community, S = Staff, T = Tourist

Table 2 shows the tourists reception in selected destinations. The tourists reported that they received warm reception at four destinations of study areas which are; Agulu/Nanka erosion site (46.00%), Ogbunike caves (38.00%), Urashi river source (64.00%) and Okposi salt lake (60.00%). The reception at Nekede zoo was indifference (54.00%), while poor (62.00%) at Oferekpe waterfall.

Table 2: Tourist Reception in Selected Destinations as reported by tourists

NATURE OF RECEPTION	DESTINATOINS					
	Agulu/Nan	Ogbunike	Nekede	Dikenafai	Oferekpe	Okposi
Warm	23(46.00)	19(38.00)	07(14.00)	32(64.00)	04(08.00)	30(60.00)
Hostile	12(24.00)	13(26.00)	07(14.00)	10(20.00)	06(12.00)	08(16.00)
Indifference	08(16.00)	11(22.00)	27(54.00)	06(12.00)	09(18.00)	09(18.00)
Poor	07(14.00)	07(14.00)	09(18.00)	02(04.00)	31(62.00)	03(06.00)

In Table 3, the tourist reported that the facilities in almost all the sites were inadequate while some has no facilities. The facilities at Agulu/Nanka erosion site were inadequate (86.27%). Those of Ogbunike caves were inadequate (80.95%),

Nekede zoo were inadequate (89.58%). Urashi river source has no facility (00.00%), Oferekpe waterfall has no facility (00.00%) and Okposi salt lake has inadequate (91.11%) facilities.

Table 3: Adequacy of Facilities in Selected Destinations as Indicated by Staff Respondents

Destinations	Facilities	Frequency	Percentage
Agulu/Nanka site	Adequacy	06	11.76
	Inadequacy	44	86.27
Ogbunike caves	Adequacy	08	19.05
	Inadequacy	34	80.95
Nekede zoo	Adequacy	05	10.42
	Inadequacy	43	89.58
Urashi river source	Adequacy	00	00.00
	Inadequacy	54	100.00
Oferekpe waterfall	Adequacy	00	00.00
	Inadequacy	40	100.00
Okposi salt lake	Adequacy	04	08.89
	Inadequacy	41	91.11

Table 4.shows the complaints/dislike of tourists in visiting selected sites. Among other things, tourists complained about corrosiveness of the gully (25.49%) at Agulu/Nanka erosion site, illegal hunting in the caves (21.28%) at Ogbunike caves, empty cages (28.00%) at Nekede zoo, bush covering the entrance (34.48%) of Urashi at Urashi river source, far distance of the site (32.61%) at Oferekpe waterfall and lack of tour guards (32.65%) at Okposi salt lake

Table 4: Complains/Dislike of Tourists in Visiting Selected Sites

Study sites	Complains	Frequency	Percentage
Aglu/Nanka erosion	Colored soil in the gully	13	25.49
	People still tipping sand around it	15	29.41
	Closeness of erosion to houses	10	19.61
	Erosion not stopping	07	13.73
	Cutting of trees around erosion site	06	11.76
Ogbunike caves	Illegal hunting in the caves	06	14.29
	Sacrifice to gods	05	11.90
	Long steps that lead to the caves	08	19.05
	Expensive gate fee	10	23.81
	Expensive tour guards	05	11.90
	Difficulty in transporting back	06	14.29
	Untidy environment	02	04.71
Nekede zoo	Empty cages	08	16.67
	Sighting sick animals	10	20.83
	Untidy environment	06	12.05
	Expensive gate fee	12	25.00
	Tick wire gaurs blocking view	12	25.00
Dikenafai	Bush covering the entrance	20	37.04
	Un-kept nature of the site	12	22.22
	Not having a tour guard	10	18.52
	Lack of maintenance	12	22.22
Oferekpe waterfall	Far distance of the site	09	22.05
	Logging activities	05	12.05
	Lack of maintenance	06	15.00
	Lack of awareness	12	30.00
	Lack of tour guards	08	20.00
Okposi salt lake	Lack of tour guards	14	31.11
	Bushy environment	08	17.78
	Lack of development	10	22.22
	Crude method of salt making	09	20.00
	Lack of modernization	04	08.89

Table 5 shows the challenges of ecotourism development in the research destinations. One of these challenges at Agulu/Nanka erosion site was high cost of entrance fee as well as Ogbunike caves. Bad road and lack of funds was the main challenge at Nekede zoo, lack of development at Urashi river source, bad road at Oferekpe waterfall and crude method of salt making at Okposi salt lake.

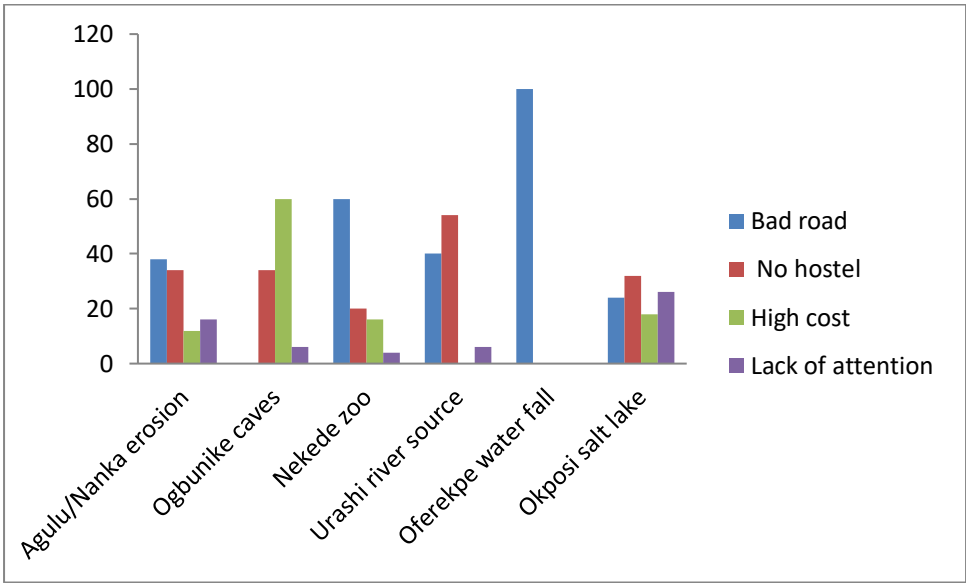


Fig. 2: Major challenges tourists experience in these sites

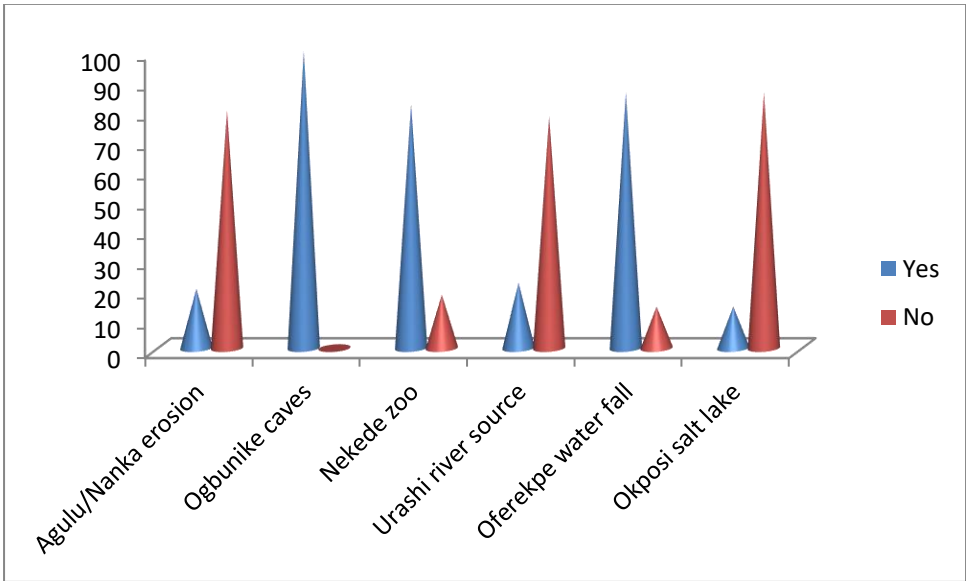


Fig. 3: Tourists satisfaction in the sites

Discussion
Demographic characteristics of Respondents

The result on Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. In all the sites, the highest respondents on age (29.24%) fall into the age bracket (36-45) years, while the least (06.30%) were >60 years. These shows that the respondents were on their responsible age that knows history of the community. The sex ratio was (67.47%) male and (32.53%) female, showing that the numbers of male respondents were more than female respondents. This indicated that the males were constant indigenes and knows more about the history of the community than most of the women who are married into the community. On marital status, (46.48%) were married, (50.37%) were unmarried and (03.30%) were divorced.

The civil servants were (40.50%), self-employed (37.48%) while the least (22.04%) are those that are not working. On years of service, (44.53%) have worked more than 11 years, (40.33%) have worked (6-10) years and the least (15.14%) have worked for (1-5) years. The highest respondents (76.31%) agreed that they have visited the sites more than 3 times, followed by (13.19%) who visited more than 2 times. The least number of respondents (10.49%) have visited just once. This ensures accuracy of the results since the highest number of respondents have visited the site several times.

Tourist reception in selected destinations

Table 2 shows the tourists reception in selected destinations. The expectation of every tourists is to receive warm welcome when arrived in a destination. This will make them happy, feel at home and willing to repeat visits. These corroborate the findings of Hana, (2016), that good reception made on tourism sector can increase the number of tourists. The tourists reported that they received warm reception at four destinations of study areas which are; Agulu/Nanka erosion site (46.00%), Ogbunike caves (38.00%), Urashi river source (64.00%) and Okposi salt lake (60.00%). This is because they have tour guards, though some of them are not trained. These sites welcome tourists warmly because they want more tourists to visit their sites. Also the access fees can easily be affordable in these sites. This corresponds with the findings of Asuk and Ifebueme (2018) that affordable access fee can attracts more tourists. The reception at Nekede zoo was indifference (54.00%) because of an increase in access fee. This site was also managed by state government and they always regard it as government property. The reception was poor (62.00%) at Oferekpe waterfall because of the interior location of the site. There are a lot of primitive natives who don't understand English language, and there were no tour guards in this site to welcome and direct

tourists as stated by Alabi, (2001) that poor services will impair the growth and benefits of ecotourism sites.

Working facilities at the destinations

In Table 3, the tourist reported that the facilities in all the sites were inadequate while some have no facilities at all like Urashi river source and Oferekpe waterfall. The facilities at Agulu/Nanka erosion site were inadequate (86.27%). Those of Ogbunike caves were inadequate (80.95%), Nekede zoo were inadequate (89.58%). Urashi river source has no facility (00.00%), Oferekpe waterfall has no facility (00.00%) and Okposi salt lake has inadequate (91.11%) facilities. Good and functioning facilities promote the activities of ecotourism as stated by Ijeomah (2007) that ecotourism destinations cannot function well with poor and inadequate facilities.

Complaint/dislike of tourist at destinations

Table 4 shows the complains/dislike of tourists in visiting selected sites. Among other things, tourists complained about fearful layers of colored soil in the gully (25.49%) at Agulu/Nanka erosion site. The colored soil profiles are very fearful at sight, more especially the 'echo' that repeat sound when one is talking. Likewise, the tourists dislike illegal hunting in the caves (21.28%) at Ogbunike. Some hunt birds, rodents, fishes and crocodiles. Both the community and staff regard it as illegal activities to the site. Tourists also complained about some empty cages (28.00%) at Nekede zoo. This make the zoo seems as if it is about to close. They suggested that government should replace dead animals in the zoo, especially the ones that attract tourists most. They complained about bush covering the entrance (34.48%) of Urashi at Urashi river source, far distance of the site (32.61%) at Oferekpe waterfall and lack of tour guards (32.65%) at Okposi salt lake.

Challenges of ecotourism development in research destinations

Fig. 2 shows the challenges of ecotourism development in the research destinations. One of these challenges at Agulu/Nanka erosion site was weather condition (41.18%). It was during the rainy

season that more erosion used to collapse. Slow development (33.33%) was the main challenge at Ogbunike caves, though the community tried to build administrative block that took them many years to complete. There was no facilities yet inside the administrative block and the tour guards were not trained. Lack of funds (35.42%) was the main challenge at Nekede zoo, lack of development (42.59%) at Urashi river source, bad road (45.00%) at Oferekpe waterfall and crude method (48.89%) of salt making at Okposi salt lake. There are other challenges like increased access fee, poor management which draws the destinations backward. Working hard by every stakeholder of these sites can help to eliminate some of these challenges, according to Ijeomah (2007) who stated that ecotourism thrives only where the challenges it poses could be overcome.

CONCLUSION

There are various operations going on in different ecotourism destinations in south eastern Nigeria which include nature of tourist reception and environmental education strategies used by the management. Some of these ecotourism operations like poor reception at Oferekpe waterfall need to be corrected. The best education strategies like the use of trained tour guards need to be adopted so that there will be someone to explain facts about the sites. Good working facilities will enhance proper functioning of the sites and attract more tourists. More trees should be planted in Agulu/Nanka erosion site to reduce the intensity of the erosion. Tourist complaints like collection of sand from the already existing erosion and hunting at Ogbunike caves should stop. Though each community has a way and reasons for protecting their destination, they have peculiar challenges that were associated to their sites. Some of these challenges was bad weather at Agulu/Nanka erosion site, slow development at Ogbunike caves, lack of funds at Nekede zoo, lack

of development at Urashi river source, bad road at Oferekpe waterfall and crude method of salt production at Okposi salt lake. Provision of adequate infrastructure, access roads, further development of the sites and proper publicity will make the destinations more popular and beneficial to the inhabitants of south eastern Nigeria and Nigeria as a whole.

Recommendations

1. Adequate management committee should be formed both in host communities and government to look into bad operations going on in these destinations.
2. Effective publicity and awareness of all the sites should be done because some members of the community are not even aware of the existence of a site like Oferekpe water fall.
3. There is also need to scout for funding which will add more operations to the sites.
4. There is also need for the enlistment of these sites in the Nigerian map as tourist attractions in Nigeria as such measures would make the world to know about them. There should be periodic organization of symposia and other seminar workshops to enlighten the masses on the relevance of ecotourism to national development through the appreciation and promotion of these sites.
5. It is also necessary to ensure adequate security in the tourist destination to ensure the safety of lives and properties of potential visitors. For effectiveness the security network need to be dominated by members of host communities but with professional monitoring and control.

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