PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE USE OF RIVERS FOR TOURISM AND RECREATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
In view of the sudden increase in tourism and recreation activities in Nigeria in recent years, there is low sensitisation and awareness creation on the urgent needs to promote sustainable use of rivers as natural tourism havens. To tackle this phenomenon, the qualitative paper examined the issue of sustainable use of rivers for tourism and recreation purposes. It attempts a categorization of tourism resources and a review of the concepts of tourism, recreation, ecotourism and tourist destinations within the framework of sustainable use of rivers in Nigeria. Furthermore, it highlights the various ways by which rivers can be used for recreation and provide attractions to tourists. It also identified some misuses of rivers such as dumping, sand dredging from river beds, domestic and industrial pollution as factors militating against sustainable use of rivers for tourism and recreation. The paper proposes environmental education of both tourists and residents on the need for sustainable use of rivers.

Keywords: Ecotourism, recreation, tourism, sustainable, rivers

Introduction
In recent years, there has been a phenomenal growth in tourism and recreational activities in Nigeria. This development stems from the awareness that both tourism and recreation provide opportunity for the citizen to know and understand his own environment. In addition, the two activities have health benefits such as promotion of the physical wellness of individuals, lowering stress and depression, promoting emotional, social and intellectual wellbeing and general improvement of quality of life. Consequently, these activities are important and need to be promoted in all its ramifications.

Following from the above perspective, this paper focuses on rivers as an aspect of tourism and recreation destinations in Nigeria, attempts a categorization of tourism destinations in Nigeria and it highlights various ways rivers are misused for tourism and recreational purposes. It also reviews the meaning of the concepts of tourism, recreation, ecotourism and sustainable use of rivers with a view of recommending ways of promoting tourism and recreation through sustainable use of rivers.

There seems to be no generally accepted definition of the term tourism. Although it is relatively easy to propose a technical definition of a particular class of tourism or tourist, but the wider concept is ill-defined (Holloway & Taylor, 2006). However a search of the existing literature shows that the earliest attempt at defining tourism was by Professor Hunziker and Kraft of Berne University (Switzerland) in 1942. The duo defined tourism as the sum of the phenomena and relationship arising from the travel and stay of non-residents in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected to any earning activity. Similarly, the Institute of Tourism (1976) defined the concept as the temporary short-term movement of people to destinations outside places where they normally live and work, and activities during their stay at these destinations. It includes movement for all purposes, as well as day visits or excursions. These definitions clearly bring to the fore the issue of tourism destinations which forms the fulcrum of the definition by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) as endorsed by the United Nations (UN) Statistical Commission in 1993. According to the WTO, tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one

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consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes.

In contrast, recreation is a leisure activity that does not involve long travels or distance of more than 40km (Ojo, 1983). Studies in recreation can be conveniently divided into those concerned primarily with the demand for varied pursuits, and those which focus on the supply of available resources. Furthermore, demand studies fall into three broad categories. The first examines the whole pattern of demand of the total population over the full range of leisure activities. The second group seek to isolate the population pursuing a particular activity and thus to examine its characteristics in far more detail than would otherwise be possible. The third category changes the focus from participant to place or environment and concentrate attention on site where a specific type of recreation is undertaken. Thus recreation is usually carried out by individuals within a geographical definition.

Tourism and recreation destinations are of two kinds, they may either be natural or constructed. Whether natural or constructed, tourist destinations have been delineated according to geographical features as follows:

(i) Seaside tourism
(ii) Rural tourism and
(iii) Urban tourism

Seaside tourism includes seaside resorts, natural beaches, boating holidays etc. Rural tourism include the most common categories of lakes and mountains, agritourism – such as farm holidays, botanical and zoological gardens, rural retreats, rivers and canals holidays, wildlife parks and national parks. Urban tourism includes visits to cities, towns, capitals etc.

With regards to the natural destinations, scholars have used the word ‘ecotourism’. Though several definitions of the term abound, a workable definition proposed by Brouse (1992) is that ecotourism refer to responsible travel in which the visitor is aware of and takes into account the effect of his action both on the host culture and the environment. This presupposes that ecotourism encompasses conserving the environment in order not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem and nurturing an understanding of the environment, culture and natural history. In other words, ecotourism has the ambitious aim of using tourist destinations sustainably.

Sustainable use of tourism destinations can be conceived as the practice of putting natural phenomena such as rivers to tourist use in such a way that the needs of the present tourists are met while protecting and enhancing opportunities for future tourists. It is simply a matter of intergenerational equity. If tourism resources are used in ways that are not sustainable, it would affect future generations of tourists.

Categorization of Nigerian tourism destinations

The Nigerian physical landscape offers a variety of both natural and man-made tourism resources, such as game reserves, forest reserves and plantation, national parks, beaches, scenic cultural and historical resources etc. These resources can be classified in line with the division stated earlier. Consequently tourism destinations in Nigeria can be categorized into: Seaside tourism destinations – examples are the Bar Beach, Takwa Bay, Coconut Beach, Lekki Beach all in Lagos State also Calabar Beach and Obudu Beach in Cross Rivers State; Rural tourism destinations – example include Obudu Ranch, Assop Waterfalls, Farin Ruwa Falls (Wamba), Yankari National Park, Wikki Warm Spring (Bauchi), Mambila Plateau, Gashaka – Gumti National Park, Cross River National Park at Okwango and Oban, Kainji Dam and Kainji Lake National Park, University of Ibadan Zoological and Botanical Gardens, Rivers Niger and Benue, Ethiope River in Delta State; Urban tourism destinations include Abuja City, Lagos Metropolis, Calabar City, Kano City, 3Armed Zone and Malam Aminu Kano Triangle, Dutse City [Jigawa State], Lafia City, Presidential Lodge and City Hall Tourism Complex [Nasarawa State] etc.
Nigeria is located approximately between Longitude 3°E and 15°E and Latitude 4°N and 14°N over an area of 923,768 sq km, which comprise of 910,768 sq km of land and 13,000 sq km of water spread across rivers and lakes. The country is bordered in the north by Niger Republic, by the Republic of Benin to the west, the Republic of Cameroon to the east. On the southern flank is the Bight of Benin, which covers approximately 853 km of the country’s coastline. This coastline comprises the delta of River Niger, Lagos Lagoon, bars beaches and estuaries which are veritable tourist destinations.

The Rivers of Nigeria are categorized into three groups based on their drainage patterns. They are:

(i) Coastal rivers which are short and swift flowing e.g. Rivers Owena, Ogun and Osun.
(ii) Rivers that flow into Lake Chad e.g. Hadeija, Hamadugu, Yobe etc, and
(iii) Those that flow out and into Nigeria e.g. Rivers Niger, Benue and their tributaries of Sokoto, Gongola, Kaduna, Katsina-Ala and Cross River.

Nigerian Rivers presents a lot of natural and constructed tourist attractions and destinations. Examples of such attractions include the various dams such as Kainji, Shiroro, Ojirami etc. and waterfalls such as Assop falls, Farin Ruwa falls [Wamba] etc., Source of River Ethiope, Confluence of Rivers Niger and Benue, etc. In addition, cultural festivals are held in some rivers and in this way provide attraction for tourists e.g. Argungu fishing festival in Kebbi State, numerous boat regalia in Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta States.

Misuses of rivers as tourism destinations

Though rivers provide destinations for tourism and recreation activities, they are frequently misused, thereby militating against their sustainable use for these purposes. Some of the ways, rivers are misused include: inland sand dredging, domestic and industrial pollution, waste dumping. There has been an upsurge in sand mining in river beds in Nigeria in recent times to meet increased demand for the resource for construction purposes. The dredging of sand disrupts the ecology of affected rivers thereby making them unsuitable for recreation and tourism activities.

Increased population and industrial activities have resulted in the generation of huge amount of solid waste which is indiscriminately discharged into water bodies such as rivers, streams and lakes. If this happen the quality of the water may be affected and this limits the use of such water bodies for recreation and tourism.
Plate 2: Flooded River Benue in Loko Transit Community in Nasarawa State a superb spot for tourism and recreation

**Promoting sustainable use of rivers for tourism and recreation**

For sustainable use of rivers to promote tourism and recreation in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proffered.

1. Educate the tourists and residents on the need to protect the ecological integrity of rivers vis-a-vis the environment. Such education should encompass the goals of environmental education as outlined by the Tbilisi Inter-governmental conference on Environmental Education. The components of these goals are: awareness, sensitivity, attitudes, skills and participation. In essence the education of the tourists and residents should stimulate their awareness on the need to use rivers sustainably, and making them to gain a variety of experience. In addition, to making them develop a sense of concern for the environment; it should also make them to develop skills for handling environmental issues and opportunity to be involved in the resolutions of problems arising from their interactions with the environment.

2. The government at both state and federal levels should formulate policies and laws to guide the activities of tourists in their destinations to forestall the abuse of the environment. Tourism cannot thrive in a society where the physical environment is fragrantly abused and misused. More so, too many visitors to eco-tour spots such as rivers can damage the ecosystem and disrupt diverse species of organisms and even the aesthetic quality.

**Conclusion**

Rivers constitute part of the natural environment that is used for tourism and recreation activities. Owing to the role of these leisure activities on the economic, physical and mental wellbeing of the citizens, via the reduction and elimination of stresses, fatigue and hypertension amongst youths and aged it is therefore imperative that rivers should be sustainably used to ensure intergenerational continuity of these activities.

**References**

