

RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism can simply be defined as leisure trips to rural areas. There are clear differences between the rural areas and urban settlements in Nigeria. The low ebb of infrastructural development, population size, and economic activities of the former areas are accountable for these clear-cut differences. There is a lot of attention on the urban areas due to their socio-economic vibrancy which are lacking in the rural regions. However, mother nature has blessed different parts of Nigeria's rural areas with various gifts of nature that are either enshrouded in thick forests, rivers, mountains, caves and other heritages. These gifts of nature are tourism attractions as they were. Some of these gifts of nature in rural areas were examined in this study. This study, therefore, examined the prospects and challenges involved in the development of rural tourism in Nigeria, using Oroke-ewo in Ilupeju Ekiti, Agbele rock in Igbeti and Iho-Oloko in Ikere-Ekiti as case studies. Key Informant Interview (KII) and archaeological reconnaissance were used in gathering necessary data from the field. The data obtained from the field were interpreted on a descriptive basis using textual analysis. The study, therefore, revealed that many rural areas in Nigeria are blessed with potential tourism locations, but it is pathetic that much of the tourism potentials of such rural areas have not been harnessed for tourism purposes. Some of the challenges include infrastructural challenges, government policies, and inadequate public enlightenment.

Keywords: *Rural tourism, Tourism attractions, Prospects and Challenges.*

Introduction

Many rural areas in Nigeria are blessed with works of nature that could be developed into tourism attractions. The negligence of such works of nature is usually because they are located in rural or remote parts of the country. Various definitions have been given to the word 'rural'. While, some scholars refer to rural areas as rural communities, others such as Sharpley and

Sharpley (1997) describe the term ‘rural’ as all areas, both land and water, that lie beyond towns and cities which, in national and regional contexts, may be described as major urban centers. Rural areas still retain unspoiled traditional and spiritual values, especially the ethnographic, the socio-economic life and its environment, thus enabling the development of rural tourism, with a great future, being in a direct relationship with other forms of tourism (Nistoreanu and Marinela, 2011). Ian (2001) opines that rural communities are, in reality, ‘stuck’ between a rock and a hard place when we consider the physical geography of their situation, being between the city and the wilderness. Rural areas are parts of the nation that are characterized by low level infrastructural and social development and usually have low internally generated revenue. Such areas are usually blessed with undisturbed or least disturbed ecological attributes. They usually have unimpaired ecosystem. The ecological attributes they have include the following: an array of green plants, array of forests, pockets of wild and farm animals, air that has not been polluted with factory discharge, and streams.

Ashley and Maxwell (2001), as cited in Roselyn et al (2012) point out that common features of rural space are, firstly, spaces where human settlement and infrastructure occupy only small patches of the landscape, most of which are dominated by fields and pastures, woods and forest, water, mountain, hills and desert. Secondly, they are places where most people spend most of their working time on farms, usually on subsistence basis. Thirdly, there is abundance and relative cheapness of land. Fourthly, there are high transaction costs, associated with long distance and poor infrastructure, and lastly, geographical conditions that increase political transaction costs and magnify the possibility of elite capture or urban bias are common and rife.

The clusters of people that reside in rural areas form rural communities. The typical attributes of rural communities in Nigeria is peasant farming and low educational status among the people. Although, the educational status of the rural communities may be low yet they have their specific ways of making tasks easy for themselves. Meanwhile, all cities and towns in Nigeria had once been rural areas occupied by rural community members. Rural community members have absolute or almost absolute dependence on nature for survival. They usually solely depend on agricultural outputs and little art and craft work for survival. Their level of sophistication in

respect to modern technology usage and adoption is low, if not nil. However, it is noteworthy that most of these rural areas in Nigeria have untapped tourism potentials.

Concept of Rural tourism

Lane (1993) submits that although rural tourism is simply defined as ‘tourism that takes place in the country side’, this definition does not include the complexity of the activities and the different forms and meaning developed in different regions of the world, as well as the number of protagonists in rural tourism. Rural tourism can be described as journey to rural parts of a country, not basically to make money, but to either rest from the hustle and bustle of towns or to behold the works of nature domiciled in the specific rural area. Rural tourism can also be termed as nature-based tourism because tourists are closer to nature when on rural tourism. Surugiu (2009) explains that rural tourism is a form of tourism that takes place in rural areas and involves exploitation of natural and anthropogenic tourist resources of the rural area, and the conduct of social and economic activities that generate benefits for local communities.

Lane (1994) posits that rural tourism extends beyond farm-based tourism to include: special-interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and in some areas, ethnic tourism. Lane (1994) further opines that rural tourism in its purest form should be, first, located in rural areas; second functionally rural – built upon the rural world’s special features of small-scale enterprise, open space, contact with nature and the natural world heritage; third, rural in scale – both in terms of buildings and settlements – and, therefore, usually small-scale, and fourth, traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, and connected with local families. It will often be very largely controlled locally and developed for the long term good of the area.

The concept of rural tourism, according to Grefe (1994) could be viewed from three different perspectives when observed from the supply angle, viz: it is perceived as working class tourist phenomenon within local residents in rural areas; it is associated with a particular form of accommodation, as well as with the option of undertaking specific activities, and it is defined as a type of holiday where the place of stay is on a farm and the organized activities are connected

with and around the farm. In this case rural tourism is limited to farm tourism or agricultural tourism. Rural tourism is much about withdrawal from urban settlements to get closer to nature for a specific period of time. To make such stay in the rural area a palatable one, there must have been good accommodation and lodging facilities provided for or procured by the tourists. Although, the accommodation and lodging facilities may not be as sophisticated as those found in urban areas, they would have the necessary infrastructure and equipment to make the stay of the tourist comfortable. Usually, tourists do not expect much sophistication but rather satisfaction and pleasure. The fastest growing component of tourism is 'nature-based' tourism, which involves excursions to national parks and wilderness areas and to developing countries where a large chunk of the world's biodiversity is concentrated (Olson et al., 2001; Christ et al., 2003).

Tourism in rural or community areas opens up hitherto abandoned locations to development, because different investors would be attracted to such locations. Development of rural tourism could be cost effective because of the availability and accessibility of natural resources within the rural community. Egbali et al. (2011) reiterated this fact by stating that rural tourism development has always been a valuable, growing economic strategy and an advantage of low risks and costs and, considering that resources are available, costs are low and plans are smaller compared to other tourism plans or projects.

According to UNWTO (2005), tourists are people who travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited. A tourist is also regarded as a person who travels outside of his normal environment for a period of more than 24 hours (Mathieson and Wall, 1982). Hence, rural tourists are those tourists that are involved in rural tourism. Rural or local tourists usually do not necessarily need travel documents (passport, visa, statement of accounts and so on) before they could embark on tourism. Also the distance between the residence of rural tourists and the rural tourism destination is usually not much, unlike the distance between a tourist's residence and international tourism location. The cool breeze and the fresh smell of green plants/crops leave rural tourists refreshed and healed. Some of these tourists embark on rural tourism in order to: rest from the hassles of urban regions, get

some issues ironed out through deep thoughts, appreciate nature, engage in spiritual meditation, hold private meeting/conferences, and conduct research.

A rural tourist is not expected to spend much money while on tourism when compared to tourists in cities. This may be because rural communities are the closest to nature, so the food served the tourists is expected to be indigenous and cheap. Also, the cost of transportation within such rural area is expected to be cheap because of low population density and low level of development.

Advantages of rural tourism

It is noteworthy that rural tourism has advantages and disadvantages depending on individual perspective. According to Ashley et al (2001), one advantage that is particular to rural tourism is that the nature of the product often involves enterprises that feature local ownership such as bed and breakfasts, home visits and farm stays. This, in a way, boosts the rural economy and financial status of the local entrepreneurs. Humaira (2010) opined that rural tourism cash flows can assist job retention in services such as retailing, transport, hospitality and medical care. It can also provide additional income for farmers, and, in some cases, for foresters and fisherman.

As Gannon (1994) and Kieselbach and Long (1990), cited in Roselyn, et al, (2012), indicate the development of tourism can help address several problems through: economic growth, economic diversification and stabilization; employment creation, as primary source of income but most importantly secondary source of income; reduced out-migration and possibly re-population; maintenance and improvement of public services; infrastructural improvements; revitalizing crafts, customs and cultural identities; protection and improvement of both the natural and built environment; and increasing recognition of rural priorities and potential by policy-makers and economic planners.

Indeed, rural tourism helps promote cottage business and industry within the rural area. In terms of economic growth, as a result of tourism activities, Christ (1998) pointed out that the funds accrued from tourism were spent on maintaining a village borehole and water pump, expanding the village school and purchasing food for villagers during a drought. Environmental improvements such as village paving and traffic regulation schemes, sewage and litter disposal can be assisted by tourism revenues and political pressures from tourism authorities (Humaira,

2010), which shows how much more tourism could help clean the environment and maintain ecological biodiversity.

Disadvantages of Rural Tourism

Tourism has certain deleterious or harmful effects on the rural community. Some of the disadvantages of rural tourism are:

Firstly, as many as 90% of all rural tourism businesses are small businesses, with half of these being family owned and operated (Carlsen and Getz, 2001). Based on this, therefore, a lot of the revenue accrued from rural tourism goes to a family which would definitely lead to monopoly of resources, power and authority if care is not taken.

Secondly, influx of tourists to rural regions could impair or destroy the ecosystem of such rural areas if not well managed, particularly with indiscriminate dumping of refuse, and destroying of soil structure and texture by continuous trampling. McDougall and Wright (2004) observed that trampling of the fragile vegetation along the highest mountain ridges in Australia resulted in a decline in native species' richness on the track compared to adjacent vegetation, as well as a decline in the abundance of species. In essence, the presence of tourists in a rural tourism location would one way or the other impair the ecosystem of the area.

Thirdly, there could be defacing of historic monuments and buildings and trampling upon archaeological sites and features by large numbers of visitors especially when paths or passages provided get congested (Okpoko and Okpoko, 2002). The problem of defacing monuments is associated with developers who sometimes build high-rise structures like hotels in areas of natural beauty, in a place of historical/archaeological value or at strategic places which could be better used as park or green areas (Ogechi, 2005). Building of such hospitality structures in a place where Natural Park or game reserve is supposedly to be located is a situation of misplaced priority, which would leave the ecosystem in such area totally impaired.

Fourthly, tourism can facilitate the spread of infectious diseases to the rural populace. Wilson (2002) submitted that even tourists traveling to and from remote locations typically rely on major transport channels, often located in major cities, from which they disperse to home and work environments where the spread of diseases can grow. Any indigene of the local tourism area that

comes in contact with a deadly infectious disease becomes unlucky and thereafter becomes a donor of the disease.

Fifthly, tourists can be a vehicle for the carriage of weeds to rural areas. Weeds are unwanted plants that grow and compete for space and nutrients with food or cash crops. Hence, seeds of weeds conveyed usually through clothes of tourists, would lead to low level of agricultural productivity in the tourism destination. For example, a study carried out about a decade ago which evaluated the risk of cargo, food and tourists as vectors for the introduction of exotic plants into sub-Antarctic islands, found a wide diversity of exotic seeds in the clothing of tourists including taxa that are classified as environmental weeds (Whinam et al. 2005). Fig. 1 is model that depicts the advantages and disadvantages of rural tourism.

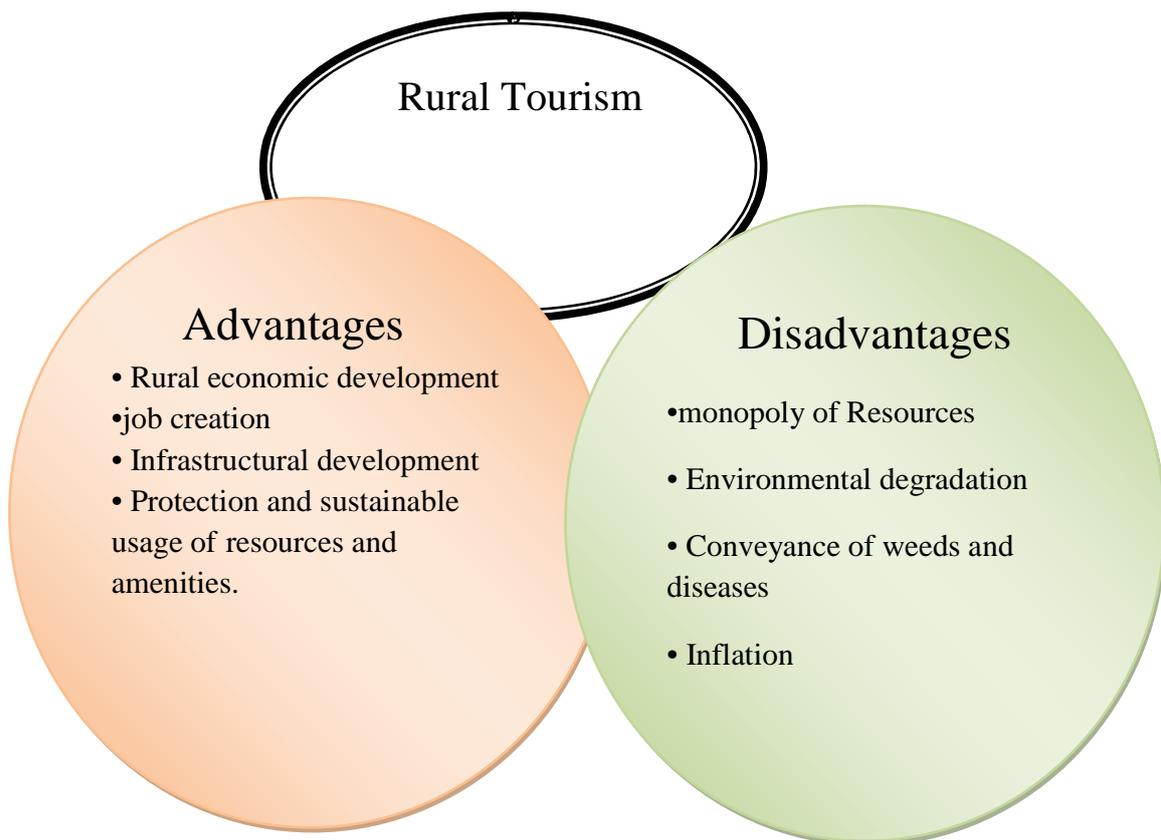


Figure 1: A model showing the advantages and disadvantages of rural tourism

Tourism development in Nigeria

Different regions of the world are today concentrating their economic mainstay on tourism. It is natural that when an individual makes money and have sufficient savings, such an individual would spend the money by exploring new dishes, new environments, and new events and so on. All these new things and experiences are one way or the other elements of tourism. Hence, different countries have made and are still making a lot of efforts to expand their tourism industry in respect of meeting the steady expanding demand of tourists. Mohammad et al. (2011) opine that the tourism industry has been experiencing tremendous expansion over the years as attested to by its inclusion into the national economic plan of developed and developing economies of the world. The tourism industry of Nigeria has attained considerable growth over the years. But it is not particularly developed yet, because there are still many untapped or undeveloped tourism potentials and assets within the country. These undeveloped tourism potentials and assets are both located within the rural and urban areas of the country. Many rural parts of the country are basically filled with untapped tourism potentials while urban parts of the country are filled with once developed and now neglected tourism assets. Among the numerous examples of untapped tourism assets in the rural parts of Nigeria are Agbele rock located in Igbeti area of Oyo state, Oroke-ewo that is located in Ilupeju-Ekiti of Ekiti state, Iho-Oloko rock shelter/cave in Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti state, Ayunkunugba water fall in Oke-Ila Orangun, Osun state, the cultural landscape of mounds at Gberefu on the outer barrier beach of Badagry and the Iwo Eleru rock shelter at Isharun near Igbara-Oke, Ondo state (this rock shelter produced the skeleton of the oldest Man as yet found in West Africa, formerly dated radiometrically to about 11,000 years old but now believed to have been as old as 16,000 years). Examples of once developed and neglected tourism assets in urban areas are Ibadan Trans Amusement Park and the Bower's Tower located in Sapati area of Ibadan, among others (see Okpoko and Okpoko 2002 for a comprehensive list of tourist attractions in the different parts of the country).

Tourism development in any country is a subject of readiness of the government of such country to embrace development in such aspect of the economy. Even if a private company would embark on tourism asset development, there must have been prior approval and authorization from the Government of the day, otherwise the company might lose its investment and assets to

the Government. Governments of some States in Nigeria are aware of the importance of tourism development and the continued increased revenue generation that may accrue from tourism development. Such Governments have developed some of their tourism potentials into a competitive tourism location. Meanwhile, Governments of some States in Nigeria are probably not just ready to develop tourism for whatever reason or are not aware of the significance of tourism for revenue generation and socio-economic development. It is noteworthy that certain tourism locations such as Obudu cattle ranch is internationally competitive and attracts a lot of international visitors. The Ikogosi warm spring resort in Ekiti State was also developed to international standard by the past Government of Dr Kayode Fayemi.

Tourism development is highly essential for any tourist venture or organization. Tourism development is basically the means of initiating tourism activities and ensuring tourism continually thrives in a particular location over a period of time, by adequately putting the necessary resources in place. The basic paraphernalia needed for tourism to continually thrive are: careful planning, proper execution, excellent administration, effective management practice, good marketing mix, good feedback mechanism, excellent maintenance and monitoring ability. A proper combination of these mentioned factors enhances tourism development. The saying that failure to plan is planning to fail applies to the tourism industry, hence the need for careful planning of tourism development. Long (2012) thus posits that tourism development without proper planning and integration with local values and environment can lead to socio-cultural, environmental and economic damage. Execution which basically means 'putting into effect' is very paramount to tourism, because without putting into effect a tourism site, it cannot attract tourists.

Rural tourism in Nigeria: Prospects

The prospect of rural tourism in Nigeria is great, with the abundant tourism potentials. However, in examining the prospects and challenges, three case studies are selected among numerous examples. These are Oroke-ewo war site located in Ilupeju Ekiti, Ekiti state, Agbele rock in Igbeti area of Oyo State (a popular natural heritage) and Iho-Oloko rock shelter in Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti state (Fig. 2). Data on these sites were collected through Key Informant and structured

interview, archaeological reconnaissance and excavations. The data were analyzed through descriptive methods.

Oroke-ewo simply means the hill of the Ewo people. The Ewo people are one of the two tribes that make up Ilupeju Ekiti (the two groups are namely Egosi or Ewo and Egebemeta). According to an informant, Oroke ewo is a preserved war site between the warriors of Ilorin which one Ali championed and the Ewo people. According to tradition, when the war broke out between these two kingdoms, the spiritually-inclined war prowess of the Ewo people surpassed that of Ali and his entourage; hence Ali was turned into a stone image. A camel and a big drum were said to have been the basic war paraphernalia that Ali had. As the war raged on, whenever Ali directed his war camel to any part of the war front, all the enemies' soldiers on such side would die off; and when the war got too intense and Ali beat his big drum, any enemy soldiers that heard the sound of the big drum died instantly. Ali is claimed to have used these war weapons to overcome several communities and took them captive. Oral tradition further claimed that Ali prayed on his mat with the intention of attacking the Ewo community just after his prayers. However, while he

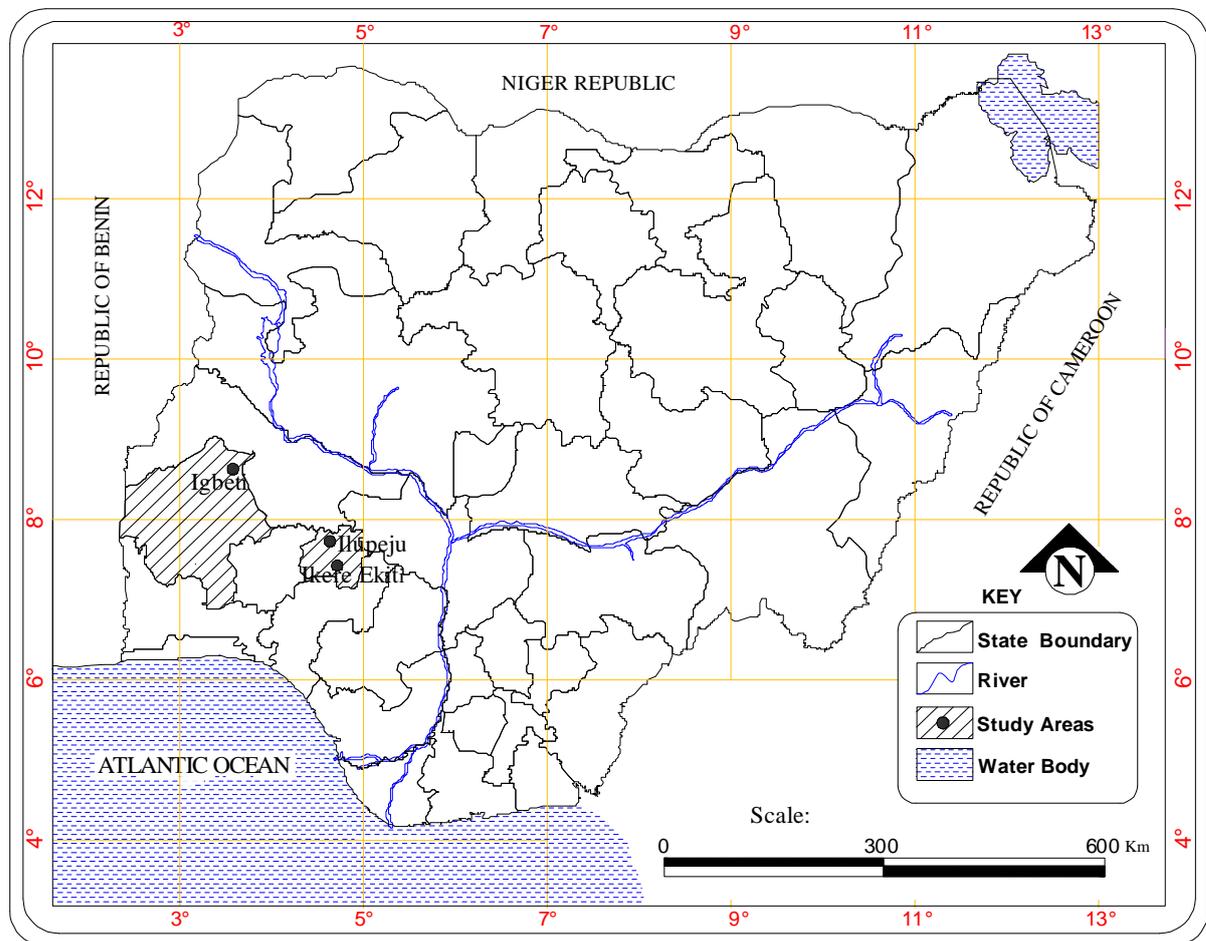


Fig. 2: Sites mentioned in the text

was still praying the responsive warriors of Ewo land attacked and conquered Ali's men and also turned his war camel into a Baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*) (Plate 1) and his war drum to a rock (Plate 2). Ewo kingdom's war men went after Ali who was still praying, when he saw Ewo kingdom's warlords coming to get him, he fled. But the warriors quickly enchanted him and turned him into a stone image and his praying mat into a flat rock. Till date, when a stone or rock piece is hit on the drum-turned rock on Orokewo hill, the drum resonates.



Plate 1: Supposed war camel turned into Baobab tree.



Plate 2: The drum-turned rock

Furthermore, some stone figures were reported to have been located very close to the hill by some researchers some decades ago (Ogundiran, 2016: personal comm.). These were beautifully carved stones looking similar to those enigmatic stone figures of Esie in Kwara State. A recent research visit to the hill by the authors did not yield information about the location of these stone figures.

Other potential tourist attractions on the hill are other gigantic baobab trees, rocks, and a water body that is of spiritual importance not very far from the hill. This water body is a pool within a depressed circular landscape. It is said to have been the people's major source of water before the abandonment of their first settlement for the present site. To the northern boundary of this pool, known as *omi aremo* is a row of extremely weathered granitic boulders cut out and arranged in such a way that made them looked natural. Oral tradition has it that the mermaid spirit of the water used to come out in the past anytime it was called and would give hen to the people to go and rear and return to it some of the chicken produced by the hen. They also sought

other forms of assistance from the water. If properly developed these monuments could become fascinating tourist attractions.

Agbele Rock in Igbeti, Oyo state.

Agbele rock in Igbeti, Oyo state is a monument to marvel at. The story behind the formation of Agbele rock is quite fascinating. There are two versions of the mode of formation of this rock. The first version is that in time past there used to be a valiant and powerful thief. This thief would come at unexpected times to cart away the residents' farm produce. The thief engaged in this nefarious act for several years. So, the elders of the Igbeti kingdom consulted the oracle which instructed them to carry out some rituals. The thief came as usual to steal their belongings but because they had carried out the rituals the oracle demanded of them, the oracle alerted the chief warrior of Igbeti about the presence of the thief among them. So, they eventually apprehended the thief on a hill. The thief was apprehended with a big basket on his head containing stolen items. The warriors then turned the thief together with the basket on his head into a stone image (Plate 3). This stone image is what is now known as Agbele rock.

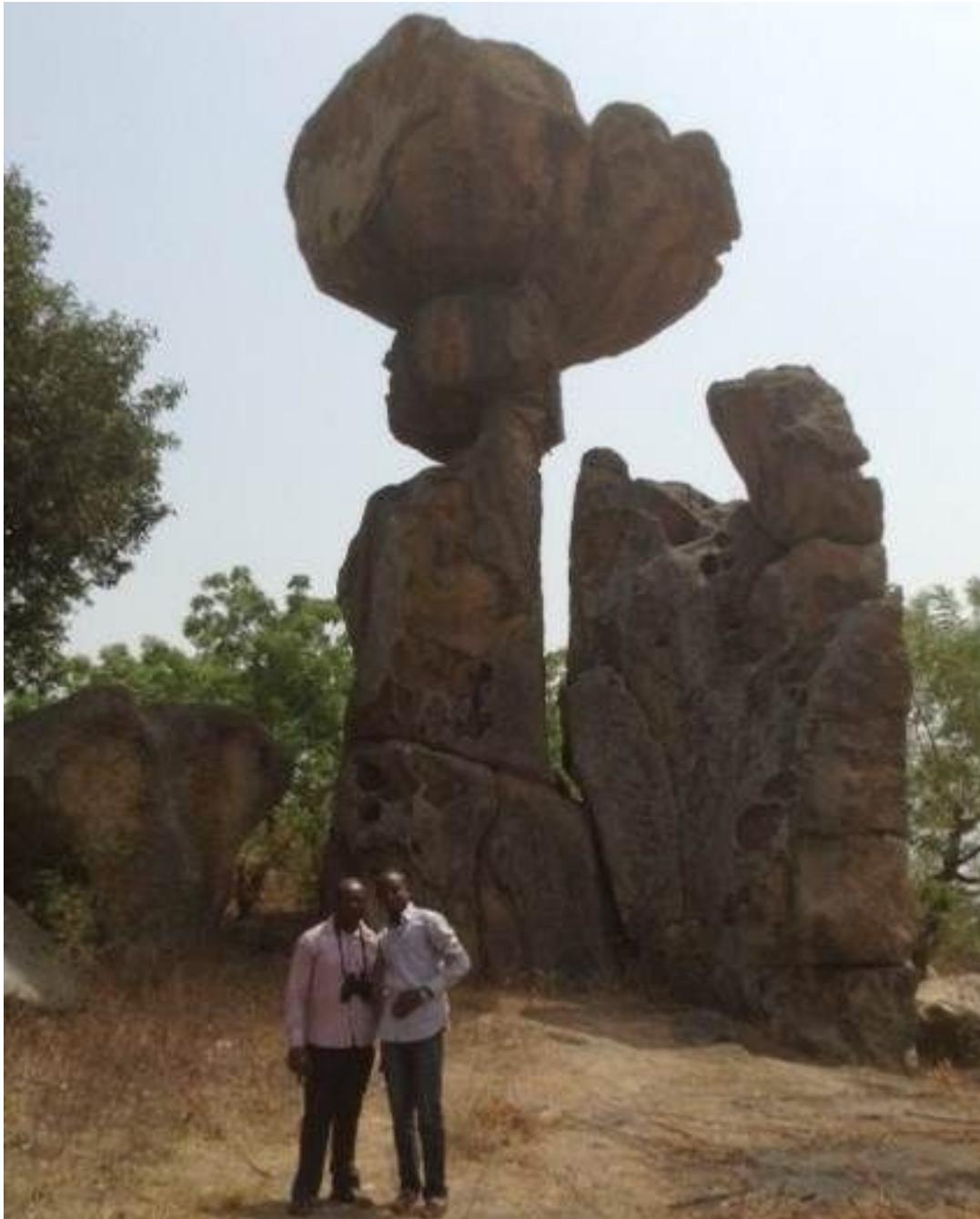


Plate 3: Agbele rock

The second version is however, scientific. It is just a normal rock formation that derived from the magma that poured out from the interior of the earth at the time of its formation. But whether

they are mythical or natural, the rocks are delicately placed on one another in a very puzzling and captivating manner.

Iho Oloko rock shelter/cave

This rock shelter/cave is located in Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State. Although its tourism potential had been discussed in an earlier paper, we cull it here to bring out its rural tourism potential. It is located within the hill ranges of Ugele and Olosunta. The Olosunta, together with Orole are hills with potential tourist attraction. The later is an imposing inselberg on the community's landscape.

The rock shelter/cave is found at the foot of a conglomerate of rocks and hills with a thick forest vegetation cover. Our informant, Chief Olotin informed us that the rock shelter/cave derived its name from an animal called *Oloko (ikoko)*, that is hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*) which used to live in the shelter where it came down to kill their domestic animals, particularly goat. Tradition has it that the rock shelter was occupied by the first settler to the area, now called Oke-Ikere about five centuries ago. He was said to have been a hunter who left Ile-Ife to carve a niche for himself. He lived in the shelter with his entourage for some months before moving to the adjoining plain. They, however, would retire to the shelter anytime there was an impending war. Indeed, it would be difficult for an approaching enemy to know that people were living there in the shelter, because, ordinarily from the foreground, no one would suspect any human living there (Plate 4



Plate 4: General view of the rock shelter (directly behind the building, engulfed in a thick forest)

The rock shelter is a very large one, with five compartments. The rock is of porphyritic granitic composition, and, although there are five entry points, it is commonly entered the west via a cocoa farm. Two compartments are immediately encountered after this ‘main’ entrance, both of which lead to a long and wide corridor. Two other compartments are seen after the corridor to the northwest. Each of the compartments can conveniently house between ten and fifteen people at a time. Southeast of the corridor is the cave which is about two meters wide at the entrance. As Fatunsin et al (1995) noted, within compartment 1, there is a unique arrangement of rock boulders which seemed to have served sitting purposes. The compartments had surface potsherd litters, ground stone axe and microliths.

Archaeological test pitting was carried out at three points within the rock shelter and entrance of the cave. Much of the materials recovered were potsherds. Others included few microliths, mostly flakes, rusted iron and slag and hammerstones. A radiocarbon date of 620 ± 60 bp (calibrated to 1280-1420 AD) was obtained from charcoal recovered from level 30 cm of test pit 2. Details of the archaeological work have been given elsewhere (Alabi and Aleru, 2013).

The Iho-Oloko rock shelter holds great potential for rural tourism. As noted above, it is a large shelter with five compartments, with compartment 1 having boulders that seemed to have been arranged for sitting. In fact, all the compartments have boulders everywhere. Moving from one compartment to the other is fascinating, with one sometimes crawling on rock boulders. The general landscape of the areas adjoining the shelter is also very fascinating: the more expansive Olosunta and Ugele hills (Plate 5). Approaching the entrance of the rock shelter is breath-taking, as the landscape rises gently from the back of the street into a small cocoa farm and more sharply into the hills of Ugele. We were informed that the people celebrate the Ugele hill festival once in a year during which time the hill is climbed. We were further informed that the top of the hill is a plateau where many towns in Ekiti are viewed. This makes it a wonderful attraction to tourists. Moreover, at the time the shelter was first visited over a decade ago, the vegetation was more or less a primary forest. However, during a recent visit, there has been some human interference on the vegetation as some timber loggers somehow found their way very close to the shelter to fell trees which, incidentally they could not move away due to the sloppy terrain. But at the upper reaches of the hills, the vegetation is undisturbed. As noted by Alabi and Aleru (2013), the beautiful and fascinating scenery of the shelter with its chambers or compartments, and the extensive hills surrounding it, top of which could be climbed to view much of Ekiti land, combine together to make it a tourist's destination.



Plate 5: Olosunta hill range (to the left) and Ugele (to the right)

Challenges to Rural Tourism

The tourism industry in Nigeria is still growing and has not attained full development. There are some challenges that are impeding the growth of the industry in Nigeria. Challenges to rural tourism vary from infrastructural challenges, to government policies, and inadequate public enlightenment.

Infrastructural challenges

The problem of infrastructure is common to rural communities in Nigeria. In fact, one of the attributes of rural communities in the Nigerian context is poor infrastructural development. This is a great challenge for tourism development in rural areas, because some tourists would still want access to urban infrastructure and facilities. These infrastructure may be all or a combination of two or more of the following: good road network, tap water, electricity, comfortable lodging facilities, shopping malls, and Internet facilities, among others.

The truth of the matter is that most of the rural areas in Nigeria lack all or most of these facilities, but these are facilities that are normally found in rural tourism destinations of the developed and more sane climes. Prideaux (2000) understands the importance of transport infrastructure as an essential component of successful tourism when he noted that it provides inducement for the growth of existing tourist destinations and the creation of new tourist attractions.

A typical international tourist would expect all of these facilities, but would feel disappointed and regretful for not seeing most of them in the rural areas in Nigeria. Indeed many of the above facilities are absent at the rural tourism destinations that are considered for this study (namely Oroke-ewo, Agbele rock and Iho-Oloko). Infrastructural challenges are a huge problem to tourism development in Nigeria. This is because tourism sites that lack all the aforementioned infrastructures would most likely not enjoy the patronage of international tourists, and if at all they enjoy patronage by local tourists, then it would be to the very lowest minimum. Examples of international tourist flow to some rural sites in Nigeria include flow of tourists to Olumo rock, Ikogosi warm spring, Erin-Ijesa water fall. Neither does Oroke-ewo nor agbele rock enjoy the patronage of international tourists. Iho-Oloko is not even yet known as a tourist site.

Figure 2 shows the direct impact or linkages of infrastructural development both on the tourists and the residents of the rural area. Infrastructural development fosters accessibility. When there is good and motorable road network that leads to these various tourists destinations, then it becomes quite easy and less stressful for prospective tourists to locate. Infrastructural development fosters comfortability for the tourist. Comfortability sets in for rural tourists when there are state-of-the-art or standard lodging facilities that are not far from the precise tourism location.

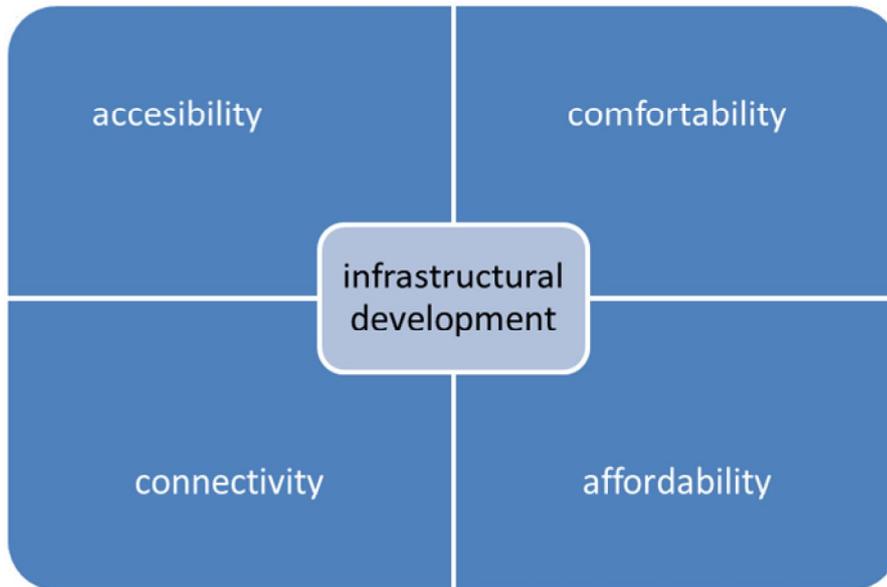


Figure 2: the various linkages of infrastructural development

Challenges with respect to governmental policies

Any development in any part of the world is subject to Government policies and approval. The three tiers of Government (Local, State and Federal) are major determinants of development in Nigeria. Ajadi (2012) opined that policy making by the governments on the ground of tourism is under the influence of controllable internal and external factors. This challenge might be quite enormous for international prospective investors and private investors. This has relations with the tax rate and index of the country, country's laws and regulations in acquiring and using land for industrial purposes and laws with regard to labour acquisition and usage for construction and sustainability of tourism assets. In some advanced and developed climes, for instance, China, foreign investments that centre on development would be tax free for a period of time. Also, loans to continue such projects are given out at extremely low interest rate. In Nigeria the tax rate is pretty high especially when compared with cost of operation and production of goods and services.

Challenges of public enlightenment

This is also an indeed great challenge to both developed tourism assets and potential tourism destinations. The residents of communities must be sensitized about the importance of the particular tourism destination that they have in their community. The residents should have a sense of ownership and belonging. This implies that they should have the sense that since they are members of the community then they are joint owners of the tourism location. Residents can feel a sense of ownership when they are actively involved in the construction of the respective tourism location and its maintenance. Otherwise, they would destroy and sabotage the developed tourist attraction. A typical example of this is what is happening at Agbele rock in Igbeti. This rock location was uniquely separated by a fence. But it is pathetic that the fence and gate that lead to the rock have been broken. So, since there is nothing holding back people from freely entering the tourism destination, the surrounding of the rock has been turned to an open place where they defecate. The defecation enhances the nutrient of the soil, leading to luxuriant plant growth during the raining season, and thus making the rock inaccessible. During the dry season the defecation becomes very obvious and really irritating. This situation reveals two things: first, the people are unaware of the tourism potential of the rock, and second, the state of the environment of the rock will definitely be appalling to and repelling tourists. When people are well informed and enlightened, they will guide and protect their heritage.

There needs, therefore, to be proper sensitization of the public in respect of knowing the importance (financial, social and developmental) of tourism locations in their various communities. This could be done by organizing public lectures or certificate awarding centers in all communities that host tourism locations. The public lectures should be organized from time to time while ensuring there are fringe benefits for attendees of such lectures. This would ensure adequate knowledge impartation on the residents of the communities. Meanwhile, at the developed tourism locations qualified residents of the communities should be employed into whatever capacity or position they can fit in. As long as the residents feel a sense of ownership and the tourists locations put food on their tables and money in their pockets, the numbers of saboteurs would drastically reduce.

Summary and Conclusion

The undisturbed nature of the ecosystem of rural areas makes them suitable for rural tourism. This is because tourists can have a fresh and one-hand touch with nature at its best. This study examined the prospects and challenges involved in the development of rural tourism in Nigeria, using Oroke-ewo in Ilupeju Ekiti, Agbele rock in Igbeti and Iho-Oloko in Ikere-Ekiti as case studies. Many rural areas in Nigeria are blessed with potential tourism locations, but it is pathetic that much of the tourism potentials of such rural areas have not been harnessed for tourism purposes. There is a need for more public enlightenment on the tourist attractions in the country for sustainable development. Government and private organizations must synergize together for the development of the numerous rural tourist attractions.

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