



## Impact of Religious Tourism on the Redemption Camp, Loburo Forest, Mowe, Ogun State Nigeria

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### Abstract

Religious tourism is recognized as a prime industry in most parts of the world. However, in Nigeria, it has not been given much prominence in ecological studies as it affects our ecological setting to evaluate the obvious advantages and disadvantages that may bring about economic growth and sound environmental conservation. This work investigates the socio-economic implication of religious tourism at the Redemption Camp at Mowe, Ogun State, Nigeria, to document its socio-economic impact on the residents around the camp. A total of 240 tourists were sampled during major activities of the religious tourism of the camp. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were also carried out. The results show that Only a few respondents (3.9%) lived in the forest before establishing the Redemption Camp, and adults are involved more in religious tourism than young people, as only 4.5% of the tourists were aged 20 years and below. Religious tourism has been a high instrument in conserving biodiversity at the subsistent levels of development in this environment through taboos and norms, which are now broken down. Therefore, It is worthwhile to set aside a good portion of the remaining vegetation of Loburo forest for conservation purposes and preserve remnants/relics of the biological diversity that once made up the environment.

**Keywords:** Religious tourism, Redemption camp, biodiversity, taboos, norms, biological diversity.

### Introduction

Redemption Camp is located within Loburo Forest, which was once a large tract of community forest in Ogun State, Nigeria, before the construction of the Lagos-Ibadan expressway in 1978. The construction of the road in 1983 made the region accessible to religious activities initiated by the Redemption Camp (Obateru, 2014). Since then, these activities have grown exponentially, establishing large communities in the area, which has had severe consequences and a significant impact on the area's ecology and land-use pattern. People flocked to this location for prayers, retreats, faith-based camping, and many other religious activities that fit the definition of religious tourism

for two or more days per week, monthly, annually, and over the years.

Religious Tourism is called faith tourism, where people of faith travel individually or in groups for pilgrimages or leisure (fellowship) purposes. It is a type of tourism that comprises both spiritual and pleasure benefits to tourists. International Conference on Religious Tourism estimates the worldwide faith tourism industry at about 18 million, including Pilgrim, Missionary travel, Leisure fellowship, Faith-based cruising, Retreats, Monastery visits and guest stays, Christian and faith-based camps, and Religious tourist attractions. Religion has long been a strong motivating factor for people to travel (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). Some sources argue that

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people travelled to sacred sites even 30,000 years ago (Blackwell, 2007). Religion tourism is recognized as a prime industry in most parts of the world. It has been useful to earn maximum foreign exchange (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). Despite so many potential and varied phenomena and the pervasiveness of religious tourism and spiritual connections to place, relatively few scholars have explored this space in academia in Nigeria. Even though Jackowski (2000) estimates that approximately 240 million people travel every year because of their religion, including Christians, Muslims, and Hindus, religious tourism remains one of the most understudied areas in tourism research (Vukonic, 1998)

Religion is considered a common motivation for travel, with increasing spiritually motivated travel coinciding with the growth of tourism in the modern era (Lloyd, 1998). Religion has played a key role in leisure development from their very first days over the centuries and has influenced how people utilize their leisure time (Poria *et al.*, 2003). Horner and Swarbrooke (1999) explain how Religious tourism is one of the oldest forms of tourism, and it has undoubtedly existed long before Christianity. Egyptians, Greeks, and Jews expressed their devotion through religiously motivated trips. Travel for religious reasons existed also in Africa and Asia.

Religious tourism means visiting sites, shrines, and structures with religious significance and attending

religious conferences, different cultural-religious events, exhibitions of cultic objects, and sacred music concerts (Vorzsak and Gut, 2009). It is understandable why more and more countries are seeing the development of religious tourism as an important provider of jobs and income (Egresi *et al.*, 2012). The religious tourism of the Redemption Camp at Mowe, Ogun State, Nigeria, is investigated in this work with the view to document its socio-economic implication on the residents around the camp

## Materials And Method

### The Study Area

Loburo Forest, Ogun State, Nigeria (Figure 1), is between kilometres 36 – 48 along the Lagos – Ibadan Express Way. The community forest formed part of Owode and Sagamu Local Government Areas of Ogun State. The area occupied about 75 km<sup>2</sup> of virgin and graded level of secondary forest before The Redeemed Christian Church of God Redemption Camp started in 1983. Few highly remote villages were there at the time. These include Mowe in Owode Local Government Area and Simawa in Sagamu L. G. A. The study area, which started as a designated site for religious activity in 1983, has given birth to major revivals, outreaches, and the establishment of other religious outfits and campgrounds, including the Deeper Life Bible Church and NASFAT.

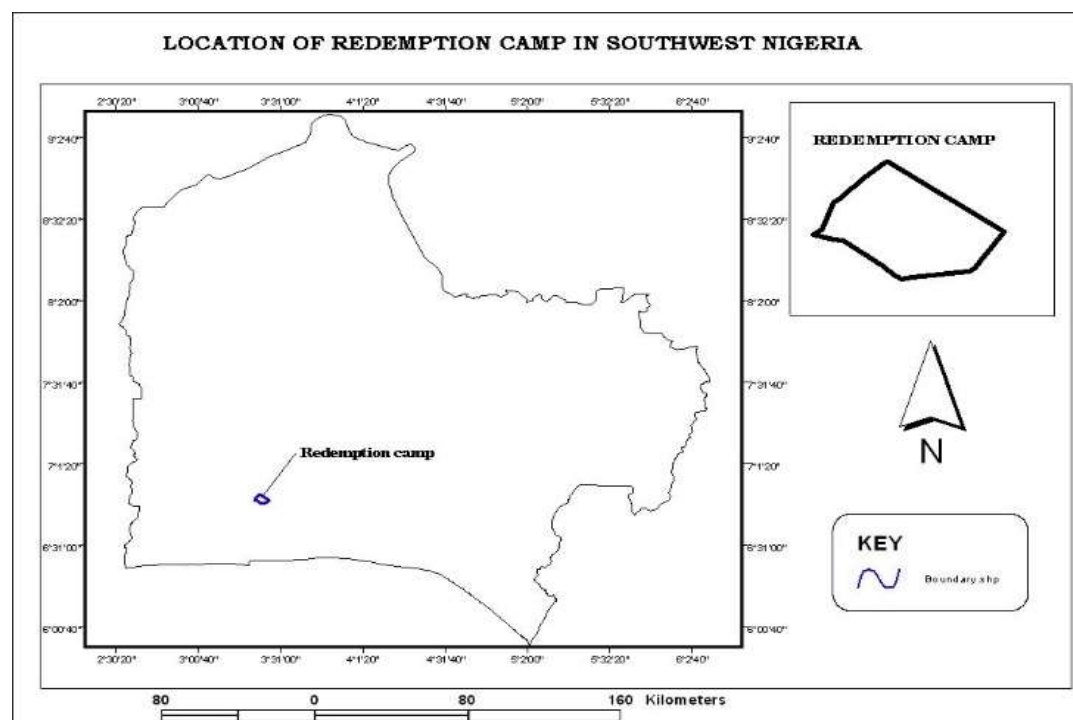


Figure 1: Map of Southwestern Nigeria showing the location of Loburo Forest (Redemption Camp)

### **Vegetation and Climate**

The areas comprise a series of ecosystems: the Guinea forests- Lowland rainforest, the

predominant habitat type of the areas identified as priority for surveys is the Guinea-Congo lowland rainforest, which is found in the westernmost parts of southern Nigeria (Kaey, 1959; White, 1983; National Atlas, 1987). The Redeemed Christian Church of God (Redemption Camp) is situated at Loburo in Owode Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. Mowe and Loburo bound the forest to the north, Sagamu Local Government to the south, Ikorodu in Lagos State to the East, and Deeper Life Camp ground to the west. It is situated at kilometre 46 of the Lagos Ibadan Expressway. The area enjoys a tropical climate with two distinct seasons. These are the rainy season (April-October) and the dry season (November-March). Temperatures range between 21<sup>0</sup>C and 28<sup>0</sup>C with high humidity. The South-westerly wind and the northeast trade winds blow in the rainy and dry seasons, respectively (Ogunjemite and Olaniyi, 2012).

### **Data Collection**

The study involves an initial reconnaissance survey of the study area, first to georeference the study area to its true ground position as well as to gather some crucial information about the physical and cultural features in the study area that may assist in developing an appropriate land use and land cover classification scheme. Before the field data collection deployment, an advanced visit to the site and various stakeholders of the study area was carried out in November and December 2010. This study's preliminary information collection was done mainly through interviews and discussions with relevant stakeholders. Previous reports of studies conducted on the site and other relevant documents on environmental sensitivity mapping and biodiversity conservation were obtained from the Department of Forestry, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State Government institutions, private organizations, NGOs, local communities and other stakeholders. Additional information was also obtained from the Internet to complement other sources. At this stage of the study, views expressed by various stakeholders were collated and properly documented.

### **Socio-economic survey**

Individual and group interviews were conducted using already prepared questionnaires for primary data collection. Individuals interviewed were with community members living within the settlements around the Redemption Camp and within the area already acquired for further development. A total of One hundred twenty-seven (127) respondents were sampled in eight settlements of Simawa, Oke Rala, Asegere, Mowe, RCCG Camp, Ibafo, Loburo, and Oloparun to determine the community demographic structure of current settlers of the forest. Furthermore, another set of prepared questionnaires was used to determine the demographic structure of tourists to the site. A total of 240 tourists were sampled during major activities (Monthly Holy Ghost, Special Holy Ghost, Annual Convention, Female Minister, Feast of Esther Conferences) of the religious tourism of the camp. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were also carried out with select distinct groups of community people, which included those in traditional governance positions (*Baa'les* Community leaders), surveyors in charge of land demarcation for sale, union leaders in charge of Trade Association with direct impact on the environment such as Bricklayers, Carpenters, Associations, Block makers and Sand and gravel suppliers. The FGD groups also included those whose livelihood activities substantially impact the community's natural resource base (exploiters of timber and non-timber forest products).

### **Results**

#### **The demographic structure of residents at Loburo Forest**

The demographic character of residents within Loburo Forest is presented in Table 1. Most residents at the site are men, totalling 78.43%, while females were only 21.57% of the resident population. The age structure of the respondents shows that the majority are adults, with people in the age structure of 36 – 55 years in the majority. The educational levels of the residents show that the majority are well educated, with people attaining tertiary education scaling up to 60.78% of the residents. A high proportion of the respondents, 27.45%, also live within the Redemption Camp. Only a very few of the respondents (3.9%) lived in the forest before the establishment of the Redemption Camp. Most of the respondents came after the establishment of the camp.

**Table 1: Demographic character of residents of Loburo Forest (Redemption Camp)**

Index measured	No of respondent	Percentage respondent	Remark
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	105	78.43	
Female	22	21.57	
<b>Age structure</b>			
Less than 20yrs old		2.82	
Between 20 – 35		41.18	
Between 36 – 55		35.29	
Above 55yrs old		19.61	
<b>Education Level of respondents</b>			
No formal education		21.57	
Primary education		1.96	
Secondary education		15.69	
Tertiary education		60.78	
<b>Distance of settlement of respondent from the camp</b>			
Within Camp		27.45	
1-2km from Camp		21.57	
2-5km from camp		11.76	
>6km from camp		17.65	
<b>Length of stay with Loburo Forest</b>			
31 years and above		3.9	Before the RCCG Started
15 – 30 years		15.7	Before 2 <sup>nd</sup> Imagery
7 – 14 years		25.5	Before 3 <sup>rd</sup> Imagery
1 – 6 years		54.9	Before 4 <sup>th</sup> Imagery
Not specific		0.8	

#### **The demographic structure of tourists coming to Redemption Camp at Loburo Forest**

The demographic structure of tourists coming for religious activities of Redemption Camp at Loburo Forest is presented in Table 2. The majority of people involved in the religious tourism of Redemption Camp are men, constituting 63.64%, while women are 36.36%. The result also shows that adults are involved more in religious tourism than young people, as only 4.5% of the tourists were aged 20 years and below. This activity was carried out by literate people rather than people with no formal and minimal education, as 86.4% of tourists have attained a tertiary level of education. The entire respondents (100%) visit monthly, and the most attended program is the Monthly Holy Ghost meetings. Most tourists spend

between 3-7 days on average and are motivated mostly by the prayers and miracles witnessed. Few people visit the site as individuals (9.0%), with the majority as church, family, or excursion groups. The most frequently patronized accommodation type is the chalets, followed by the double rooms and some stay in the open auditorium. Tourists are motivated to visit by the different religious activities such as prayers (100%), (87%) and healings (54%). A comparison of the resident and tourist demographic structure of Loburo forest revealed that residents from only 17 states of the country were from 34 States, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). It is further observed that most residents (approximately 68%) are from the southwest Nigeria Geopolitical zone.

**Table 2: Demographic structure of tourists coming for religious activities of Redemption Camp at Loburo Forest**

Index measured	No of respondent	Percentage respondent	Remark
<b>Sex</b>			
Male		63.64	
Female		36.36	
<b>Age structure</b>			
Less than 20yrs old		4.5	
Between 20 – 35		36.36	
Between 36 – 55		45.45	
Above 55yrs old		9.0	
<b>Education Level</b>			
No formal education	None		
Primary education	None		
Secondary education		13.6	
Tertiary education		86.4	
<b>Frequencies of attendance</b>			
Monthly		100	
Quarterly			
Annually		40.9	
<b>Programmes attended</b>			
Monthly Holy Ghost		100	
Special Holy Ghost		69	
Annual Convention		100	
Female Minister		29	
Feast of Esther			
Holy Ghost Conference			
<b>No of days spent in each visit</b>			
One day		9.0	
2 days		31.8	
3 days		59.09	
1 week		54.54	
1 month		None	
More than a month		None	
<b>Number of tourists in groups</b>			
Family group		50	
Church group		27.72	
Single individuals		9.0	
Excursion group		13.20	
<b>Types of accommodations patronized</b>			
Chalets		59.09	
Single rooms		9.0	
Double rooms		18.18	
Suite		-	
Pastor's Hostel		3.31	
Auditorium		10.42	
<b>Motivations for visits</b>			
For prayers		100	
Miracles		87	
Healing		54	
Relaxation		-	
Just to attend programme		-	

**Table 3: A comparison of settlers and tourist demographic structure in Loburo Forest.**

SN	States of Origin	Community		Tourist	
		No of Respondent	Percentage Respondents	No of Respondent	Percentage Respondents
1	Abia			8	3.33
2	Adamawa	2	1.57	4	1.67
3	Akwa Ibom			4	1.67
4	Anambra			8	3.33
5	Balyesa			8	3.33
6	Bauchi			3	1.25
7	Benue			5	2.08
8	Borno				
9	Cross River	2	1.57	4	1.67
10	Delta	4	3.15	5	2.08
11	Ebonyi	2	1.57	3	1.25
12	Edo	5	3.94	12	5.0
13	Ekiti	5	3.94	8	3.33
14	Enugu			8	3.33
15	Gombe				
16	Imo	2	1.57	8	3.33
17	Jigawa			4	1.67
18	Kaduna	2	1.57	13	5.42
19	Katsina			3	1.25
20	Kano	2	1.57	4	1.67
21	Kebbi			4	1.67
22	Kogi	2	1.57	4	1.67
23	Kwara	7	5.51	8	3.33
24	Lagos	5	3.94	8	3.33
25	Nasarawa			5	2.08
26	Niger			7	2.92
27	Ogun	38	29.92	12	5.0
28	Ondo	10	7.87	12	5.0
29	Osun	26	20.47	4	1.67
30	Oyo	12	9.45	28	11.66
31	Plateau			4	1.67
32	Rivers			8	3.33
33	Sokoto			4	1.67
34	Taraba	1	0.79	4	1.67
35	Yobe				
36	Zamfara			4	1.67
37	FCT			12	5.0
		127	100%	240	100%
	No of State represented	17		34	

**Foreign tourists at Loburo Forest (Redemption Camp).**

Foreign tourists also form a substantial part of the religious tourists of Loburo Forest (Redemption Camp). Although this tourist category was not directly sampled using the questionnaires due to the country's current security challenges, information was sourced from secondary data available from the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC). Of special interest is the

awareness created in Nigeria's Religious tourism with the Holy Ghost Congress in December 1998 tagged Lekki '98, which was reputed to host an estimated 3 million people. This event was relocated to the Redemption Camp at Loburo Forest and has remained an annual event since then, pulling millions of people from all over the world, and this could be regarded as the point of intervention in internationalizing religious tourism of Redemption Camp in Loburo Forest.

**Table 4: Profile of Religious Tourism of Redemption Camp Loburo Forest since Holy Ghost Congress 1999.**

Index	2009	2010	2011	2012
Average attendance	1,872,200	1,820,521	1,236,574	1,700,000
Foreign delegates	2400	3,200	4000	3,800
No of the Countries represented	30	35	40	-

Source: NTDC (2013)

## Discussion

### **The tourists coming for religious tourism at Redemption Camp Loburo Forest.**

It is pertinent that the religious activities of the Redeemed Christian Church were well attended from all over the country. Only three states were not represented. These are predominantly Muslim states, some threatened by insurgency and banditry, which may further hinder religious activities. However, religious tourism is higher in the Southwestern part of the country probably due to the site's proximity in the zone. Loburo forest, before the establishment of Redemption Camp, was a highly remote jungle with only a few sparsely populated villages such as Mowe (now a sprawling commercial centre) and Simawa (Jones, 1955; Keay, 1989; National Atlas, 1987). Today, it has grown to be a high urban and industrial area with a dense population. The initial impetus for this rapid urbanization is the religious activities of the centre.

Religious tourism at RCCG Redemption Camp, which dates back to March 1986 Ukah (2008), has attracted close to 2,000 people at the beginning. This marked the beginning of religious tourism, as today, people come from all over the country and the world to attend the Holy Ghost Services and Holy Ghost Congress, one of the major events at the camp. This agrees with the assertion of Poria *et al.*(2003) that Religious obligations have become a fashionable trend worldwide as a means of expressing beliefs and faith in the ability of God to protect and guide mankind. This then amounts to stating the most obvious, that religious practices both under the auspices of Christianity, Islam and traditional practice have in no small way contributed to the development of tourism in the world (Umejei, 2011). It is a known fact that Christians' pilgrimages to Israel have formed an economic platform for the empowerment of the localities and contributed to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). With these scenarios and many others around the world, it has become valid that religious tourism can become a source of economic improvement for a country and its people. However, in Nigeria, the promotion of

tourism may be able to contribute to economic growth if properly addressed significantly. The Redemption Camp is contributing to the growth of religious tourism in this way as the number of Nigerians and foreigners attending these programs is said to be in excess of five hundred thousand (Adeboye, 2013).

In relevance to society (especially on environmental issues and the conservation of biological diversity), the Christian faith cannot afford to stand unconcerned (Aluko and Aluko, 2011). This is a fundamental biblical principle exemplified from Genesis to Revelation that other creations must be maintained and perpetuated for continuity. Even during the flood of Noah, God had concern for the least of all His creation. Therefore, It is worthwhile to set aside a good portion of the remaining vegetation of Loburo forest for conservation purposes and preserve remnants/relics of the biological diversity that once made up the environment.

Increasing global population and greater demand for food, shelter, pleasure and satisfaction of human religious demands are part of situations leading to rapid changes in some areas once considered impervious to human activities but are now coming under threats of anthropogenic factors. Although religious activities in Nigeria have not been given much prominence in ecological studies, it becomes pertinent to study this trend as it affects our ecological setting to evaluate the obvious advantages and disadvantages associated, that may bring about economic growth and sound environmental conservation. This situation deserves particular attention so much as Nigeria is regarded as one of the most religious nations in the world. It is good that we begin to see the contribution of this sector, which hitherto had been informal in all aspects of our national life and its contribution to the ecology of some of the once pristine environments of the nation, such as the Loburo forest that houses the Redemption Camp.

## Conclusion

Religious tourism at the Redemption Camp had profoundly impacted the socio-economic of once

a remote and desolate forest of Loburo in Ogun State. Tourist influx has reached an all-height upward of 1,500,000 individuals and is scaling beyond in a single program. This highly impacts the natural features (Flora and fauna) in the area. Religion had been a high instrument in conserving biodiversity at the subsistent levels of development in this environment through taboos and norms now broken down. The alternative to this will be

the enforcement of environmental ethics through religious adherents. Traditional religious practices had been one of the factors that held Loburo forest and its biological diversity until the beginning of Christian religious activities pioneered by the Redemption Camp. It will be good for the churches in this area to rise to the challenges of maintaining some portions of the remaining environment for conservation purposes.

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