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# Ecotourism and Community Development at Ikogosi Warm Spring, Ikogosi-Ekiti, Nigeria

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**Abstract**

Ikogosi Warm Spring is one of the projects embarked upon and being promoted as a regional development strategy by the government of Ekiti State. This study sought to assess the current status of ecotourism development and evaluate the existing tourism-site/resource-community relationships, impacts and the capacity of ecotourism to generate benefits for Ikogosi Warm Spring and the local communities. Questionnaire, interview schedules, observations and secondary data sources were the instruments for this study and basic quantitative analysis was used to interpret the data obtained from ecotourism site officials, local residents, business owners and tourists. The results show that ecotourism development was at an early stage in the destination such that the socio-economic benefits accruing to the local communities have not been substantial. The residents have had to cope with reduced access to resources since the Ikogosi Warm Spring Site was established but they generally supported conservation and were optimistic that ecotourism growth would yield huge benefits. There was low influx of tourists who paid small amounts of money as gate fees and access to the amenities. Despite these, ecotourism contributes extremely towards revenue generation, natural resources conservation and management.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, tourism destination, tourists, residents, socioeconomic benefits,

**Introduction**

Tourism is a luxury and a voluntary activity. It involves the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal place of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created and services provided to cater for their needs. Smith (2004) noted that tourism and travels have been part of human experience for millennia, describing them as a form of nomadism that characterized man (*Homo sapiens*) but which is both normal and pleasurable under the right conditions. As a major global phenomenon, tourism has become the largest and fastest growing industry in the world (Campbell, 1999; Wells, 1997). International tourism accounted for eight (8) per cent of the world total export earnings and thirty seven (37) per cent of export and travels accounted for US$504 billion, ahead of all other categories of international trade in 1998 (WTO, 2000). WTO (2001) recorded that $476 billion were generated as receipts from 699 million international tourist arrivals in 2000. Tourism is yet to reach full economic maturity in Africa (Nwosu, 2002) but it has been identified as a major sector through which to address the problems of unemployment and poverty on the continent (DBSA, 2009). In fact, it is the path to tread for diversifying the economy of the countries from primary production (especially petroleum resources), increase national income and foreign exchange earnings, gross domestic products (GDP), generate employment and improve the socio-economic conditions (Weaver, 1998). Besides, tourism would be a tool for biodiversity conservation and development that can yield sustainable local earnings.

Nature-based tourism currently represents a relatively small portion of global tourism but it is the fastest expanding market and ecotourism is one of the sub-markets (Scheyvens, 1999). Although no widely-accepted definition of ecotourism exists but, at a minimum, it must involve travelling to relatively undisturbed natural environments (Fennel, 2008). Ceballos-Lascurain (1993) submitted that the travel must be environmentally and socially responsible, should support conservation efforts, and improve the welfare of the host communities.

Ecotourism has received some attention in developing countries and economically-impoverished regions as agent of change linked to resource protection policies, protected area conservation efforts, sustainable development initiatives, and regional and community development strategies (Wells, 1997). Parks and several forms of protected areas comprising cultural sites, biosphere reserves, national parks and gardens, wilderness areas, mountainous sites, water sources and courses are the most often-mentioned and demanded ecotourism destinations (Eagles, 1997). The location of the sites in occupied landscapes of the rural areas means that community development would be given consideration in their planning (Neth, 2008) because of the capacity to induce both positive and negative environmental, cultural and socioeconomic impacts at a destination. Therefore, the intricate relationships that exist between tourism, nature (regarded as protected areas), people and development need to be investigated.

**Tourism Development in Ekiti State**

The tourism sector in Ekiti State went comatose before the civilian administration that took office in 2011. The facilities in the various tourism sites had deteriorated due to neglect leading to poor services and decline in patronage by local and international tourists. The Ekiti State Government decided to invigorate the necessary institutions needed for the development and promotion of tourism because of the sector’s capacity to catalyze regional growth through biodiversity conservation for increased revenue, employment generation and improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the rural areas.

* Ekiti State Ministry of Culture and Tourism: to implement policies and directives from the Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism; initiate projects; control land allocation for development of tourism sites; and regulate the operations of hotels and catering institutions.
* Ekiti State Tourism Board: to promote, market and disseminate information on tourism; identify, preserve and promote tourism assets of the state; manage and maintain state-owned sites and centres of attractions; coordinate the activities of the tourism agencies including the Local Government Tourism Committees; register, classify, grade and monitor hotels and other tourism establishments; charge fees, impose such sanctions as may be prescribed from time to time; and operate the State Travel Bureau.

The activities of these institutions and the identification of Ikogosi Warm Spring for development through private sector partnership exemplified the desire of the state government to promote tourism to an enviable status.

**Materials and Methods**

The study was carried out in Ikogosi-Ekiti in Ekiti West Local Government Area, Ekiti State. Ikogosi-Ekiti is a small, sleepy and quiet town situated in a valley and from the surrounding hills rises the warm spring but the source of the cold spring is yet to be detected. The presence of the warm and cold springs flowing side by side has catapulted the town to national and international limelight. The Ikogosi Warm Spring Site is 150 km2 while the nature reserve (core area) is 50 km2 in size and the whole landscape consists of fascinating green lush vegetation. The warm spring rolls down over a hilly landscape at 70oC and from another hill rises a cold spring which joins the warm spring at a confluence to maintain a temperature of 37oC and thereafter form a continuous stream.

In order to assess the current status of ecotourism development at Ikogosi Warm Spring and be able to provide planning direction, the existing tourism-site-community relationships and impacts were assessed. This required obtaining site-level data from the various stakeholders on site management, operations and facilities, community perceptions of the site and tourism. Fifty (50), five (5) and twenty five (25) copies of well-constructed questionnaire were administered in Ikogosi town randomly on the local residents, business owners and tourists respectively. Five respondents were business owners because of the few businesses in the town and 25 for tourists in response to the low influx as a result of the renovation and construction at the destination. Structured interview schedule conducted one-on-one was used to get information from some villagers, Site Manager and some site officials. Field observations were made to complement the interview process and, wherever possible, corroborate the questionnaire findings. Efforts were also made to assess the status of the ecotourism site, its attractions, facilities, trails, etc. and also the facilities and amenities present in the town.

**Results**

Ikogosi-Ekiti is a small town with minimal available socio-economic infrastructure. The components are: (1) the main tarred road from Erinjiyan-Ekiti linking the tarred road from Igbara Odo-Ekiti at the centre of the town to join the tarred road to Ipole-Iloro via the Ikogosi Warm Spring; the roads in the town are in fairly good condition and transportation around the town is by foot, motorcycle (personal and commercial) and personal automobiles (2) 1 pipe-borne water outlet (3) 1 hotel and 3 schools (4) 1 Nigerian Police Station, 2 churches, 1 mosque, 1 Bus Stop (but no commercial buses or cabs operated within the town), 1 medical clinic, 1 library and 1 water bottling company. The establishment of Warm Spring Waters Nigeria Limited (WSWNL) - a joint project between United African Company Nigeria Limited, the Ekiti State Government and some private investors to produce “GOSSY” Spring Water (bottled water) has been the only positive development witnessed in Ikogosi-Ekiti for over a long time and a major economic attraction. The company built the Bus Stop and Library as part of corporate social responsibility to the host community.

The interview results in Table 1 show that the local resident’s dependence on the Ikogosi Warm Spring was high. The access of the residents to the site resources was high such that there were no records of illegal resources use and enforcement capacity of the site bureau. The benefit mainly derived by the residents from the site is the water resources but they still had positive attitude to conservation and good potential for stewardship. Also, there was no record of conflicts between site staff and the residents even as the relationships between them varied and no individual or the community leader was involved in tourism planning but provided with information only.

**Table 1: The relationships between the community and Ikogosi Warm Spring (The Site)**

|  |
| --- |
| Indicator Assessment |
| Town population 18000  Local residents’ dependency on water resources High  Access to site resources High  Illegal resources use None  Enforcement capacity None  Benefits from resources protection Water Resources  Conservation attitude Positive  Potential for stewardship Good  Staff-resident relations Variable  Participation in planning None; provided with information only |

The Ikogosi Warm Spring was still at an early stage of tourism development but it experienced a fair influx of tourists. Based on the tourists’ records, the Site Manager estimated that 890,000 people visited the Site annually but the economic benefits were very limited probably because the overwhelming majority of visitors consisted of domestic/local tourists. The average length of stay for tourists was one night with some visiting only as a day trip but the weekends and holidays were the busiest times. Most (70%) arrived by personal automobiles or tour buses organized by employers but due to lack of accommodation in the site most tourists spent the night at the hotel in the town or in hotels at Ado-Ekiti and Aramoko-Ekiti. Also, it appeared that many (if not all) tourists did not even stop in the town but instead drove straight through town and up to the Site where they stayed, recreated and ate before driving straight back through town and out of it. However, during the holidays overflow times, the need to purchase snacks and bottled water or general curiosity would prompt visiting families or friends, and some tourists to stop in the town en route the Site or out of the town.

The Site Manager indicated that approximately ₦100 million was budgeted annually towards conservation activities at Ikogosi Warm Spring. Some of the amount would have been tourism-generated revenues (gate fees) from the estimated 890,000 tourists (380,000 adults and 510,000 children) that visited the Site annually. Unfortunately, government had taken over the collection of entrance fees (₦100 per tourist) such that the revenue generated at the Site became insignificant despite the number of tourists. There were no other sources of revenue such that insufficient funds had been the biggest limitation to management as indicated by the deplorable conditions of the chalets while the Zoological Garden no longer existed

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Table 2: The relationships between tourists with Ikogosi Warm Spring

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| --- |
| **Indicator Assessment** |
| Number of tourists per year 890,000  Ecotourism site entrance fees ₦100  Tourism’s financial contribution to conservation at Ikogosi Warm Spring Average  Availability of educational materials/opportunities None |

The demographic features of respondents at Ikogosi Warm Spring (Table 3) show that the male respondents were 60% of local residents and business owners but 76% of tourists. The marital status showed that 38, 20 and 72% of local residents, business owners and tourists were single,

60% of local residents and business owners and 24% of tourists were married. Most of the business owners had tertiary education (80%); 36, 44 and 8% of residents attained primary, secondary and tertiary education while 20 and 12 % of the business owners and local residents were illiterate.

Table 3: Demographic ratings of respondents at Ikogosi Warm Spring

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Demographic rating | Local residents  % | Business owners  % | Tourists  % |
| Sex: a) Male  b) Female  Marital status: a) Single  b) Married  c) Widow  Educational level: a) Primary  b)Secondary  c)Tertiary  d) None  Age: a) <25  b) 25-50  c) <60  Religion: a) Christianity  b) Islam | 60  40  38  60  2  36  44  8  12  24  64  12  90  10 | 60  40  20  60  20  0  0  80  20  20  60  20  80  20 | 76  24  72  24  0  -  -  -  -  28  56  16  88  12 |

All the residents and business owners were aware of the establishment of Ikogosi Warm Spring and its importance but only 6% of the residents had not visited the Site (Table 4). The local residents were in support of government decision to create the Site as 54% of residents and 60% of business owners agreed that it was relevant adding that the development had made the town to be a place of public interest known all over the world and strongly hoped that Ikogosi would become a better place in the nearest future. The 46% of the local residents and 40% of business owners who saw the Site as irrelevant added that there had been no tangible benefits from the government since its establishment to them personally and to the community and that the future would not be anything different. Tourism-related entrepreneurship and income were virtually non-existent in Ikogosi as indicated by the estimated annual sales revenues of the business owners. The few business owner respondents (40%) indicated that 5% or less of their total sales came from tourism-related expenditures. Nevertheless, 4% of residents and 80% of business owners that claimed the Site had positive effects on their lives indicated that the benefits were mainly through increased income while 4% of the residents derived local economic benefits. The Site establishment had positive impact on the livelihood of 48% of the residents and no negative impacts. The cited positive effects were local economic benefits (4%), improved roads (4%), more jobs (6%) and water resources (28%). The Site had positive impact on the livelihood/businesses of 80% of the business owners while the remaining 20% had not noticed any effect whatsoever. The responses summarized in Table 5 show very limited or no tourism-related employment and entrepreneurship for the residents, income to the local community and inter-cultural exchange opportunities. The host community has a positive attitude and optimism towards the future impacts of the Site development in terms of social welfare benefits and the roles of conservation to protect the water resources, environment and climate.

**Discussion**

The results of this study show that ecotourism, as defined and assessed under the adopted framework, did not exist at Ikogosi Warm Spring. The community members have a good understanding of why the Site was created especially the importance of protecting the water resources. Lindberg *et al.* (1996) had observed that site establishment often resulted in reduced access of local residents to resources; this was largely the case at Ikogosi Warm Spring where residents do not have full access to resources and complained of insufficient compensation.

The establishment of the Site was seen as good after all and majority of the respondents agreed to welcome more tourism. This relates to the perception, among some, that the Site has had a positive influence on their livelihood whereas almost half of residents indicated that the Site had either positive or negative effects on their lives. Although road improvements were observed, the impacts on climate and the water resources were difficult to confirm while tourism-related employment, entrepreneurship and income have been highly limited.

The interview and questionnaire responses showed some optimism with most officials, residents and business owners seeming confident that tourism growth at Ikogosi Warm Spring would generate benefits for the Ikogosi community. This is perhaps

not surprising given the early stage of development at the Site which relates to the Doxey’s ‘Stage of Tourist Euphoria’ (Doxey, 1976), D’Amore’s model of tourist-resident relationships (D'Amore, 1983) or Butler’s ‘Exploration Stage’ (Butler, 1980) of a tourism development. The few who were more pessimistic generally held the belief that only the Site officials and the government would benefit from future tourism growth. This is significant, recognizing that attitudes towards tourism development are largely based on perceived, as opposed to actual, costs and benefits (Lindberg *et al*., 1996). The community socio-economic benefits have been very limited, tourism has not really generated revenues for conservation and educational opportunities for tourists are absent.

Ikogosi Warm Spring could not be considered a successfully operating ecotourism destination but even if ecotourism was to increase in the future, this study has identified that weaknesses in the tourism-site-community relationships stand to limit its ability to generate benefits and should be tackled. Few tourists currently stop in the town of Ikogosi and there are relatively few spending opportunities for tourists and residents suggesting significant potentials for economic leakages. Wall (1994) had noted the inherent difficulty of spending money in the wilderness with limited facilities. However, providing the tourists with opportunities to spend money locally through the development of tourism facilities and services - interpretive media, food concessions, souvenirs, etc. - can help in this respect and also encourage tourists to return in the future. The development would allow and create room for the sales of tourist-related goods and implement a special conservation tax.

**Table 4: Responses of local community residents to the development of Ikogosi Warm Spring**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Parameters | Responses | Residents, % | Business owners, % |
| Awareness of the site?  Visits to the site?  The establishment of the site has impacted on livelihood?  Impacts    Do you see any benefits to yourself if Ikogosi Warm Spring becomes well developed?  Benefits  Do you see any benefits to the community if Ikogosi Warm Spring becomes well developed?  Benefits  Have the Site officials involved you personally in any way (Planning, Education, Information, etc.)?  Have the Site officials involved the community in any way (Planning, Education,  Information, etc.)?  What is your overall feeling about the site?  Can you estimate on the average the percentage of your revenue that come from the activities tourists? | Yes  No  Yes  No  Yes  No  Increased income  Local economy  Jobs  Road  Water resources  Yes  No  More jobs  Enjoyment  Yes  No  Local economy/business  Community development  Yes  No  Yes  No  Relevant  Non relevant  5%  10%  50% | 100  0  94  6  48  52  4  4  6  4  28  46  52  64  32  38  16  16    74  26  74  16  72  54  44 | 100  0  100  0  80  20  80  80  20  80  0  80  20  60    40  40  60  60  40  40  20  20 |

Source: Field Survey, (2012).

Table 5: Summary of the relationships between the community and tourism

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| --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **Assessment** |
| Tourism employment  Tourism income for local community  Tourism-related entrepreneurship  Host attitude towards tourism’s impact    Social welfare benefits  Intercultural exchange opportunities  Potential for positive intercultural exchange | Very limited  Very limited  None  Positive; optimistic; some concern for environment safety and potential for government benefits  New roads; climate; water resources  None  Good |

The community residents are not actively involved in Site/tourism planning processes while relatively little is known about the tourists that visit Ikogosi Warm Spring. There is urgent need to renew and maintain community outreach and foster community stewardship through public involvement in planning and decision making-resident advisory committees, participating in conservation activities etc. Monitoring programmes to provide up-to-date biophysical data are averagely in place. Site officials have little expertise in site/tourism management. Sound planning and management strategies, training and re-training opportunities for management and interpretative staff can help to overcome many of these issues. This would engender the collaboration between Ikogosi Warm Spring and the relevant institutions on the development of special training programmes for future site staff

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