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# Stakeholders Participation and Socio-Cultural Outcome for the Sustainable Management of Ecotourism Destinations in Plateau State Nigeria

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***Abstract:*** *Stakeholders Participation has been observed by ecotourism researchers to be a significant determining factor in the sustainable management of ecotourism destination. This study, therefore, carried out a confirmatory analysis of this claim concerning Plateau State ecotourism destination. The three critical constructs in analysing sustainability are economic, socio-cultural and environmental factors. The study focused on only one construct which isthe socio-cultural factor without disregard for the importance of the other two constructs. This approach allowed for a more detailed examination of the sociocultural implications of stakeholders' participation using the analytical framework that depoliticises participation by categorising it into four (nominal, instrumental, representative and transformative participation) levels Primary data were scientifically collected, cleaned and necessary pre-analysis test done before describing and analysing using the structural equation modelling. The use of structural equation modelling is to determine the extent to which sample data support the theoretical model. The results show that a reduced level of participation in ecotourism by stakeholders is related to the insignificant impacts of ecotourism on socio-cultural growth and preservation inPlateau State Nigeria. Therefore for the active participation of stakeholders especially the immediate local communities, it was recommended that the Plateau State government adopt a community-based-ecotourism model and or public-private-partnership as appropriate. The current 100% ownership by the government would not allow for sustainable management of the destinations. The government should focus on regulatory and enforcement of compliance roles.*

***Keywords:*** *Socio-Cultural, Stakeholder, Sustainability, Ecotourism, Structural Equation Model*

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## I. Introduction

Tourism is found to be a critical contributing sector for development, prosperity, and well-being of communities across many countries. Ecotourism which is a recent form of tourismhas become an essential economic activity in natural areas around the world. It provides opportunities for visitors to experience powerful manifestations of nature and culture and to learn about the importance of biodiversity conservation and local cultures. At the same time, ecotourism generates income for conservation programs and economic benefits for communities living in rural and remote areas (Drumm, Moore, Soles, Patterson, & Terborgh, 2004).Therefore managing ecotourism destinations as business enterprise require a strategic management approach that focuses heavily on stakeholders' short andlong-term benefits.

Ecotourism is an excellent example of a business model that explicitly show the significance of stakeholder in the corporate governance debate. To stress the importance of stakeholders' involvement, Honey, (1999) examined the benefits expected by stakeholders in ecotourism. He observed that ecotourism is capable of providing the flowing values to communities and countries across the world; respect for local culture, minimising tourism impact, creating and building environmental awareness, providing finance for conservation, supporting human rights and democratic movements while empowering local people. All these benefits are assumed to come from ecotourism were managing the destination is sustainable. The shareholder does not lose his investments in this case. Meanwhile, the ecotourism business survives perpetually as long as the sustainability strategies are appropriate.

Ecotourism destinations around the world are on the increase resulting in the creation of jobs, enterprises, generation of export revenues, and infrastructure development (UNWTO, 2015). Ecotourism impacts three different areas; these are the environment, economy and society. The focus of the study is on one of these equally essential constructs, which is the society from a socio-cultural perspective regarding activities and behaviours of stakeholders for the sustainable management of ecotourism destinations which was done by

describing ecotourism effects on host communities through direct and indirect relations with tourists, and interaction with the tourism industry. For several reasons, host communities often are usually at a disadvantage in interactions with the tourists and tourism operators/suppliers. The negative impacts of ecotourism include the increase in drug and alcohol abuse, economic materialism, changes in traditional culture, negative influences on the youth of the local area and a change from the former peaceful lifestyle of the area and overstressing the local facilities and utilities. However, ecotourism also generates positive impacts by sharing and learning of new tradition, educational opportunities, employment opportunities, economic benefits for the local community/people and friendship with the visitors to the area thereby having an international exposure which could attract international interventions for social and cultural preservations (Vishwanatha & Chandrashekara, 2014). Therefore social considerations in the sustainable management of ecotourism destinations are fundamental in developing management plans for the enterprise. It is with these thinking that the International Ecotourism Society in 1991 produced one of the earliest definitions: "Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of the people"(United Nations Environment Programme, 2002)**.**

**1.2 Statement of Hypotheses**

The challenges of ecotourism destinations management in Plateau is evident in the stagnation and lack of growth in the sector. There is little or no attention given to the critical issues around sustainable management of these destinations (Liveability, Viability and Equity). This has resulted in the decay of ecotourism infrastructure and facilities for Picnicking, Game Viewing, Bird watching, Sportfishing, Boating/Canoeing and Self-guided Trails, in destinations such as Pandam wildlife Park, which is the largest, Assop falls, Kura falls, Kerang Volcanic Mountains among others. This study is concerned with the underlying cause of such disturbing state of ecotourism destination in Plateau State from a socio-cultural perspective without disregard to economic and environmental concerns. Therefore the problem examined is the significance of the relationship between Stakeholders' Participation in ecotourism management and the socio-cultural outcome of such participation. The understanding of this problem formed the basis for recommendations that should facilitate the sustainable management of ecotourism destinations in Plateau State if adopted in a balanced manner with the other two sustainability constructs ( Economy and Environment).

The hypotheses were set based on the research questions and the objectives of the study for consistency and focused analysis. Therefore the four hypotheses for this study are stated as follows:

i. $\mathbf{H_{01}}$: Nominal level of stakeholders' participation in eco-tourism has no significant positive effect on the preservation of the socio-cultural heritage of the communities around ecotourism destinations in Plateau State.
ii. $\mathbf{H_{02}}$: Instrumental level of stakeholders' participation in eco-tourism has no significant positive effect on the preservation of the socio-cultural heritage of ecotourism communities in Plateau State.
iii. $\mathbf{H_{03}}$: Representative level of stakeholders' participation in eco-tourism has no significant positive effect on the preservation of the socio-cultural heritage of the ecotourism communities in Plateau State.
iv. $\mathbf{H_{04}}$: Transformative level of stakeholders' participation in eco-tourism has no significant positive effect on the preservation of the socio-cultural heritage of the ecotourism communities in Plateau State.

## II. Literature Review

**The Theoretical Review**

The anchoring theory for this study is the stakeholder theory supported by the systems theory and the sustainable development theory from a management perspective. The system theory provided the theoretical explanation for the importance of focusing the 'whole.' rather than the parts; it further explains how societies are structured to support the scientific research of communities and organisations within them.

**Stakeholder Theory**

The stakeholder theory recognises the importance of wealth creation as well as the firm's relationships with its multiple constituent groups such as shareholders, creditors, employees, customers, suppliers, regulators, and local communities and impact on society at large. While the shareholder based theory and its schools of thought (the "transaction cost economics" (TCE) and "agency theory") focus on behaviours that can maximise firm efficiency. The TCE focus on the importance of corporate hierarchies and monitoring employee behaviour to minimise self-interested behaviour; agency theory focus primarily on the principal vs agent (shareowner vs manager) relationship in publicly traded firms, and how to best align the competing interests of the two parties to maximise firm value. Both TCE and agency theory have "gloomy vision" of human self-interest. Both assume that human beings are opportunistic, and, thus, will put their interests before the firms. Although tenets of shareholder and stakeholder theories differ, both are concerned with the purpose of the firm and strategies to improve its competitive position. However, the stakeholder mindset is broader than that of the shareholder and

in agreement with sustainability principles (Pfarrer, 2010). This paper aligns with the stakeholder theory, supported by sustainable development theory and systems theory for robust theoretical support.

**Systems Theory**

A system has been broadly defined to describe a complex set of interacting components and the relationships among them which permit the identification of aboundary-maintaining entity or process. It is difficult to quantitatively model social and psychological phenomena, therefore, the General system theory provided the body of knowledge for its application in the domain of human activity systems (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). Over time the general systems theory gave birth to many approaches. The directly relevant one to this study is in the open system theory, which looks at the relationships between the organisations and the environment in which they are involved. As observed by Mele, Pels, & Polese, (2010 p.131) "Managers should become familiar with the concept of systems and the associated way of thinking. Managers have to plan structural adjustments to guarantee the survival of the whole system, constantly formulating new interpretations of the business scenarios in order to find an adequate positioning, implementing (when necessary) periods of adjustment, transformation and redefinition the organisational structure. This adaptive and proactive behaviour should be based upon systems theory conceptual pillars in order to promote sustainable and long-lasting performance. Given real-world complexity, we strongly believe that systems theories and perspectives can effectively contribute to the management, marketing and service research due to their dual approach: the global, holistic view of observed phenomena and the specific, reductionist view of their specific components and traits." This theory fits the stakeholder position adopted for this study and stresses the significance of looking at the whole rather than the parts in the strategic and sustainable management of ecotourism destinations.

**Sustainability theory**

According to Jenkins, (2003) the theories of sustainability attempt to prioritise and integrate social responses to environmental and cultural problems. While the economic model focuses on the to the sustainability of natural and financial capital; an ecological model aims at biological diversity and ecological integrity, and a political model looks to social systems that realise human dignity. Recently, religion has entered the debate with symbolic, critical, and motivational resources for cultural change. Sustainable development, therefore, has come to be seen from the perspective of the interactions of three broad concepts; environment, economy and society. Sustainability is the driving force in today's ecotourism development thinking.

Social-sustainability relates to the soundness, richness and flexibility of organisations and institutions that govern access to and transmission of resources. Supporting institutional sustainability does not mean sustaining specific institutions or organisations, however, but helping people to build and strengthen frameworks, legislative, regulatory and financial systems that allow sound institutions to flourish. Sound institutions enable societies to use and allocate resources transparently and efficiently (Russell, 1994).Economic sustainability is the ability of a population to generate revenue to maintain itself in a market economy and produce a surplus to invest in security, research and development, infrastructure, and social safety nets.Environmental sustainability refers to the measurement of change in the resource base that supports existing populations (Russell, 1994).

In a study Acquah, Collins, Arthur, & Boadi, (2017 p.10) they examined the socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism in park adjacent communities in Ghana. From the study, "the top three socio-cultural concerns of ecotourism were a loss of farmland, Pasture land and inflated prices of goods, while the top socio-cultural benefits of ecotourism in the park adjacent communities include increased awareness and respect for local culture, placing communities in the global spotlight and increased support for conservation. The overall perception of respondents towards ecotourism showed that local communities held a favourable view or opinion towards eco-tourism". This stakeholders assessment is an essential factor in a sustainable management approach to ecotourism enterprises.

Sustaining ecotourism destinations in Nigeria and Plateau State has been a great challenge. Plateau State has abundant tourism potentials, such as beaches, spectacular rock formations, hydrological bodies, wildlife and waterfall and another rich festival, architecture, and craft. The rich tourist attractions of the State have earned her the slogan "Home of peace and tourism". Numerous factors have hindered patronage of the tourism destinations in Plateau State. Most of the tourism destinations lack the necessary facilities such as accommodation, catering, entertainment, electricity, water which are of the essence to tourists, hence making them less attractive in any given location (Aniah, Eja, Otu, & Ushie, 2009).

It is expected that ecotourism destinations in Plateau State should actively involve the local communities in developing and managing the socio-cultural component of ecotourism. This study used the White, (1996) typology of participation as the framework for measuring the participation of stakeholders in socio-cultural preservation strategies of ecotourism destinations in Plateau State. The advantage of this typology is that it distinguishes between four types of participation (nominal, instrumental, representative and

transformative) in order to depoliticise participation. Secondly, it shows the interests in participation from the 'top-down' that is, the interests that those who design and implement ecotourism development programmes have, in the participation of others. Thirdly, it presents participation from the 'bottom up' to show how the stakeholders themselves see their participation, and what they expect to get out of it. Then finally, it characterises the overall expected outcome of each type of stakeholder's participation. This framework is a precise analytical tool used in this study to measure the socio-cultural outcomes of stakeholder participation in the strategic management of ecotourism destinations in Plateau State.

## III. Methodology

The study is restricted to Plateau state because of the reputation of the State in Nigeria's ecotourism discuss. The state is endowed with abundant natural and cultural environment and centrally located in Nigeria as a bridge between the north and the southern part of the country. Also, ecotourism in this study is restricted to rural communities because the adopted definition sees ecotourism as a rural phenomenon. The stakeholders in this study are mostly the rural communities residents and government employees in rural areas. Also, while sustainability is measuredusing three constructs (Economy, society, and Environment), this study adopted only one of the constructs (society) for detailed examination and recommendations.

**Research Design**

This study isa cross-sectionalstudy adopted the descriptive and explanatory research design. The survey approach for collecting primary data is found to be appropriate because it allows for a scientific approach and it is a cost-effective design, mainly because the sample population for this study is significant. Secondary data are not suitable for analysis in this study. Therefore questionnaires were used to asked stakeholders the same set of questions (Likert-scale format, from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"). The questions asked centredaroundone of the three indices of sustainable management (socio-cultural). While the four levels of participation (Nominal, Instrumental, representative and transformative) determined the questions ask concerning stakeholder participation. A total of 399 sample size was calculated to represent the entire Local communities, while the sample of employees of the public sector was also estimated to be 366 giving a total for the probability sample as 765. The sample size for the non-probability sampling (tourism operators/tourist and NGOs) which is takenusing purposive sampling was 100 made up of 90 tourism operator/tourist and 10 NGOs making the total Stakeholders for this study to be 865 respondents. This study administered a total of eight hundred and sixty-five (865) copies of the questionnaire to four categories of stakeholders with a different interest in the sustainability of the ecotourism destinations. The key stakeholders for the sustainability of ecotourism destination are the Local communities, the tourism Administrators at the state government level, the local government administrators living in among the local communities and private enterprises within the local communities, a test of non-response bias showed that a total number of questionnaires (762) returned by the respondents compared with the number administered (865). The result shows a response rate of 88.1% which suggests that they are adequate for the analyses based on the recommendation of 80% (Kerlinger, 1964). Furthermore, the data for this study were subjected to data cleaning tests such as out of range, missing values, outliers and normality tests. All the issues relating to the data cleaning were taken care of,and the data was certified and used for the final analysis.

## IV. Results and Discussion of Findings

The male respondents represent 61.4% while the female respondents represent 38.6% the spread is good, as it was not a deliberate decision to access more men than women. Also, the length of stay is essential as it is expected to be one of the primary determinants of the depth of knowledge of the environment, while 30.7% lived in the communities for 11-15 years, 25.4% lived for above 20years, in fact 93.6% of respondents for this study lived in the communities for more than 5years. However, 78.5% (54.3% and 24.2%) of respondents belong to the active age group of 25year to 65years; this is also appropriate, 86.1% of respondents have secondary education and above. The literacy level of the respondents is quite significant to understand the questionnaires administered to them with face-to-face support also. Also, 42.6% of the respondents work for the local government, only 2.1% are employed in the Private sector, reflecting the low level of private investments in the local communities generally, 31.1% are self-employed mainly farming/hunting and petty trading. Other indices show the high poverty levels in the communities; only 14.2% earn more than N25, 000.00 a month, 21.2% earn less than N5000 a month at a time when $1was exchanged for N385.00. For pre-analysis, normality test was conducted to ensure that the data used for analysis are suitable for parametric analysis. The normality test for the dependent variable showed that the data follows a normal distribution given that the bell-shaped curve is symmetric. There were no outliers in the data after testing using boxplot.

**Structural Equation Modelling**

This study applied structural equation modelling (SEM). The goal of SEM analysis is to determine the extent to which sample data support the theoretical model. Structural equation models comprise both a measurement model and a structural model. The measurement model relates observed responses or 'indicators' to latent variables and sometimes to observed covariates (i.e., the CFA model). Figure 1 shows the measurement model for this study.

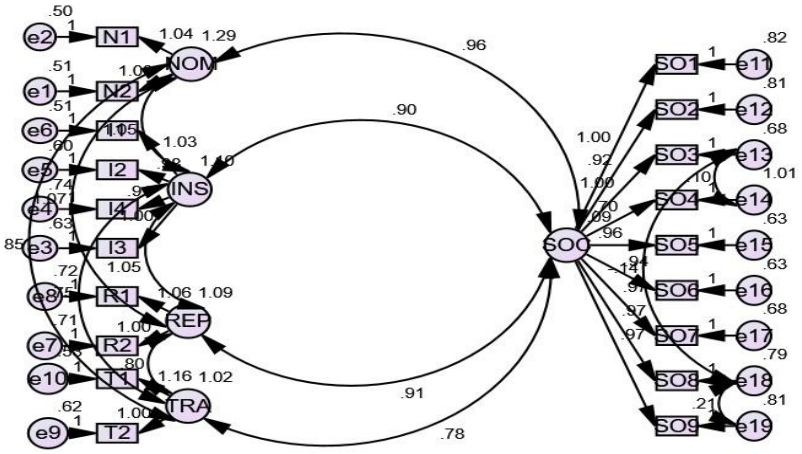


**Figure 1:** Measurement model

**Table 1:** Goodness of Fit indices

| Measurement Index | Bench Mark | Values Obtained | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|
| **χ2** | | 520.766 | |
| **Df** | | 139 | |
| **χ2/df** | Between 2 and 5 | 3.747 | Good fit |
| **GFI** | ≥0.90 | 0.933 | Good fit |
| **AGFI** | ≥0.90 | 0.909 | Good fit |
| **CFI** | ≥0.90 | 0.961 | Good fit |
| **NFI** | ≥0.90 | 0.947 | Good fit |
| **RMSEA** | <0.05 | 0.060 | Fair fit |
| **TLI** | ≥0.90 | 0.952 | Good fit |

**Note: χ2** = Chi-square; **df** = degree of freedom; **GFI** = Goodness of fit index;
**RMSEA** = Root mean square error of approximation; **NFI** = Normated fit index; **TLI** = Tucker Lewis index; **CFI** = Comparative fit index; **AGFI** – Adjusted goodness of fit index

Table 1 shows the result of the fitness indices for CFA. The model was refined and re-specified, in order to improve the fitness of the model (Kline, 2005)The items which shared a high degree of residual variance were therefore constraint. Thus, after constraining these problematic items, the measurement model was re-run, as recommended (Bryne, 1998; Kline, 2005; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The model was certified fit as shown in figure 1.

**Convergent Validity**

Convergent validity is the extent to which observed variables of a particular construct share a high portion of the variance in common (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). Factor loadings of the construct, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) estimation are used to assess the convergent validity of each of the constructs. Also, Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, (2006) suggested that ideal standardised loading estimates should be 0.7 or higher, AVE estimation should be higher than 0.5, and reliability estimates should be above 0.7 to show adequate convergent validity. Therefore, in this study, the minimum cut off criteria for loadings >0.7, AVE >0.5, and reliability >0.7 used for assessing the convergent validity. Table 2also shows the result of the composite reliability (CR) for each construct used for this study. The result shows that the value of the composite reliability implies that the instrument is reliable.

**Table 2:** Convergent Validity

| s/n | Constructs | Factor Loading |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Nominal Stakeholder** - AVE= **0.727, CR= 0.842** | |
| | **N1** | 0.858 |
| | **N2** | 0.847 |
| 2 | **Instrumental Stakeholder** -AVE= **0.629, CR= 0.871** | |
| | **I1** | 0.833 |
| | **I2** | 0.798 |
| | **I3** | 0.796 |
| | **I4** | 0.742 |
| 3 | **Representative Stakeholder** - AVE= **0.618, CR= 0.764** | |
| | **R1** | 0.777 |
| | **R2** | 0.795 |
| 4 | | |
| | **Transformative Stakeholder** AVE= **0.672, CR=0.803** | |
| | **T1** | 0.849 |
| | **T2** | 0.789 |
| 5 | **Socio-cultural** AVE= **0.6283, CR= 0.919** | |
| | **SO1** | 0.755 |
| | **SO2** | 0.731 |
| | **SO3** | 0.785 |
| | **SO4** | 0.586 |
| | **SO5** | 0.784 |
| | **SO6** | 0.777 |
| | **SO7** | 0.777 |
| | **SO8** | 0.752 |
| | **SO9** | 0.748 |

**Source: AMOS output 23.0**

**Table 3:** Discriminant Validity

| | NOM | INS | REP | TRA | SOC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **NOM** | **0.8525** | | | | |
| **INS** | 0.6842 | **0.7929** | | | |
| **REP** | 0.6806 | 0.7419 | **0.7861** | | |
| **TRA** | 0.6083 | 0.5421 | 0.5602 | **0.8195** | |
| **SOC** | 0.6626 | 0.6699 | 0.6156 | 0.5721 | **0.7462** |

Table 3 shows the result of the Discriminant validity for this study. Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which a latent construct is genuinely distinct from other latent constructs (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The result shows that the diagonal values which are bolded are all higher than the correlational values of the latent construct which confirms the discriminant validity of this study.

**The Structural Model**

The structural model then specifies relations among latent variables and regressions of latent variables on observed variables. The relationship between the measurement and structural models is further defined by the two-step approach to SEM proposed by James, Mulaik, & Brett, (1982). The two-step approach emphasises the analysis of the measurement and structural models as two conceptually distinct models. This approach expanded the idea of assessing the fit of the structural equation model among latent variables (structural model) independently of assessing the fit of the observed variables to the latent variables (measurement model). The rationale for the two-step approach is given by Sorbom & Joreskog, (2003) who argued that testing the initially specified theory (structural model) may not be meaningful unless the measurement model holds. This is because if the chosen indicators for a construct do not measure that construct, the specified theory should be modified before the structural relationships are tested.

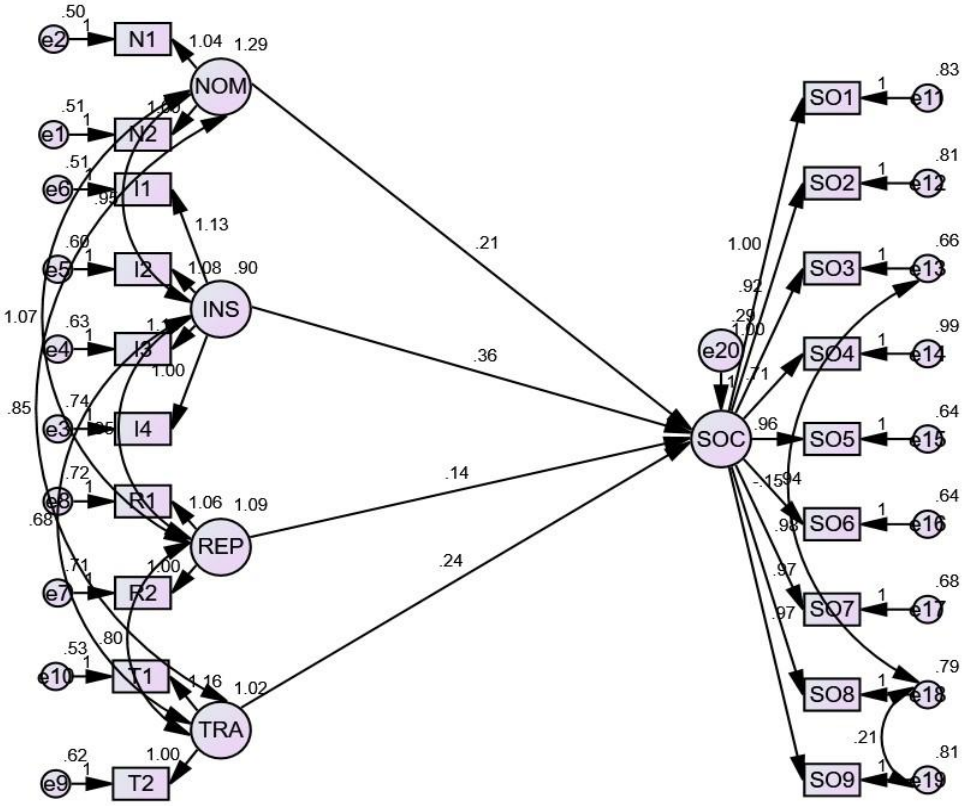


**Figure 2:** Structural Model

**Test of Hypotheses**

Table 4 presents the values used to test the stated hypotheses followed by decisions.

**Table 4:** Regression estimates of latent constructs

| Hypotheses | Construct | Direction | Construct | Standardised Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | P-value | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **$H_1$** | **SOC** | <-- | **NOM** | 0.206 | 0.088 | 2.340 | 0.019 | Significant |
| **$H_2$** | **SOC** | <-- | **INS** | 0.363 | 0.239 | 1.520 | 0.128 | Not significant |
| **$H_3$** | **SOC** | <-- | **REP** | 0.140 | 0.277 | 0.505 | 0.614 | Not significant |
| **$H_4$** | **SOC** | <-- | **TRA** | 0.236 | 0.055 | 4.263 | 0.000 | Significant |

**Source: AMOS output 23.0**

**Hypothesis One:** The null hypothesis is that the nominal level of stakeholders' participation in eco-tourism has no significant positive effect on the preservation of the socio-cultural heritage of the communities around ecotourism destinations in Plateau State. However, the test result shows that there is a significant effect of the nominal level of stakeholders' participation in the social-cultural heritage of communities. This result implies that the reason for participation by stakeholders which is to 'display' the inclusion of local communities and to legitimise government participation in the activities of the ecotourism destination towards the socio-cultural preservation, is significantly being achieved.

**Hypothesis Two:** The null hypothesis is that the Instrumental level of stakeholders' participation in eco-tourism has no significant positive effect on the preservation of the socio-cultural heritage of the communities around ecotourism destinations in Plateau State. The test result confirms that there is no significant effect of the instrumental level of stakeholders' participation in the preservation of the social-cultural heritage of communities. This result implies that the reason for participation by stakeholders which is to 'means' of reducing the cost of living for local communities and as a means for efficiency to the government in the activities of the ecotourism destination towards the socio-cultural preservation, is not significantly being achieved.

**Hypothesis Three:** The null hypothesis statement is that the Representative level of stakeholders' participation in eco-tourism has no significant positive effect on the preservation of the socio-cultural heritage of the communities around ecotourism destinations in Plateau State. The test result confirmed that there is no

significant effect of the Representative level of stakeholders' participation in the preservation of the social-cultural heritage of communities. This result implies that the reason for participation by stakeholders which in this case is to 'have a voice' in the management of ecotourism destinations in their communities which the can leverage upon for improved livelihood is not significant. Also the aim of interest of the government at this level in managing ecotourism destination for sustainability this is also not significantly achieved. Thisis reflected in the insignificant preservation of the socio-cultural heritage of the communities around the destinations.

**Hypothesis Four:** The null hypothesis statement is that the Transformative level of stakeholders' participation in eco-tourism has no significant positive effect on the preservation of the socio-cultural heritage of the communities around ecotourism destinations in Plateau State. However, the test result showed that there is a significant effect of the Transformative level of stakeholders' participation in the preservation of the social-cultural heritage of communities. This result implies that the reason for participation by stakeholders which in this case is 'a means to an end' as a source of empowerment to the communities and the government is significantly being achieved. This result could be because the local communities engage in open fishing, farming, hunting and even residing within the ecotourism destination reserved areas. This may be empowerment to them but not sustainable in the management of the ecotourism destinations in their communities.Which the can leverage upon for improved livelihood is not significant. The preservation of socio-cultural heritage to the detriment of the environment is not sustainability.

## V. Discussions

The sustainability of ecotourism destination depends on the active participation of Stakeholders at all the four levels of participation (nominal, Instrumental, Representative and Transformative). The stakeholders Participation should impact positively on the preservation of the socio-cultural heritage of the communities; it should also provide economic benefits for local empowerment. Finally, it should ensure that the environment is keptserene and well conserved and protected. Therefore the relationship between the participation of stakeholders and the outcome of such participation is central to the design and implementation of workable ecotourism development and management plan and policies.This study has shown from the four tested hypotheses and the brief analysis under each, that Plateau State ecotourism destinations are not significantly impacting positively of the sustainability of the destinations. It has shown that the State government owned 100% of this destination which has politicised participation and thereby leaving the destinations in a deplorable state of dilapidation and unstainable practices being on the increase. The socio-cultural heritage sites and cultural festivals of the communities are not well integrated into the overall ecotourism management structure and plans. This has therefore deprived the local communities of the enormous benefits that ecotourism provides to those who practice it sustainably with the active participation of all stakeholders.

## VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the Plateau State ecotourism destinations are not being sustainably managed and that the 100% ownership by the state government is a significant obstacle to the development of these destinations. The expected results from ecotourism both as an alternative source of revenue to the government and employment/empowerment to the people especially the local communities cannot be achieved where stakeholders participation is not adding significant values to the three essential constructs that constitute sustainability (social, economic and environment). By the above conclusion, it is recommended that the Plateau State government back on the process of handing over the management and development of the ecotourism destinations to local communities and the private sector. The state government should focus more onthe regulatory role and the compliance of destinations to global best practices. Several models would provide the basis for restructuring the ecotourism sector. Some of the models could be community-based tourism models which would be designed to fit each destination while the second is to adopt the relevant public-private-partnership model that puts the local communities at the centre.

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**List of abbreviations**

**NOM-** Nominal Participation
**INS-** Instrumental Participation
**REP-** Representative Participation
**TRA-** Transformative Participation
**SOC**-Social Outcome

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