

## Tourism and Rural Development in South-South Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study demonstrated the relationship between tourism and rural development. A cross sectional survey in 30 tourists communities randomly selected across three South-South States in Nigeria was done. A checklist of tourism and rural development indicators was constructed and used for data collection. The relationship between the two constructs-tourism and rural development was analyzed and tested via the multiple correlation technique. Findings showed a robust significant positive relationship between the constructs signifying an underlying common property between them. This shared common property identified as 'Rural Development Planning' reinforces the calls for stakeholders who are interested in coming to grips with the challenge of rural development to adopt tourism as an effective tool for rural development planning. The establishment of a Department of tourism at the local government area (LGA) level and the Community-based Tourism Committee at the community level remains the institutional framework for achieving this agenda.

**Keywords:** Tourism; Rural Areas; Rural Development; South-South Nigeria; Correlation Analysis

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The need to develop rural areas and improve the fortunes of rural dwellers in developing nations has again resurged at the global stage. Current debates revolve around resuscitating agriculture, stimulating markets, diversifying rural economy and creating stronger value chain for rural products (European Union Report, 2018). It is noteworthy that government in countries of developing economies have reasoned that guaranteeing rural sustainability and ensuring rural development can contribute significantly to national peace and security (Phyllis Bo-Yuen, 2020). This is against the backdrop that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UNSDG) number Eleven emphasizes the creation of sustainable urban settlements and communities while overlooking the issue of rural development (UNDP, 2015). However, about half of the world population are rural based (UNFPA, 2019). This is why the European Forum on Rural Development in Africa Caribbean Pacific (ACP) Countries held in 2018 in Brusel became significant as it brought to the fore a global perspective to the challenges of rural development in Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of rural development, what is indisputable is the fact that rural development in contemporary society is a process that revolves around 3 – point agenda. These include: engendering economic development; developing infrastructure to meet social needs and attitudinal transformation in matters concerning society, culture and ways of thinking (Kanu and Ukonze, 2018). Over the years, in most developing countries, rural development policies, programmes and strategies have centered on the agrarianization of the rural economy and alignment with international donor agencies for Aid (European Union, 2018). However, with the current wave of dwindling of agricultural fortunes witnessed in most rural economies, a search for an alternative rural development paradigm became inevitable. Indeed, climate change, conflict, market concentration amid spatial disconnection has created skewed economic bottlenecks for rural economics to thrive (World Bank, 2021).

Rural development stakeholders are beginning to come to grips with the new model of rural development that hinges on rural tourism. The development of rural tourism as a panacea for socio-economic development represents a shift in the agrarianization paradigm that once dominated rural development theory, policy, and practice (James and Effiong, 2021). Tourism is by far the world's largest and fastest growing economic sector, accounting for 10.4% of global GDP and 319 million jobs in 2018 (World Travel and Tourism Council, WTTC, 2018). Tourism activities carried out in rural areas is termed "rural tourism." According to Essien and James (2019), rural tourism is a multifaceted activities that include ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, community based tourism and food tourism. In short, rural tourism represents an effort aimed at "selling" the unique physical, social, cultural components of the rural landscape to "outsiders" by

creating tourism products that are authentic, uncommon while showcasing the rural bond (UNWTO, 2016). Rural tourism has been recognized by development experts as a tool for reversing the malaise of uneven spatial distribution of income and socio-economic development between urban and rural areas through deliberate effort at increasing rural income via tourism employment and the provision of certified infrastructure in rural areas (Mitchell and Reiel, 2011). This assertion has been corroborated by James and Essien (2021) through an empirical assessment of the impact of rural tourism on coastal communities' development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Their findings showed that rural tourism could serve as a platform for accelerated development through the alleviation of poverty, provision of infrastructure, boost local income; provide access to non-farming jobs and also preserve the cultural and physical landscape of the region.

The imperative of adopting the rural tourism strategy for sustainable rural development is critical for Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, (NBS) (2018), Nigeria's population is estimated at over 193 million, with a rural population of 98,156,561 persons representing 48.04% of total. This statistics places Nigeria as a largely rural country compared to South Africa with 33.65% of rural population and Brazil, 13.18% (UNFPA, 2019). Furthermore, in defining a rural area, Nigeria adopts a single criterion of population size obtained through census. Based on this, the National Population Commission NPC, (2006) defines a rural area as settlements with less than 20,000 inhabitants. With this arrangement, Nigeria faces a huge national burden of providing succor to her enormous rural based population and enclaves.

In the past, the Nigerian government experimented with several rural development programmes in her bid to transform the rural enclave and make life meaningful for the rural populace. Some of such programmes were basically agricultural in nature like the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); the Green Revolution; Agric Development Programme (ADP); and Agric Credit Scheme (ACS). Others such as the Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI); River Basin Development Authority (RBDA); Primary Healthcare Programme and Better Life for Rural Women were designed to provide infrastructure and improve the general well-being of the rural citizens (Kanu and Ukonze, 2018). In spite of all these efforts, rural population in Nigeria still suffer from poor infrastructure, high unemployment, social exclusion, limited access to basic services and forced migration due to decline in opportunities and extreme poverty (Kanu and Ukonze, 2018).

The South-South region of Nigeria where this study is based remains the worst hit in terms of rural exclusion, neglect and underdevelopment. While efforts targeted at oil drilling has generated far reaching environmental and social conflicts, the enormous tourism resources are yet to be fully harnessed.

This paper seeks to empirically demonstrate the link between tourism and rural development for the South-South region in Nigeria. The findings are expected to enrich existing theoretical perspectives on tourism and development nexus and further encourage rural development planning on the basis of this new paradigm.

## **II. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA**

The study area is the South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. It comprises three coastal States: AkwaIbom, Cross River and Rivers State. The three States were chosen for the study based on consideration of contiguity, the relative concentration of major tourism activities in the region and the evidence of robust tourism drive by the various State governments south region. The study area is located between latitudes 4°2'01" and 7° only? North and Longitudes 6°2'01" and 8°3'01" East (Fig.1).



**Figure 1:** Location of the Study Area on the Map of the South-South Zone of Nigeria

It occupies a total landmass of 37.663km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 11,994,574 (NPC, 2006). However, using the population growth rate of 3% per annum for the study area, the projected population of the area in 2021 is 18,687,155. The region's tourism development is traceable to the 18th century when trade in palm oil and other local products attracted people from different areas of the world to the region. Apart from trade in local produce which attracted the foreign merchants to the coastal area of Rivers, Cross River and AkwaIbom State, the other activities which attracted foreigners to the region were the New Yam Festivals, Chieftaincy Coronation Ceremonies, initiation into womanhood and blood oath ceremonies (Karibo, 1991; Ikurekong, 2010). These ceremonies marked the era of cultural tourism in Nigeria.

### III. THE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study was designed as a cross sectional survey to demonstrate the relationship between Tourism and rural development in South-South Nigeria. A random selection of 30 rural communities from the three South-South States (AkwaIbom, Cross River and Rivers States) in Nigeria formed the study sample. A checklist of tourism and rural development indicators was developed and used to collect data for the study. Interviews were also held with tourism officials and other key informants in the communities. A dichotomous measure; 1 and 0 was used to score the presence or absence of a given tourism potential, service or activities as well as development indicator for each sampled community. Accordingly, 1 indicated the presence of tourism/development indicator while 0 showed the absence of it. Specifically, tourism measures were collapsed into five key elements;

- X<sub>1</sub> – Tourists' attraction (natural/created)
- X<sub>2</sub> –Tourism Equipment (souvenir center, sign post, information center)
- X<sub>3</sub> – Tourism Service (restaurants tour guide, retail shop)
- X<sub>4</sub> – Tourists accommodation (motel, chalets, guest house)
- X<sub>5</sub> – Tourists' Services (taxi, motorcycle, boat)

Similarly, three key development indicators were used to measure the status of rural development as follows:

- Y<sub>1</sub> – Presence of infrastructure (paved road, electricity, health facility, water supply)
- Y<sub>2</sub> – Presence of industries (local craft, agro-processing)
- Y<sub>3</sub> – Presence of off-farm employment/earning

Regarding data analysis, the multiple correlation analysis was utilized. The purpose was to examine the shared property between the set of tourism indicators (as independent variables) and a single index of rural development

(as dependent variables). The MCA also tested the null hypothesis that “tourism does not relate significantly with rural development.” To achieve this, a composite measure of rural development (Y) was evolved by the summation of  $y_1$ ,  $y_2$  and  $y_3$ .

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1 Tourism Development in the Study Area

Tourism development though a major policy thrust of government in the South-South region is yet to reach an advanced stage (Essien, 2016). As Table 1 indicates, the region has abundance of natural tourists’ attraction, specifically in the form of water-based attractions such as creeks, water front, water fall beach and lagoon. These attractions can be attributable to the littoral status of the region. Other natural attractions in the area are nature-based attraction such as the mangrove, village and her unique landscape (Essien and Imikan, 2018). These natural attractions have been fairly developed for tourists’ consumption in the study area as 100 percent of the sampled respondents reported the presence of one or more natural attraction. However, tourism can reach advance stage where destinations would boost of supply of diverse attraction including created attractions. In the study area created attraction such as cultural, religious historical event/monuments, and resort are yet to be fully developed for touristic value as only 10 out of 30 sampled communities reported the presence of one or more created attraction (Table I).

It is important to note that the study area coincides with the Niger Delta region which is noted for oil production and environmental degradation in Nigeria. In the light of the above, experts have proposed a shift from over-dependence on the oil sector to tourism development for the sustainability of the region beyond the oil era (Essien and James, 2019; Essien and Udofia, 2019).

Apart from tourist attraction (which is the main reason tourists visit a destination), other tourism structures such as tourism equipment, services, accommodation and transportation are critical for a complete tourism experience in a destination. For the study area, apart from structures like restaurants, rental shop and motorcycle that were found in 100 percent of the sample, other tourism supporting structures were not found in some communities.

**Table I: Stock of Tourism Structures in the Study Area (N=30)**

<b>Tourism Structure</b>	<b>Total Stock</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>1. Tourism Attraction</b>		
Natural (One or more)	30	100
Created (One or more)	10	33.3
<b>2. Tourism Equipment</b>		
Souvenir Center	20	66.6
Sign Post	23	76.6
Information Center		
<b>3. Tourism Service</b>	8	26.6
Restaurant	30	100
Tour Guide	14	46.6
Retail Shop	30	100
<b>4. Tourism Accommodation</b>		
Motel	10	33.3
Chalet	7	23.3
Guest House	8	26.6
<b>5. Tourists Transport Services</b>		
Taxi/Bus	11	36.6
Motorcycle	30	100.0
Boat	11	36.6

Source: Field Survey by Authors (2021)

##### 4.2 Status of Rural Development in the Study Area

The rural situation in the rural South-South region of Nigeria reflects clearly the general level of underdevelopment in the entire country. The NBS report (2018), has shown the low level of development in rural Nigeria as compared to her urban counterpart. Findings in this study have added credence to the several reports of underdevelopment of rural Nigeria. One of the indicators of rural underdevelopment in Nigeria is low stock of infrastructure. As in Table 2 indicates, only 19 communities out of 30 had paved road, the conditions of these roads remains issues of concern due to its deplorable state. As essential as the presence of health facility to the well-being of rural people are; only 50 percent of sampled communities had health facility. Further information from direct observation and key informants revealed that most of the health facilities lack basic

equipment and health workers to deliver rural healthcare services. The issue of rural water supply is dismal. Only 33.3 percent of the communities were provided with borehole water supply. Most rural communities in the study area depend on the already polluted surfacewater from the creeks and streams. These findings are in line with previous findings by James and Essien (2012) that water supply in rural Akwa Ibom State fall short of both national and WHO standards.

Rural industrialization as well as off-farm earnings/employment are important indicators of rural development. For the study area, there was zero presence of manufacturing industry; Agro-processing were found in only 7 out of 30 sampled communities, while 19 communities were provided with direct tourism employment. One of the objectives of rural development planning is to create diversified economy for rural dwellers. In the face of crop failure and diminishing agric fortunes, increasing the sources of non-farming earnings for rural dwellers become imperative. According to Effiong, Essien and Patrick (2020), over dependence on agro-based programmes to roll back rural poverty has been perceived by rural people as unsustainable, fueling further debate on the need for alternative rural development paradigm. The proceeding section of this paper attempts to provide the empirical underpinnings for incorporating tourism as a rural development paradigm.

**Table 2: Rural Development Indicators in the Study Area (N=30)**

Development Indicator	Total Stock	Percent
<b>1. Rural Infrastructure</b>		
Paved road	19	63.3
Electricity	25	83.3
Health Facility/services	15	50.0
Water supply (Borehole)	10	33.3
<b>2. Rural Industrialization</b>		
Local Craft Industry	16	53.3
Agro-processing Industry	7	23.3
Manufacturing Industry	0	00.0
<b>3. Rural Employment (non-farming)</b>		
Direct Tourism Employment	19	63.3
Other non-farming Employment	22	73.3

Source: Field survey by Authors (2021)

#### 4.3 Tourism and Rural Development Correlate in the Study Area

The theoretical proposition that tourism shares a common property with rural development and therefore could be relied upon to change rural socio-economic situation require further robust empirical verification across time and space. For the South-South region of Nigeria where this research was conducted, the underlying question was whether tourism is significantly related with rural development? To answer the above question, the null hypothesis stating that “there is no significant relationship between tourism and rural development” was formulated. The Product Moment Correlation Analysis (PMCA) on SPSS version 25 was used for testing the hypothesis. The results are displayed on Table 3. In the analysis, the sets of tourism variables numbering X<sub>1</sub>-X<sub>5</sub> were correlated singly with the status of rural development (Y) to generate the magnitude, direction as well as the significance of relationship between them. In Table 3, the lower triangle of the matrix was used to enter the zero-order Product Moment Correlation Coefficients while the level of significance of each Correlation Coefficient was entered in the corresponding cell of the upper triangle.

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix for Tourism Variables (Independent) and Rural Development (Dependent)**

	X <sub>1</sub>	X <sub>2</sub>	X <sub>3</sub>	X <sub>4</sub>	X <sub>5</sub>	Y
X <sub>1</sub> : Tourist Attraction		.000	.000	.000	.002	.000
X <sub>2</sub> : Tourism Equipment	.313		.000	.040	.008	.000
X <sub>3</sub> :Tourism Services	.601	.125		.001	.000	.000
X <sub>4</sub> :Tourism Accommodation	.207	.264	.420		.000	.000
X <sub>5</sub> : Tourist Transport Service	.627	.181	.145	.513		.000
Y: Rural Development	.844**	.810**	.651**	.722**	.763**	

Source: SPSS Data Analysis (2021)

N/B \*\* Indicate significant correlation between tourism variable (X) and rural development (Y) at 0.05 level of significance

As Table 3 indicates, all the zero-order Correlation Co-efficient between tourism variables and rural development were more than 0.50 and significant at 0.05 probability level ( $\rho < 0.05$ ). This shows that there is significant relationship between tourism and rural development. This result invalidates the null hypothesis. Correlation between two variables signifies the extent to which they shared an underlying construct or component. Viewed in this light, the high correlation between tourism variables and rural development is readily seen to indicate the existence of a common property among them all. This common components which underlies the six variables (tourist attraction, tourism equipment, tourism services, tourist accommodation, tourist transport services and rural development) is most likely ‘rural development planning imperatives’. This is so because the provisions of tourism structures (highlighted above) as well as the indicators of rural development (infrastructure, industry and employment) are the offspring of an effective rural development planning initiative. At this juncture, it is necessary to examine the correlation between each tourism variable and rural development.

i. **Tourist Attraction and Rural Development ( $r = .844$ ;  $\rho \leq 0.05$ ):** the high correlation between this pair is very insightful. Rural development (in terms of paved road, health facility/services, electricity, water, and communication services) are sensitive to the development of tourists’ attraction in an area. According to James and Essien (2021), a little, sleepy rural community called InuaEyetIkot in Ibeno L.G.A of AkwaIbom State witnessed significant infrastructural development owing to the development of Ibeno beach for tourists’ attraction. It is therefore natural to see rural development programme anchored on tourism development produce a concomitant effects in the area of infrastructure as part of tourism support systems (Essien, 2016).

ii. **Tourism Equipment and Rural Development ( $r = .810$ ;  $\rho \leq 0.05$ ):** The high positive correlation between the pair of tourism equipment (the presence of souvenir shop) and rural development (craft industry development) presupposes that the former can encourage local craft development. Tourists have to share authentic experience by patronizing local product such as raffia bags/shoes as in IkotEkpene, Akwa Ibom State; and local cuisines as in UdungUko, Akwalbom State (Essien, 2016). To this end, tourism in rural areas can engender rural industrialization and create jobs.

iii. **Tourism Services and Rural Development, ( $r = .651$ ;  $\rho \leq 0.05$ ):** Tourism Services include retail shops, restaurants barbing/hair-do which are essential service required by tourists to make their stay comfortable. The high positive correlation between the two variables suggest that off-farm jobs/earning are likely to increase as opportunity for rendering tourism services are provided. This perhaps is the reason for James and Essien (2021) assertion that the development of tourism can interfere with rural job structure through the multiplication of off-farm jobs. In the face of dwindling agricultural fortunes, tourism remains an alternative sector for providing jobs and off-farm earnings for rural people. In recognizance of the impact tourism can bring to bear on rural development, the Akwa Ibom State government through the State Parliament has instituted the Akwa Ibom States’ Tourism, Arts and Culture Endowment Fund to fast track its tourism and rural development initiative.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has confirmed the theoretical proposition that tourism shares a common variance with rural development and can therefore be used as a catalyst for rural change. The positive significant relationship between tourism and rural development as demonstrated in this study re-echoes the need for a paradigm shift in rural development initiative. A shift from the traditional agriculture-oriented programmesto tourism oriented programme is hereby affirmed. Tourism development has the potentials to transform the infrastructural, industrial and employment structure in the rural areas. The establishment of the Department of Tourism at the local government area can serve as a springboard to harnessing tourism potentials for the development of the backlands. Furthermore, at the community level, the adoption of the Community-based Tourism (CBT) Committee offers a ray of hope for rural communities who are interested in rural development. To drive this agenda, therefore, the institution of Community Tourism Committee at the local level of government is hereby recommended.

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