

Harnessing Ecotourism Potentials for the Socioeconomic Development and Livelihoods Improvement of the people of Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigates the influence of ecotourism development on the socioeconomic development and improvement of the rural livelihoods of the people of Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The survey inferential research design was adopted for the study, the main trust of the study is to investigate how ecotourism potentials of Bekwarra can be harnessed and to influence the socioeconomic development and improve the livelihoods of the people and to identify factors that can influence the development of ecotourism in Bekwarra Local Government Area. Using multistage random sampling techniques, a sample of five hundred respondents were sampled from among farmers, businessmen, traders, palm wine tappers, hunters, civil and public servants, conservation and development officer and community leaders for the study. Structured questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection. The researchers personally administered the instruments and collected same back. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Regression Analysis were the statistical methods adopted for analyses. The result shows that ecotourism development can significantly influence the socioeconomic development and improvement of livelihoods of the people of Bekwarra, factors like financial capital and household income, educational status, infrastructural deficits, technical knowhow, community participation, awareness of ecotourism opportunities, marital status, cultural factors, religious affiliation, occupational status among others were identified as factors influencing ecotourism development in Bekwarra. The study concluded that ecotourism development can significantly influence the socioeconomic development and also improve the livelihoods of the people of Bekwarra. It was therefore recommended that the tourism potentials of Bekwarra should be harnessed in order to bring about economic development and improve the rural livelihoods of the people of Bekwarra.

Keyword: Ecotourism, archeological sites, ecotourism sites, socioeconomic development, livelihoods improvement and ecotourism potentials.

Introduction

Every society is endowed with one form of natural resources of the other to be exploited for the betterment of the lives of the people of that community. Most communities are blessed with forests, others with water bodies, while others are blessed with serene environment and archaeological sites good enough for tourist

attractions. These resources if properly harnessed and exploited can contribute to the socioeconomic development of the rural livelihoods of such communities and bring about their infrastructural development. Most Bekwarra community have developed into subsistent farming because of the availability of rich arable land, which has become

depleted reducing crop yield due to repeated cultivation and farming. Farming activities within this arable land that was once very productive is becoming very discouraging most especially as farm inputs are not available. To arrest this trend and provide for the socioeconomic development and livelihood improvement, alternative sources of means of livelihood is to be explored and one such alternative is harnessing the rich cultural and environmental resources endowed by nature in Bekwarra for ecotourism development.

Bekwarra local government is blessed with archeological sites like the Ogolobi pond and Ungwa Ugbe anibi in Adihe, Ukaa ochi'ifu in Beten, iritem Agbalu and the Irite famous monolith at Ukpah, Ugbe Onya'abo k'ukaa in Bewo, Otukpuru, Iritem Inyanya in Nyanya and Abuana forest. These archeological sites and forests if properly harnessed, can lead to the socioeconomic development and livelihood improvements of the lives of the people of Bekwarra local government area. Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting relatively fragile, pristine and undisturbed natural area (Environment) intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative from standard commercial tourism, its purpose may be to educate the traveler (tourists), to raise funds for ecological conservation and or the host communities to directly benefit from economic development and political empowerment. Ecotourism involves travel away to destination where Flora, Fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions; its purpose is intended to offer visitors (tourists) insight into the impact of human activities on the environment and to foster a greater appreciation of the natural environment.

Ecotourism is the business of organizing holidays to places that people do not always visit in a way which do not damage the environment and other resources in the destination area. The International Ecotourism Society (2005) defines ecotourism as,

“a responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and sustains the wellbeing of the local people”. The benefits of ecotourism, is its potential to contribute to conservation and development, thereby improving the socioeconomic status and livelihoods of the tourism host communities (Eshun, 2011; Bhuiyan, Siwar, Ismail, & Islam, 2012).

Bansal & Kumar, (2011) further described ecotourism as an environmentally responsible travel and visitation to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present; that promotes conservation, have a low visitor impact and provide for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples thereby raising environmental consciousness (Tosun, 2006; Joshi, 2011). There are some features of this type of tourism which makes ecotourism different from other form of tourism; Patterson (2002) listed the following as characteristics of an ecotourism business:

- a) The impact of the activities carried out must be minimal on a protected area's natural resources and recreation techniques.
- b) There should be public participation involving different stakeholders ranging from individuals, communities, ecotourists, tour operators and government institutions beginning from the planning stage to development, implementation and monitoring phases
- c) There should be a placed carrying capacity of people to areas of ecotourism attractions per time and per season.
- d) Every activity to be carried out should have some element of supporting the conservation and preservation of the natural area on which the experience is based.
- e) Provide tourists orientation on the regions to be visited.

- f) Empower local people by hiring them and also buy local supplies where such exists.
- g) Recognizes that nature is a central element to the tourist experience.
- h) The use of local tour guides trained in interpretation of languages, scientific or natural history.
- i) Encourage and also ensure that wild lives are not harassed.
- j) Protect and respect the privacy and cultural values of the local people.

Ecotourism focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, its landscape, flora, fauna and their socioeconomic activities as well as cultural artifacts from the locality. Ecotourism, natural resources, cultural heritage, rural lifestyle and an integrated tourism is a type of local economic activities (Lash, 2003; Kiss, 2004; Weaver & Lawton, 2007; Fennell, 2008; Honey, 2008; Hoole, 2010; Stone & Rogerson, 2011; Eshetu, 2014; Tran & Walter, 2014).

According to Tosun, (2006) "Tourism is sustainable when its development and operation include participation of local populace, protection of the total environment, fair economic returns for the industry and its host community, as well as a mutual respect and gratification to all involved parties". At the same time, ecotourism should produce direct economic benefit for the local community if it is to elicit their continued support, benefits that compliment rather than overwhelm traditional practices and sources of income (Yeboah, 2013). However, such economic benefits and material wealth obtained by the local community may themselves lead to cultural changes in their way of life. Zapata, Hall, Lindo, & Vanderschaeghe, (2011) posited that "ecotourism is an agent of change", therefore it has the potentials of developing the socioeconomic aspect of Bekwarra and can also improve their livelihood condition if properly harnessed.

In recent times, Africa has been said to be the fastest growing tourism region with international arrivals reaching a 7.5 percent increase over that of the previous year with 360 million tourists recorded in 1998, 25 million (6.94%) visited Africa (Odunsanwo, 2009) . The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2004) rated Nigeria as one of the most visited countries in West Africa. Projections had it that if benefits and activities of travels and ecotourism are utilized effectively, it could be a force for positive growth and economic development especially for a developing state such as Cross River State (Zhao & Ritchie, 2007).

Tourism markets have the potential of improving rural livelihoods and the socioeconomic status of these rural communities within a sustainable framework of wealth creation, choice, innovation and competition. Ecotourism has the capacity to increase exports, bring in capital investment, boost rural economies (GDP) and create employment opportunities. Ecotourism generates jobs through companies/agencies directly involved in the business and in related supply industries such as retail, construction, telecommunications and manufacturing sectors of the economy.

The major underlying assumption of ecotourism is that visitors can provide the necessary economic incentives to achieve local conservation and development. In theory, ecotourism generates revenue that can be used to protect and conserve biodiversity and the natural resources that draws visitors to a particular site. It is also regarded as a mode of ecocodevelopment, which represents practical and effective means of attaining social and economic improvement for all countries (Egbe, Ambo, Ajake, Emanghe & Eneji, 2009). World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), estimated that travel and tourism generated 203 million jobs over 8% of all jobs worldwide in 2000, rising to over 207 million in 2001, 210 in 2008 and about 218 in 2013

(Eshetu, 2014). Within a decade, this is estimated to increase to over 260 million jobs or of all employment. The jobs employ a significant proportion of women, minorities and young people and are predominantly in small and medium scale enterprises (SMES) (Yeboah, 2013, Page & Connell, 2006; Holden, 2008).

Ecotourism generates economic opportunities for both the formal and informal sectors. It was observed in Kenya a lion is worth US\$ 7,000 per year in tourist revenues and income from an elephant herd is valued at US\$ 610,000 annually (Honey, 1999). Honey (1999) reports that foreign exchange from ecotourism has overridden the mainstay banana crop in Costa Rica and that it accounts for 80% of the income of the people living on the Galapagos Islands.

Lsh, (2003) found that tourism revenues for the seven villages around the Belize Baboon Sanctuary rose from US\$8,500 in 1992 to US\$ 99,000 in 2000. TIES (2005) states that “in Komodo National Park in Indonesia, independent travelers spend nearly US\$ 100 locally per visit; package holidaymakers spend only half this. In contrast, cruise-ship arrivals spend an average three cents in the local economy”. In South Africa nature-based tourism generates 11 times more revenue per year than cattle ranching on the same size of land, and job generation is 15 times greater (Honey, 1999). In the Monteverde area of Costa Rica one eco-destination directly employs 43 staff, with 70% being local residents whilst in Cuba ecotourism has been reported to generate over 54,000 direct employment, (Rogerson, 2011, 2012a, 2012b; Reimer, Walter, 2013).

Further empirical evidence of ecotourism’s economic potential was reported by Rogerson, (2011), that since 2001 the ecotourism sector in Nicaragua has overtaken coffee, meat, and other traditional product exports in economic performance. Often revenue from ecotourism comes from, *inter alia*, entry fees, camping fees,

sales of services and products at the site, donations by visitors and sales of concessions for accommodation, food and tours (Honey, 2008; Lacher & Nepal, 2010; Akama, Maingi & Carmago, 2011). Huge financial benefits obviously play an important part in ensuring smooth partnership between government, resort managers and local people and considering the fact that community people have a final say on how much and the extent tourism develops in their areas.

Most scholars observed that this partnership should be based on a commitment to hire rural community members as managers or workers in protected areas and this should ensure the improvement on their quality of lives by providing health care services, education and economic advancement and on empowering communities to manage their resources effectively. Amalu & Ajake, (2012) found out that in ecotourism development, most local communities’ members can be self employed through the provision of some of these services or employed by established tourism agencies as traders, transporters, tour guides, hotel/ accommodation staffs, security staffs, food/beverages, artifacts and cultural shops attendants among others. Ecotourism provides alternate source of livelihoods and are all avenues where local can be gainfully employed and can make their living out of this (Aniah, Eja, Otu & Ushie, 2009; Spencer & Nsiah, 2013; Muriithi, 2013).

Lash (2003) states that one important way to involve communities and gain their support in tourism is through local job creation. However, Eshun & Tonto, (2014) found that employment in ecotourism has been observed as mostly unskilled and semiskilled and often with low quality and low remuneration. It was further noted that “direct participation in ecotourism in protected areas is essential not only for economic benefit, livelihood security and measurable gains in quality of life

indicators such as health and education, but also for cultural survival”.

Communities located near major attraction sites, such as; national parks, reserves, archaeological and historic sites should have the opportunity to participate in ecotourism activities. These communities can provide hotels (accommodation), restaurants, shops, transportation and tour services; they can also be employed in management and operational activities (Okech, 2008).

The challenges of local involvement and participation in tourism continue to receive critical scholarly attention (Tosun, 2000; Kiss, 2004; Rogerson & Visser, 2004; Stone & Rogerson, 2011; Eshetu, 2014). Gilbert (2007) argues that ecotourism has both positive and negative ramifications, thus local communities who bear the brunt of such projects should be at the core of ecotourism analysis. Similar research on community based ecotourism activities has shown that inadequate knowledge of the locals, lack of funds and central institutions can impede local participation (Zhao & Ritchie, 2007; Guan, 2008, Stone & Rogerson, 2011; Sweeting, 2012; Yeboah, 2013; Eshetu, 2014).

However like every development project, ecotourism development has some problems inhibiting its execution and development. The challenges of local involvement and participation in tourism continue to receive critical scholarly attention (Tosun, 2000; Kiss, 2004; Rogerson & Visser, 2004; Stone & Rogerson, 2011; Eshun & Page, 2013). Respondents of Boabeng and Fiema who do not participate in ecotourism do so basically because of lack of transparency, lack of the requisite knowledge and a feeling of non-responsibility (Akama, Maingi and Carmago, 2011). The main challenges facing eco-destinations in most developing countries include lack of infrastructure, difficulties in access, political situation, ineffective marketing and

absence of readily visible natural features (Honey, 2008; Breugel, 2013). Gilbert (2007) argues that ecotourism has both positive and negative ramifications, thus local communities who bear the brunt of such projects should be at the core of ecotourism analysis.

However, existing research in Ghana largely overlooks how the issue of participation influences socio-economic development impacts at eco-destinations. Whereas some scholars observed that some problems facing ecotourism development in most rural communities include poor level of awareness on the feasibility and benefits of ecotourism, infrastructural deficits, lack of community participation and their commitment to the ecotourism project, poor financial background and the near absence of security to tourists and tourism sites (Hoole, 2010; Shehab, 2011; Bansal & Kumar, 2011; Bhuiyan, Siwar, Ismail & Islam, 2012).

Tosun (2000) also presents three limitations to local participation namely; operational, structural and cultural limitations. The operational limitations include the centralization of tourism administration which makes it difficult for locals to become involved as well as a lack of coordination due to fragmentation in the tourism industry (Joshi, 2011). Structural limitations highlight the attitudes of professionals who are frequently unwilling to negotiate with locals, or locals are not in the position to negotiate with them properly due to lack of human and financial resources. The issue of cultural limitations relates to the low level of awareness of the local community concerning the social-cultural, economic and political consequences of tourism development (Joshi, 2011; Eshetu, 2014).

Similar research on community based ecotourism activities has shown that inadequate knowledge of the locals, lack of funds and central institutions can impede local participation (Stone & Rogerson, 2011; Sweeting, 2012; Yeboah, 2013; Eshetu,

2014). Earlier work by Tosun (2000) indicated that a central administration and lack of requisite knowledge by locals can hinder local participation (Buanes, Jentoft, Maurstad, Søreng & Karlsen, 2005).

A lot of studies have shown the relationship between ecotourism development and other socioeconomic benefits that has improved the livelihoods of the tourism host communities, and studies have shown how many people are engaged in ecotourism businesses, ranging from provision of accommodation, tour guard, transport, food vendor etc. It has also been established that ecotourism projects like the Communal Area Management Plan For Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) projects in Zimbabwe, the CANARI projects in the Caribbean and the Ecology, Gender and Natural Resources (ECOGEN) projects in Kenya have all contributed to the ecotourism development of their communities, but no study has been carried out to assess how ecotourism development can influence the socio-economic development of Bekwarra Local Government Area (LGA). It is in view of this that this research is initiated to ascertain how ecotourism development can influence the socio-economic development and improve the livelihood of the people of Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is Survey inferential research design, the study area is Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Farming, palm wine tapping, hunting, fishing, trading are the major socio-economic activities of Bekwarra Local Government Area, though there are a reasonable population of both public and civil servants in the area. Basically, Bekwarra Local Government Area is blessed with a rich variety of forest, arable land, water bodies and a favorable climate which makes it suitable for growing both food and cash crops.

Food crops commonly grown in Bekwarra include cassava, maize, groundnut, yams, fruits and vegetables. Similarly, tree crops like oil palm, orange, mango etc are cultivated for both consumption and sales. Other economic activities of the people are sand excavation, weaving of mats and livestock husbandry. Bekwarra has ten political wards; five of these wards have some ecotourism sites, Ogolobi pond and Ungwa Ugbe anibi in Adihe, Ukaa ochi'ifu in Beten, iritem Agbalu and the Irite famous monolith at Ukpah, Ugbe Onya'abo k'ukaa in Bewo, Otukpuru, Iritem Inyanya in Nyanya and Abuana forest.

Two objectives were pursued thus: To examine the role of ecotourism in the socio-economic development and livelihoods improvement of Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State and to examine the problems hindering ecotourism development in Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State. Two commensurate research questions and hypotheses were also formulated to guide the study thus: Ecotourism development cannot significantly influence the socioeconomic development and improve the livelihood of the people of Bekwarra and there are no significant factors influencing the development of ecotourism in Bekwarra local government area.

The multi-stage sampling techniques was sample selection, where a sample of five hundred (500) respondents were one hundred (100) respondents were selected from each wards among farmers, civil and public servants, conservation agencies, traders, community leaders etc. The instrument used for data collection is a 20 item structured questionnaire with a four point Likert scale response options. The questionnaire was administered personally by the researchers and same collected back. The instrument was coded appropriately and analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation and regression analyses.

Results and Discussion

To answer the question of the extent to which ecotourism development can influence the socioeconomic development and improvement of livelihoods of the people of Bekwarra and the

null hypothesis which stated that Ecotourism development does not significantly influence the socioeconomic development and improvement of the livelihoods of Bekwarra, the result of the analysis is as shown on Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the influence of ecotourism development and the socioeconomic development and livelihoods improvement of Bekwarra local government area, (N=500)

Variables	$\sum X$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r-val
Ecotourism development	2099	3879		56453	0.78
Socioeconomic development of Bekwarra LGA	1894	2585			

Significant 0.05 level, critical $r=0.178$, $df=498$.

From the result on Table 1, the calculated r-value of 0.78 is higher than the critical r-value of 0.178 at 05 levels of significance and 498 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis which stated that there is significant relationship between ecotourism development and the socio-economic development of Bekwarra Local Government Area is accepted, hence there is a significant relationship between ecotourism development and the socioeconomic development and improvement of the livelihoods of the people of Bekwarra Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

On the second question concerning factors inhibiting ecotourism development in Bekwarra local government area and the null hypothesis of no factors influencing ecotourism development in Bekwarra local government area, regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis. These factors inhibiting the development of ecotourism in Bekwarra as listed include: financial capital and household income, educational status, infrastructures deficit, technical knowhow, community participation, awareness of ecotourism opportunities, marital status, cultural factors, religious affiliation, and occupational status.

Table 2: Model Summary Regression analysis of the factors influencing ecotourism development in Bekwarra local government area

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics	Sig.	F	R Square	F	Change	df1	df2
1	.351(a)	.123	.109	.76604	.123	8.817	10	627	.000			

a Predictors: (Constant), financial capital and household income, educational status, infrastructures deficit, technical knowhow, community participation, awareness of ecotourism

opportunities, Marital status, Cultural factors, Religious affiliation, Occupational status
b Dependent Variable: Ecotourism development and livelihood improvement

The result of the regression analysis on Table 2 shows a yielded coefficient of regression (R) of 0.351 and a multiple regression R-square (R^2) of 0.123, and adjusted R^2 of 0.109, at 0.01 level of significance, the result is significant, the result also shows that an analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the multiple regressions produced an F-ratio of 8.817, while the f-critical value is 1.91 (2-tailed), since the calculated F-value of 8.817 is greater than the critical F-value of 1.91, at 0.05 significant level, (2-tailed), the result is also significant at 0.05 level. To find out the relative contribution of each factor as it influence ecotourism development in Bekwarra, a test of regression weight was carried out. The result shows that the standardized regression beta weight ranged from -0.021 to -3.980, the beta weight of four factors (financial capital and household income, -3.980, infrastructural deficit, -2.056, educational status and awareness of ecotourism, -3.111 and occupational status, -2.618) were significant at 0.05 level of significance, while the other six factors (community participation, 0.462, cultural factors, .395, religion affiliations, 1.052, marital status, -0.123, occupational status, -0.021 and technical knowhow, -0.660) were not significant at 0.05 level of significance.

The implication of this result is that these four factors account for about 13% factors influencing ecotourism development in Bekwarra, when these factors (variables) are taken individually, only four factors, namely: financial capital and household income, infrastructural deficit, educational status and awareness of ecotourism and occupational status significantly influence ecotourism development in Bekwarra. The result shows that community participation, cultural factors, religion affiliations, marital status, occupational status and technical knowhow were factors that could influence or inhibit ecotourism development in Bekwarra. In true situation, judging from the analysis of respondent's socio-demographic variables, it is clearly observed that

all the factors listed influence ecotourism development in Bekwarra either positively or negatively.

The implication of the result is that when communities establish ecotourism projects, the development and patronage of the ecotourism project comes along with socioeconomic development like employment, cottage services like residence or hotel accommodation, local food vendor, tour guides, sales of cultural products, artifacts and items, transportation and other support services. This finding is a testimony of the earlier finding of Eshetu, (2014) who found out that community-based ecotourism (CBE) has emerged as a mutually reinforcing relationship between conservation, livelihoods and cultural preservation (Lash, 2003; Kiss, 2004; Weaver, Lawton, 2007; Fennell, 2008; Honey, 2008; Hoole, 2010; Stone, Rogerson, 2011; Eshetu, 2014; Tran, Walter, 2014).

The result of this finding is in line with the outcome of Wearing & Neil (2009) who found out that direct benefits from ecotourism activities include employments including guides, craft producers, and committee members, while indirect beneficiaries include the wider community as recipients of projects funded through tourism (Wearing & Neil, 2009). Eshetu, (2014) earlier on also observed that ecotourism often provide diverse benefits to multiple groups of users. Local forest communities view forests as a fall-back resource which helps cushion them against external shocks and trends.

Exclusion of people in host communities from ecotourism development could affect their socio-economic development and the sustainable management of natural and cultural resources especially in view of the fact that the natural resources are their main sources of livelihood. Mitchell and Ashley, (2007) found that involvement of a community in any ecotourism project is v ital for the overall success of that

project. Mowforth and Munt, (2003) supports this assertion and advocated for community participation as a tool for solving the problems of ecotourism in developing countries. For community participation to meet the expectations of a local community, Rahman, (2010) therefore holds that the local community needs to be part and parcel of the decision- making body through consultation by elected and appointed local government agencies or by a committee elected by the public specifically for developing and managing ecotourism in their locality.

This is a confirmation of what Honey, (2008); Eshun, & Page, (2013) found out that ecotourism generates economic opportunities for both the formal and informal sectors. In Kenya a lion is worth US\$ 7,000 per year in tourist revenues and income from an elephant herd is valued at US\$ 610,000 annually (Gilbert, 2007, Rahman, 2010; Eshun, 2011). Earlier on, Akama, (2004) reported that foreign exchange from ecotourism has overridden the mainstay banana crop in Costa Rica and that it accounts for 80% of the income of the people living on the Galapagos Islands. Tourism revenues for the seven villages around the Belize Baboon Sanctuary rose from US\$8,500 in 1992 to US\$ 99,000 in 2000 (Lash, 2003, Rogerson, 2011; Eshun, Page, 2013).

The result of this study has identified some factors influencing the development of ecotourism projects to include financial capital and household income, educational status, infrastructures deficit, technical knowhow, community participation, awareness of ecotourism opportunities, Marital status, Cultural factors, Religious affiliation, Occupational status. This is a confirmation of Mitchell and Ashley (2007) study; the researcher found that finance, manpower, infrastructure and facilities, availability of other services and the attitude of the locals towards ecotourism development are some factors inhibiting ecotourism development. In most communities,

accommodation, roads, and other social amenities are grossly lacking and as such ecotourism development is affected or inhibited. These and many more pose very serious threats to ecotourism development in Bekwarra Local Government Area and other local communities. Similar research on community based ecotourism activities has shown that inadequate knowledge of the locals, lack of funds and central institutions can impede local participation (Stone & Rogerson, 2011; Sweeting, 2012; Yeboah, 2013; Eshetu, 2014). Ecotourism can be a driving force in the socioeconomic development of the people of Bekwaara and also enhance their livelihood through infrastructures developed from the ecotourism projects and revenues and income generated from employment and other sundry services can be used to improve their rural livelihood, this will also bring development not just to Bekwarra but to the state at large.

Conclusion

Based on the result of the analysis using data generated from the field with the instrument designed for the study, it has been established beyond all reasonable doubt that ecotourism development activities influences the socioeconomic development and the improvement of the rural livelihoods of the people of Bekwarra Local Government Area. It was found that ecotourism contributes to the development of the ecotourism host communities in terms of employment, provision of ecotourism sundry service, sales of artifacts and crafts, catering and restaurants, accommodation and housing among other things. There are some factors, facing the development of ecotourism in most communities like poor local community awareness and participation, poor funding, near lack of facilities and infrastructure, cost and benefit sharing among others.

Recommendations

Based on the finding from the study, the following

recommendations are made:

- i. Ecotourism is a profitable venture, so concerted effort should be carried out to harness the ecotourism potentials of Bekwarra, while local communities should be encouraged with the facilitation of external agents to participate in ecotourism development activities.
- ii. Locals (ecotourism communities) should be encouraged to carry out support services like the selling of crafts, accommodation, tour guide, transportation, restaurants and food vendors among others. By so doing, they make income and other earnings from tourism activities, thereby giving them the leverage for active participation in ecotourism ventures.
- iii. Cost benefit analysis should be carried out, followed by benefit sharing to meet the corporate social responsibilities of ecotourism practitioners to the rural communities to boost their cooperation.
- iv. Communities in collaboration with Government at all levels should partner with ecotourism investors to bring tourism projects local communities where ecotourism facilities can be developed from local communities.
- v. Government and ecotourism practitioner should encourage infrastructural development to improve the economy and living conditions of their host communities.
- vi. The Cross River State Tourism Bureau and other tourism organization should carry out public awareness campaigns on the benefits of ecotourism to Bekwarra and other ecotourism endowed communities to encourage their participation in ecotourism ventures, this will create the needed awareness on the usefulness of ecotourism and the advantages of ecotourism over other forms of tourism, this will enhance

community participation in ecotourism activities.

- vii. There should be regular monitoring and supervision of tourism activities and development to supervise ecotourists activities in order to enhance environmental sustainability.

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