



TOURISM AS A TOOL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE OBUDU RANCH RESORT, OBANLIKU LOCAL GOVERNMENT, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at identifying the impact of Obudu cattle ranch resort on the biophysical environment. Findings revealed there has been land and forest loss to urbanization; while agriculture, animal grazing and fuel wood extraction has increase bare rocks. The negative impacts of tourism development can gradually destroy environmental resources on which it depends. However, tourism has also

encouraged conservation activities. It is against this background that the study recommends that for sustainable tourism on the ranch, operators should de-emphasize economic gains but rather guarantee environmental sustainability. The need for local participation in tourism operation was recommended and policy for regulation of tourist activities and the reinvestment of proceeds for local structural/amenities provision considered necessary.

Key Words: Tourism, ENVIRONMENTAL, CONSERVATION, OBUDU RANCH RESORT, OBANLIKU LOCAL GOVERNMENT

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is seen as a leisure activity, which is international in character. Eboka (1999) described tourism as the movement of people to destinations outside their usual abode or residence on short-term bases. In the same vein, tourism is seen as the services industries created to satisfy the needs arising from movement within or across international boundaries temporarily.

In recent times, ecotourism has attracted increasing attention not only as an alternative to mass tourism, but as a means of economic development and environmental conservation (Campbel, 2002). The author opined that ecotourism ventures have sustained the economy of most nations for example East African countries like Kenya, Tanzania and part of West Africa like Senegal. Ecotourism is mainly the interaction between the physical environmental features for leisure purposes. It is in this light that several thousand of people live their usual to areas with friendly climate, coastal regions for linking and trekking, surfing and swimming and the enjoyment of friendly ambience.

Tourism industry as a sub-sector of the economy has grown over the years as a main foreign exchange earner for a number of nations like Kenya, Tanzanian, Costa Rica, Uganda, Zimbabwe to mention but a few and in 1995 over 30% of the total value of the world's trade.

Presently, international tourism is growing at a rate of over 50% with an annual growth rate 5.5% (WTO,2004) Africa currently witness a remarkable growth rate of over 10% (UNEP,1996).

The recognition of tourism in Nigeria came with the establishment of Nigeria Tourist Association in 1992 by some private individuals interested in it development as a project making venture was to promote tourism in Nigeria, encourage domestic travel by Nigerians, encourage the growth of international tourism to the country's advantage and develop infrastructural facilities that are necessary for a well managed tourist industry (Eboka, 1999). Although the association failed, as it lack the necessary guideline for the development of the country's tourism industry. Eboka, (1999) noted that it however, laid the foundation for subsequent actions on tourism in the country.

Nigeria stands to benefit a lot from investment in the tourism industry. Among the gains noted are earnings from foreign exchange, increasing national income, encouraging and reviving development social and political understanding and integration and achieving general physical development of the economy. Obudu cattle ranch is one of the richly endowed potential tourist destinations in Cross River state and Nigeria in general. Obudu Ranch Resort has created job opportunities for hundreds of people in the communities, generating revenue to the region, diversified their economic activities, have provided social amenities like schools, clinics, communication facilities and so much more.

However, Land degradation, construction activities and infrastructure development, the development of tourism facilities such as accommodation, restaurant and recreation facilities, cable car, water park, traditional huts, fire station, honey moon, ware house, shop, storage, convenience, tea rooms, changing room etc has affected the environment negatively. Deforestation and intensified or unsustainable use of land in terms of rainfall and tourist land use, endangered species and modification of surface hydrology, vegetation and soil loss are typical examples.

THE STUDY AREA

The Obudu cattle ranch is located in the guinea savanna. However, other different vegetation assemblages exist on the ranch, given the topography. Part of the assemblages is under protected area coverage.

The Obudu cattle ranch has a nature reserve called Becheve. The Becheve nature reserved is a community project supervised Nigeria Conservation Foundation (NCF) founded in 1998. The nature reserve has three different ecosystem.

- I. The savanna which is a grass land characterized by more of reptiles, shrubs and few numbers of trees.
- II. The montane forest made up of a network of springs and medicinal plants with forested wooded valley.
- III. The tropical rain forest (Becheve nature reserve), area cover with thick forest trees such as the fern trees which has life span of more than a hundred years, the bracken fern lives two to three months, and die off, the Afromomoh family of alligator pepper which are highly medicinal and strangle (these are epiphytes). The Obudu cattle ranch tropical rainforest is different from other tropical rainforest of the low land.

WILD LIFE

The nature of animals and birds found in the Obudu cattle ranch are the gorilla family found in the gorilla camp area of the ranch, Buffalos, Chimpanzees, Antelopes, Served-cats, Monkeys of different species such as Drill monkey, the putty nose, Princess white toothed, mountain babblers, Yellow Puccupines and different species of birds and butterfly.

The ranch's wildlife in addition, to floral providence is rich in endemic and endangered species. This has attracted interest in protection through the creation of the conservation areas. This area managed is by the Cross River National park, is a tourist attraction, well organized with a canopy walkway.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The main economic activities of Becheve people are arable farming and small-scale animal husbandry. These have at subsistence and marginal level, implying that any attempt at alteration of the landscape meant for will result in economic dislocation. The developments in the ranch should attract people to work in the construction firms and the recreational facilities. They should also be motivated to take advantage of the commercialized communication facilities through individual phone booths, and photography to attract tourist who may not come with their personal camera. Development in the ranch and the attendant dislocation of traditional, social and economic practices should therefore create opportunities for alternatives to enhance the livelihood standards of the local people.

Agriculture:

The potential of land for agriculture is determined by an evaluation of the climate, soil, and topographical environmental components, and the understanding of the local biophysical restraints. This evaluation is an essential step for the development of agriculture. Additionally, the identification and accurate description of current and potential production areas are essential for research and agricultural development, given the important effect of these factors on the transfer of agro-technological innovations (Corbett, 1996). The local people have been circumscribed by poverty but have sustained the environment over the years, surviving on subsistence farming and livestock keeping. Managing of resources has been based on traditional ecological knowledge.

The common crops grown on the ranch are plantain, cocoyam, banana, maize, vegetables such as bitter leaf, spinach, pumpkin leaves.

The development of ranch contributed to agro crop diversity, that are establishment in the resort farm which introduced alien species such as lettuce, cabbage, carrot, water melon, parsley

Luciana tress. Crops that are threat with extinction noted are Gwantamala, cypress, eucalyptus, yam and rice.

The renewed impetus for tourism has witnessed tremendous spatial reorganization. This is the provision infrastructure and superstructures, recreational facilities, social amenities, alternative mode of transportation (cable car) and other attractions capable of satisfying the interest of tourists.

Obudu cattle ranch is close to the Cameroon border in the North-Eastern part of Cross River State of Nigeria, approximately 110km east of Ogoja Town and 65km from Obudu Town. It falls within the Obanliku Local Government Area, situated on a relatively flat plateau on the Oshie Ridge of the Sankwala hills, Obudu cattle ranch is approximately 134 square kilometers in extent as shown in figure 1.

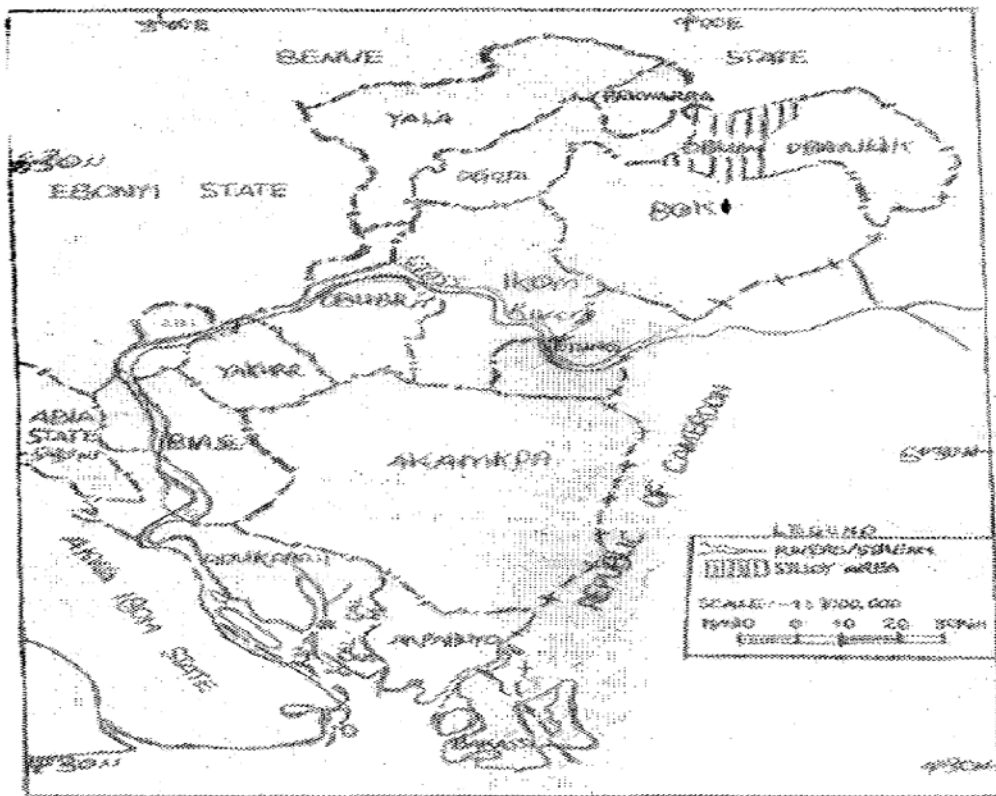


Figure 1 Map of Obudu Cattle Ranch

Source: Author's work

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The objective is to collect data that will be sufficient to enable us make inference in respect of the overall philosophy of this study. The data required for this study were both primary and secondary data. The primary data include data on stream loss and degradation, land and forest loss to urbanization, weather pattern in temporal context, exotic species introduced and species specific to the area, the extent of pollution and how species have been endangered. The secondary from various published reports and documents.

Six major communities (settlements) make up the ranch resort. Three of them were selected using a simple random sampling technique. Before this, the area was divided into two zones or strata on the basis of closeness to the resort. Out of these, one community was sampled from the zone further zones and two from the closer area. Within the ranch are indigenous Becheve people whose population estimate is put at about 1,000 (1991 census estimate/projection). A total of 100 indigenous people were administered with the questionnaire while 20 were interviewed. Also 30 workers and visitors were administered with the survey instrument. A total of 140 instruments were duly completed and returned, representing 93.3% return rate.

The six (6) communities are

Keji-Okwu/ ranch urban, Apejili, Okpazange, Kegol, Anape, Okwanu

While the sampled areas were, Ranch Urban, Okpazange, Kegol

The data were generated from structure questionnaire and semi- structure interviews.

The questionnaires were administered to literate respondents and the same were used as the basis of interview with some of the older and illiterate respondents.

Statistical tools were employed. These descriptive tools were purely percentages systematic maps of different lines resolutions were also analyze while the change defection was expressed in percentages.

Photographs of important land marks depicting the facilities of the resort and the damages or destruction done to physical/natural features were presented and described to showcase the level of development and probable environmental change.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Tourism and environmental conservation

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Direct financial contribution	38	27.1
Improved environmental mgt planning	42	30
Environmental awareness raising	34	24.3
Protection and preservation	26	18.6
Total	140	100

Source: Field work 2010

The table shows that 39% improve environmental planning; sound environmental management of tourism facilities and especially hotels can increase benefits to natural areas 27.1% talk about direct financial contribution. Revenue from park entrances and similar sources can be allocated specifically to pay for the protection and management of environmentally sensitive areas while 24.3% advocate for environmental awareness creation. Tourism has the potential to increase public appreciation of the environment and to spread awareness of environmental problems when it brings people into closer contact with nature and the environment and 18.6% emphasized on protection and preservation. Tourism can significantly

contribute to environmental protection conservation and restoration of biological diversity and sustainable use of natural resources.

CONCLUSION

Tourism is currently the major economic fulcrum of the Cross River State Government, Nigeria, a major destination of interest being the Obudu plateau ranch resort. With the establishment of the luxury Protea hotel and the large development, and are therefore vulnerable to human activities and even natural environmental changes, because of their sensitivity.

The Obudu plateau is not an exception to tourism onslaught and the possibility of degradation of this biologically diverse and environmentally sensitive area is high. Though many have considered tourism as vital for the conservation and development of mountain regions, once isolated, tourism development has the potential to degrade the environment. As pointed out by Lama and Satter (2002), tourism which hitherto brought about laudable economic opportunities, to isolated and underdeveloped mountain regions is ironically the same activity that imposes inordinate stress on natural resources, compounded by unrestrained human activities and development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preserving the natural features that attract visitors requires managing the carrying capacity of a location. To determine the carrying capacity, planners must look at a variety of factors. The number of visitors, the amount of “use” by the average visitor, the quality of resource management and facility development/designs, of resource the number of area residents and their quality of life needs and the number of other users of the area and its resources, for example, industrial users and farmers/ranchers. In addition, the management of a natural

attraction demands careful environmental planning and creative carrying capacity design to balance visitor enjoyment and education with the well-being of the floral and fauna of the location.

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