Challenges of Tourism Development in Obudu Ranch Resort, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Cross River State has in recent times experienced a significant level of tourism growth which has positively impacted on the social and economic status of the host communities. However recent reports indicate that one of the most significant tourist destination in the state - Obudu Ranch Resort is under a dysfucntional state. A questioniarres survey was carried out on 308 residents in five communities around the resort including twenty management staff in 2018. The data generated were analyzed using discriptive statistics such as means, percentages, frequencies and chi square test. The majority of the respondents identified non-involment of the local communities in benefit-sharing (84.41%), tourism planing (94.15%), implementation of eco-tourism programmes (95.77%) and eco-tourism developoment /decision making (92.53%). The study also revealed that inspite of the huge investments by the Government in developing the Obudu Ranch Resort through the provision of tourist infrastuctures including Cable Car, Honey Factory, Water Park, Canopy Walk Way and the Swimming Pool, most of the facilities are presently in a deplorable state. This was ascribed by majority of the respondents to poor funding (60%), The inability of the resort in maintaining the quality of the attractions and services (75%) and lack of capacity for sustainability (80%). Local communities will support programmes of the resort if their problems are effectively addressed. Furthermore, other challenges identified in the study as well as political will by government will restore the status of the resort.

Key words: Challenges · Tourist Infrastructures · Local Communities · Status · Poor Funding

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a means of improving the livelihoods of its residents and also provides a major socio-economic opportunity for most developed countries [1]. The level of residents? and local peoples? involvement in tourism development processes in the area can determine the success and sustenance of tourism. Tourism provides the largest labor opportunities in most developed countries and also a fast-lane vehicle in the workforce for young people and women [2]. The most significant feature of the tourism industry is the capacity to generate large scale opportunities such as employment, infrastructural development, revenue and income in destination areas and to residents and local people [3]. Another important feature of tourism is that it contributes to the national integration of the people who live in different regions of a country with diverse cultures and languages [4]. Some researchers have also proposed and advocated some new ways of doing tourism businesses, with some 'poverty alleviation face' beyond traditional philanthropic donations. This can be achieved by putting in place operating framework for promoting and developing incentives for the good practice among companies, consumers and communities [5-8]. Partnerships can be created by engaging local people in the normal business operations such as through procurement or sourcing of inputs, contract out services, providing information to guests, creating packages of local excursions, or developing new leisure facilities [6]. These can be done in a way that contributes more towards poverty alleviation by improving the social, economic, or environmental benefits while maintaining commercial returns. There is therefore the need for the private sector to get into

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partnerships with the local communities so that such business opportunities can be a way through which there can lift out of poverty.

One approach to capture such contribution is through examining the extent to which local people participate in the sharing of tourism benefits. This can be assessed by looking at three critical ways through which tourism operators (tourism businesses) can embrace the local communities. These are: local employment creation-providing job opportunities specifically for local people [9-11]; capacity building for local people- empowering local people to access tourism benefits through the provision of work experience opportunities, training, advice, loans or aid to enable local people to work for tourism or invest in tourism as local entrepreneurs [11, 12] and sharing the tourism profits with the local community-using part of the business income to support community initiatives, purchase locally, incorporate opportunities for tourists to support local businesses, events or organizations, sponsor local charities or community based organizations, sponsor local events or sporting teams [6, 7, 13, 14]. All three approaches of sharing tourism benefits (local employment creation, local capacity building and profit sharing) appear to occur even though tourism businesses have different approaches driven by their objectives.

In Nigeria, tourism has played a major role in community and human development with its numerous accompanying socio-economic and environmental benefits. Cross River State has indeed experienced a great contribution from the tourism sector, with steady increasing tourists' visits of about 10% annually from 2000 to 2016. This has positively impacted on the socio-economic status of the people of the destination area. Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State is one of the leading tourists' sites in the country with its natural and unique features, such as the climate, height, cable car, winding path-ways, natural swimming pool, exceptional accommodation and canopy walk-way. Consequently, the resort also experienced increased tourists' visits and patronages for some times, making the host people (Becheeve community who were predominantly farmers and hunters) very interested in tourism-related activities such as; acquiring jobs in the hotels, engaging in transportation, tour-guiding services, sales of food, drinks, honey, yoghurt, handcraft and other local products [15]. The increasing tourism activities also attracted the provision of basic amenities such as: schools, electricity, security, accessible roads, financial

and communication facilities. However, in recent times, the repairs and maintenance of most of the infrastructures in the resort have been grounded. This present development is ascribed to inadequate allocation of funds from government thus amenities and facilities like the Cable Car, Swimming Pool and accommodation infrastructures are in very deplorable operational condition. Furthermore, the local communities are becoming restive due to their non-inclusion in the overall management of the resort. Other challenges include ineffective marketing of the resort due to old tourism networking skills and tools as well as the non-implementation of benefit-sharing programme. It is in this regard that this study sought to examine the challenges of Tourism Development in the Resort. With the following objectives:

- To access the level of participation of local communities in eco-tourism planning, implementation and benefit sharing in the management of the resort.
- To evaluate the level of maintaining the quality of attractions and services in the resort.
- The access the level of funding and capacity building in the management of the resort

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area: The Obudu Ranch Resort is located in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State and covers an area of 24 km^2 at an altitude of 900- 1500m above sea level it lies on longitude 6°15' N; 6° 30' N and latitude 9°15' E; 9°30' E).It is the highest elevated point in the South eastern part of Nigeria with a maximum height of 1576mabove sea level.

The climate is typically temperate all year round. The dry season last from November to March. The mean annual rainfall is about 4, 300 mm. The Resort has a temperature of 26°C - 32°C between November and January while the lowest temperature range of 4°C - 10°C is recorded between June and September.The topography of the landscape of Obudu Ranch Resort is rugged with North-easterly ridges separated by low lands which form valleys.

The vegetation of Obudu plateau- the main physical feature of the resort is basically of two types – the grassland and forest. The grassland is more extensive and covers the level ground on the rolling hills and upper parts of the valley sides. The forest occupies the lower parts of the valleys.
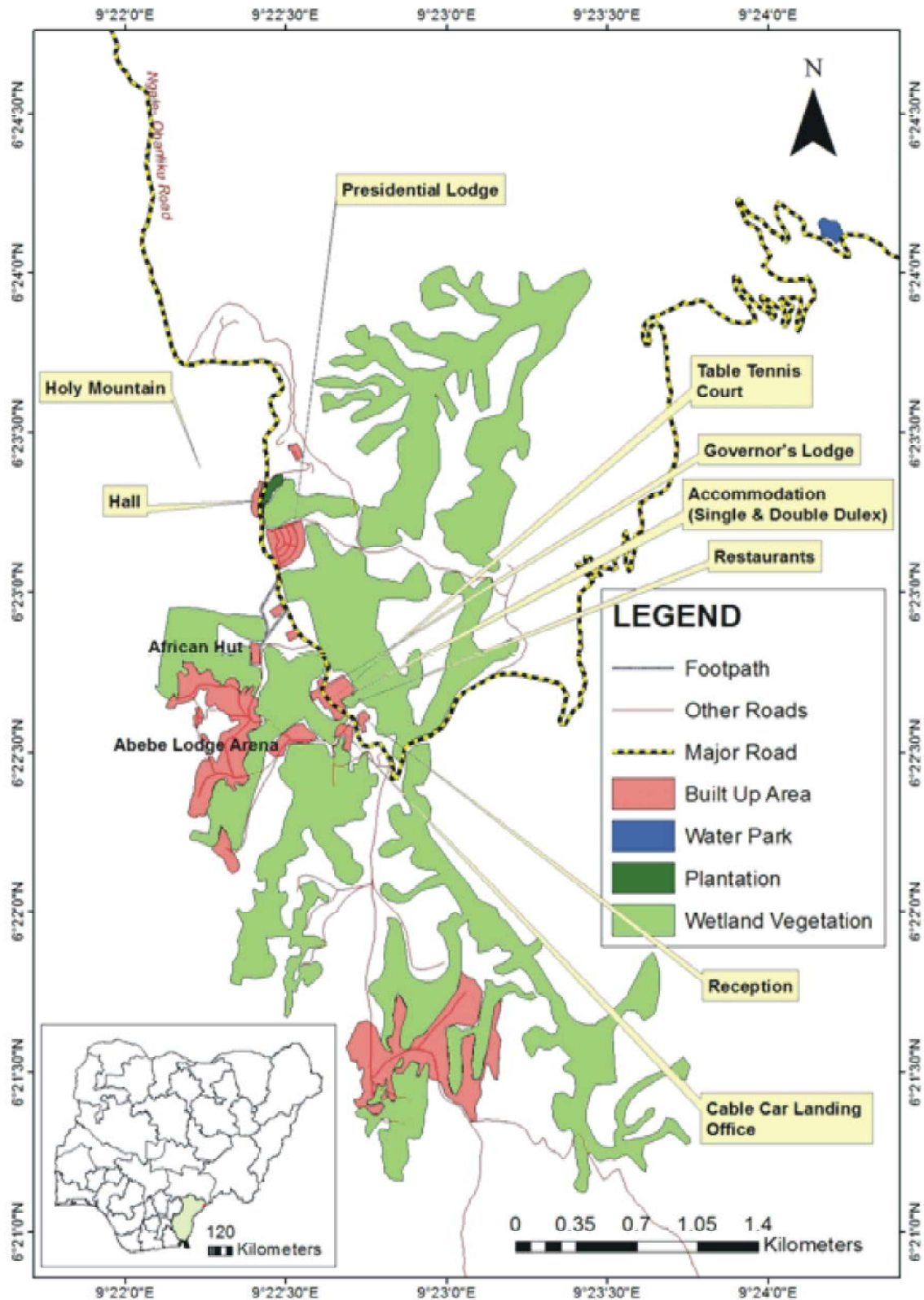
Fig. 1: Map showing the Obudu Ranch Resort

Fig. 2: Map showing the communities around the Obudu Ranch Resort

Research Design: A survey research design was adopted for the study using well-structured questionnaires and direct interviews to obtain data from Becheeve community (the host community around the resort) and staff of the resort. Two sets of questionnaires were administered to respondents during the study. Three hundred and eight questionnaires where administered to 5 purposively selected villages in Becheeve communities including: 89 in Belegete, 45 in Ikwete, 51 in Apajili, 52 in Anape and 71 in Kegol. Twenty key staff were purposely selected across cadres from the entire work force of the resort for the administration of the second set of questionnaires to represent the views of management. Secondary data was collected from reports and relevant documents in the Resorts office. Data collection were subjected to descriptive statistics, frequency distribution and percentages.

Challenges of Local Community Participation in the Management of Obudu Ranch Resort
Non Participation in Benefit Sharing from Ecotourism Revenues: Majority of the respondent sampled 84.41% disagreed that the communities participated in the sharing of economic benefits from ecotourism, 13.31% were not sure while 2.29% of the respondents agreed on this position. (Table 1A). There was no significant variation among the five communities interviewed on their views regarding their non participation in benefit sharing, $X^2_{cal} = 11.25^{ns}$ df = 12, $X^2_{tab} = 21.03$.

Non Participation in Ecotourism Planning: Furthermore, 94.15% of the respondents disagreed that the community participated in the planning of eco tourism projects and programmes in the resort while 5.85% where not sure. None of the respondent 0.00% agreed to this position (Table 1B). The opinion of respondents on participation of local communities in eco tourism planning was not significant; $X^2_{cal} = 8.335^{ns}$ df = 8, $X^2_{tab} = 15.51$.

Community participation in tourism development ensures the inclusion of local communities in the planning, decision making and implementation of tourism development programmes and projects (Koster 2007). Participation provides a window of opportunities for the local people to control the activities that take place at the tourism destination (Scheyvens 2002). Furthermore involvement of local communities in decision making ensures the promotion of traditional life styles and values of the people including equitable sharing of tourism benefits [16]. Above all, participation can boost cooperation between communities and stake holders giving rise to reduced conflicts.

Non Participation in the Implementation of Ecotourism Programmes: Also 95.53% of the respondents disagreed that the communities participated in the implementation of ecotourism programmes while 7.47% were not sure. No respondent (0.00%) agreed on this position (Table 1C). Non participation of local communities in the implementation of eco tourism programmes was generally acknowledge by majority of respondents though this views were not significant; $X^2_{cal} = 8.335^{ns}$ df = 8, $X^2_{tab} = 15$.

Public participation in the project seems to have been given little or no attention as reported by majority of the respondents [17]. It is therefore considered that the entire management of the Resort was conceived without the inclusion of the local communities in its overall management plan. It is worth stressing here that participation by communities in the Resort is limited and the attitudes and the expectations of communities in the area were mixed. Some communities consider the project as a move to deny them access to the Resort which they consider their traditional right even when some of them view it as an avenue to improve their economic base as supported by Uwem [18]. It has also been reported that the right of host communities to self control and identification of their cultural heritage have been abrogated by the management of the resort. Their knowledge of resource conservation was not even taken into consideration in spite of the communities having local knowledge base which, if meaningfully employed or explored, can support the realization of the desired goals of the project [19]. The project is under the direct management of the Cross River State government and Non- Governmental Organizations. The channels to reach the local communities have only been maintained through irregular meetings with few indigenes mostly staff of the resort and a few community leaders as corroborated by Eneji *et al.* [20]. The people did not participate in the implementation of projects in the resort but co-opted into management activities through their village heads. Such representation is limited and restricted, as the people were not given full rights to make reasonable decisions and even implement them Uwem and Mombeshora and Le Bel [18, 21]. However, Nchor and Ogogo [22] opined that involvement of community members in the management of eco-tourism projects is vital in the overall success of the destination.

Ecotourism Development and Decision Making: It was further observed that 92.53% of the respondents sampled disagreed that their community participated in the decision making and management of ecotourism programmes in the resort, 7.47% were not sure while community participation in the decision making and management of ecotourism programme was not supported by any of the respondents sampled (Table 1D). The position of respondents on the participation of local communities in eco tourism development/ decision making was not significant; $X^2_{cal} = 7.615$ df = 8, $X^2_{tab} = 15.51$.

The fact that no respondent indicated being actively involved in the planning, decision making and the overall implementation of programme in the resort is therefore, a cause for concern [23].

Challenges of Tourism Development in Obudu Ranch Resort

Challenges of Marketing: Marketing of ORR was a challenge as reflected in majority of the respondents 75% who perceived that tourism marketing was ineffective due to poor tourism networking, skills and tools, 15% were not sure, while 10% disagreed on this position (Table 2a).

There was no significant variation among the five communities interviewed on their views regarding challenges of marketing Obudu Ranch Resort $X^2_{cal} = 21.61^{ns}$ df = 16, $X^2_{tab} = 21.03$.

Challenges of Maintaining Quality of Attractions and Services: Furthermore, it was observed that 75% of the respondents were of the opinion that the maintenance of the quality of attraction and services was inadequate, 5% were not sure while 10% submitted that the quality of attraction and services in the resort were under a deplorable state due to poor maintenance (Table 2b). The opinion of respondents on Challenges of maintaining quality of attractions and serviceswas not significant among the five communities interviewed during the study; $X^2_{cal} = 13.77^{ns}$ df = 16, $X^2_{tab} = 15.51$.

The management is presently struggling to address problems of maintaining the quality of attractions and services due to lack of funds. The maintenance of tourism infrastructures is often regarded as an important factor in attaining the quality of facilities in the destination. Provision of infrastructures in tourism destinations should therefore be accompanied by quality maintenance services to avoid ageing and deterioration due to environmental factors. However the government is over burdened with so many challenges to the extent that priority is less in the tourism sector in the state. Evidence from pass studies have also shown that constrains in

maintaining tourism infrastructure is attributed to lack of will by government to manage resources effectively as in the case of ORR where the complete shutdown of operations in the resort was due to governments disposition towards other projects and programmes [24]. Development and provision of tourism infrastructure as well as regular repairs and maintenance are integral in the upgrading of tourism destinations. Infrastructures in a destination play important role in tourism industry as provision of infrastructure is one of the key factors in the development of tourism business. It is therefore imperative to ensure that infrastructures in the resort undergo regular maintenance so as to restore their functionality. Inadequate funding was identified as a serious challenge in the Resort during the study.

Challenges of Capacity for Sustainability: It was also reported by majority of the respondents 80% that the management of the resort lacked the capacity to sustain the quality of its facilities, 15% were not sure while 5% were of the opinion that there was sustainability in facilities maintenance (Table 2c). Non participation of local communities in the implementation of challenges of capacity for sustainabilitywas generally acknowledge by majority of respondents though this views were not significant; $X^2_{cal} = 9.23^{ns}$ df = 16, $X^2_{tab} = 15.51$.

One of the greatest challenges of tourism development in Obudu Ranch Resort is the sustainability of the project. The Government is the main stakeholder in the resort supported by some tourism NGO s'. Major upgrading of facilities in the resort started in 2002 with the development of basic facilities in the resort including the canopy walk-way, steel water park, the longest cable car in Africa, as well as International conference centre. Others were the Presidential retreat centre and pre-fabricated cabin accommodations facilities which are world class and satisfactorily aesthetic. The management of the entire resort was thus privatized to Protea Hotels- a tourism management consortium from South Africa to improve on the overall service delivery in the destination. To drive tourism to an international level, government invested heavily in the upgrading of social and physical infrastructures and aggressively marketed this endowment including linking of the two major international airports in Nigeria (Lagos and Abuja airports) to the resort. To further boost tourism development in the area the Obudu Mountain Race project was put in place. The level of achievement of the Obudu Mountain Race led to the World Mountain Running Association (WMRA) to upgrade its status from just an associate member race to premium race event by

Table 1: Challenges of local communities' participation in the management of Obudu ranch resort

| S/N | Challenges | Type of response | | | df | X^2 |
		Agreed	Not Sure	Disagreed		
A	Non participation in benefit sharing from ecotourism revenues	7 (2.29%)	41 (13.31%)	260(84.41%)	12	11.25[ns]
B	Non Participation in Eco tourism planning	0 (0.00%)	18(5.85%)	290 (94.15%)	8	8.34[ns]
C	Non participation in the Implementation of ecotourism programmes	0 (0.00%)	13 (4.22%)	295 (95.77%)	8	8.34[ns]
D	Non participation in ecotourism development and decision making	0 (0.00%)	23 (7.47%)	285 (92.53%)	8	7.62[ns]

Table 2: Challenges of Tourism Development in Obudu Ranch Resort

| S/N | Challenges | Type of Responses | | | df | X^2 |
		Agreed	Not sure	Disagreed		
A	Challenges of Marketing of Obudu Ranch resort	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	12 (75%)	16	12.61[ns]
B	Challenges of Maintaining quality of attractions and services	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	17 (75%)	16	13.77[ns]
C	Challenges of Capacity for sustainability	1(5%)	3 (15%)	16 (80%)	16	9.23[ns]
D	Challenges of Sharing benefits among indigenes	2(10%)	3 (15%)	15 (75%)	16	16.26[ns]
E	Challenges of Funding	3 (15%)	5 (25%)	12 (60%)	16	20.83[ns]

WMRA listing it among the major races in its calendar. The management of the Ranch was later transferred from Protea Hotels to African Suna Company from Zimbabwe and subsequently contracted to another company - Zebici Capital Limited. This was the beginning of a serious problem of poor capacity building for sustainability.

Challenges of Sharing Benefits among Indigenes: In addition to this, majority of the respondent 75% were in total disagreement that sharing / balancing of benefits between the local communities and ORR was part of the policies of the management of ORR, , 15% were not sure while 10% felt that sharing / balancing of benefits between the local communities and ORR was part of the management strategies. (Table 2d). The opinion of respondents on Challenges of Sharing benefits among indigeneswas not significant; $X^2_{cal} = 16.26$ df = 16, $X^2_{tab} = 15.51$.

Challenges of Funding: Furthermore, 60% of the respondents were of the opinion that poor funding was a major challenge in the management of the resort, 25% were not sure while 15% disagreed. (Table 2e). The position of respondents on the participation of local communities in challenges of funding was not significant; $X^2_{cal} = 20.83^{ns}$ df = 16, $X^2_{tab} = 22.51$.

Funding was inadequate to maintain critical management infrastructures including facilities like the Cable Car, Honey Factory, Water Park, the Gym, two floodlit tennis courts, canopy walk-way, swimming pool and Golf Course. Non-payment of salaries to workers have also contributed to dashing the hopes of resuscitating the resort as most of the workers have reportedly relocated to seek other means of livelihood thereby compounding the woes of the once glorious tourist destination in Nigeria. This situation is a global problem as it is not limited to Obudu Ranch Resort. In Myanmar, 1% of its tourist destinations were operated without staff while 40% had some staff but not enough to adequately meet up with critical management activities, Rao [25]. 10% of India's National Park as well as 13% of its Wildlife Sanctuaries were operating with little or no staff [26]. Brandon *et al.* and Terborgh *et al.* [27, 28] as well as other similar studies all have similar findings.

Statistical analysis tested on local communities' participation in benefit-sharing from ecotourism revenues, non-participation in ecotourism planning, non-participation in the implementation of ecotourism programme and participation in eco tourism development and decision making, showed that the calculated chi square was lower than the tabulated. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted indicating that the local communities were not involved in any form of the management of the resort.

Further analysis on challenges of Marketing of Obudu ranch resort, maintaining quality of attractions and services, capacity for sustainability as well as sharing benefits among indigenes and challenges of funding showed that the calculated is smaller than the tabulated therefore the management of Obudu Ranch Resort is surrounded with so many challenges.

CONCLUSION

Inadequate funding was the greatest challenge in the maintenance of tourism development in Obudu Ranch Resort as funding was identified as a serious challenge affecting the maintenance of critical management activities in the destination. Though the government was confronted with challenges of ensuring that the maintenance of facilities in the destination, its disposition was directed to the execution of other projects. It is therefore imperative for the government to shift emphasis towards upgrading the resort to its former level to regain its former glory with a view to ensuring that the destination regained its former glory.

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