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## The Role of Tourism in Enhancing the Nigerian Economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Challenges and Prospects

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### **Abstract**

*All over the world, chiding Nigeria tourism has become a very vital and major source of income for countries as it enhances the economic potential of such societies. The socio-economic importance of tourism in Nigeria is remarkable with direct and indirect impact on employment, poverty reduction, and diversification of the economy to other sources of earning revenue rather than depending on crude oil money from the Niger Delta region. This paper tries to examine how tourism can be explored effectively to boost the internal generated revenue of the Nigerian economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The paper also analyzes the challenges facing tourism development in contemporary Nigeria, as well as the strategies for enhancing its development in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Diversification of the Nigerian economy beyond crude oil, Tourism development, boosting internal revenue generation through tourism. Growth of the (GNP), employment generation and poverty reduction.

Tourism is the practice of traveling for recreation. Tourism makes tour for pleasure or culture. Organized societies always promote and encourage tourism. They provide peaceful environment, good accommodation and basic infrastructures for tourists who visit their state or country. Touristic sites and monuments are costly and precious price-less gifts to humanity and organized societies; they have a value beyond any price. Good government always uses their touristic sites and monuments to boost internally generated revenue of their nation.

It is important to note that with a good public relations mechanism, a local government, a city, state and country could attract needed foreign investment through tourism. For example, according to Ogunnubi (2017), the Master Card Global Destination Cities Index Report of 2016 based on air traffic, Bangkok in Thailand tops the table of top ten most popular destinations of international tourism with 21.47 million tourists, cities like London, Paris, Dubai and New York City are also top tourists' destinations.

Although Africa, including Nigeria accounts for percent of the world population, some of the fastest growing economies are domiciled in Africa. But it is unfortunate to point out that the potential of Africa's tourism remains untapped as it receives only about 3 percent of world tourism. This paper also tries to examine why Nigeria's tourism remains idle, unconsumed, unexploited untouched, unused and unutilized. This situation is abnormal and strange, yet call our self the "giant of Africa" while tremendous touristic opportunities exist to further expand tourism across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, as expected revenues that would accrue from tourism can make up for double the amount of donor aids received from developed countries or international organizations. As Bilkis (2017) put it, "Nigeria is replete with various tourists' sites scattered all over the country as well as cultural festivals which mirror the life styles and heterogeneous nature of the people who occupy the space called Nigeria"

### **The Need of Tourism in Enhancing the Sustainability of the Nigerian Economy**

It is important to note that some African countries are fast becoming known as tourist in the continent while Nigeria that is nicknamed the "Giant of Africa and Big brother" is lagging behind. This is a wake-up call for Nigeria to start developing her tourism industry to catch up with others. For example, countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Egypt, and South Africa are known for their rich and economically viable sites that are making waves and creating new era in tourism and it is contributing in boosting their internally generated revenue earning to such countries annually. For instance, the Masai Mara National reserve in Kenya is known as Africa's greatest wildlife reserve as the region is home to lots of African Lions, 570 species of birds, 95 species of mammals and more than 2 million wild beasts. Zebra and Thomsons Gazelle annual migration.

Furthermore, in tourism show case destruction in Africa, Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania places the country among nations with exceptional travel attractions in the African continent. Likewise, Egypt is known for the ancient pyramids and sphinx. We also need to mention the great Victoria falls, the largest water fall in the world and one of the seven wonders of the world found between Zambia and Zimbabwe; the well planned Cape Town, is one of the most beautiful cities in South Africa and is home to the world renowned Robben Island, the prison where the late South Africa President, Nelson Mandela was held for 27 years by the racist regime of South Africa and a host of other tourist attractions. (Bilkis, 2017).

In Nigeria, the need for tourism to enhance the sustainable development of the country is still in its embryonic stage and infancy inception considering the large accumulation of resources which are yet untapped, and the institutional structure which is yet to be regulated to compete favourably with other fast growing international and continental tourism destinations. Nigeria at this point in time needs to diversify her revenue generating sources to real sectors as tourism to boost the internal generating revenue resources rather than depending on crude oil money from the Niger Delta region which is infested with militancy activities of bombing oil facilities that generate money for the Nigeria's mono-cultural oil economy that sustain the 36 states of the federation.

As Nigeria has entered into economic recession, the government needs to explore the untapped tourism potential to boost its internally generated revenue. For example, one of the countries that has explored the benefits of tourism to boost her internally generated revenue is Thailand, available data shows that the country made over \$60 million from tourism in 2016. Bilkis (2017). The Nigerian government and people can emulate other countries of the world to invest, develop, broaden, diversify and promote the tourism sector. Nigeria is endowed, bequeathed, bestowed, favoured and enriched with various touristic sites across the six-geo-political zones in the country. Nigeria is endowed with cultural manifestations and expressions of festivals and ceremonies which mirror the lifestyles and heterogeneous nature of the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. In Northern Nigeria the Yankari game reserve, the Babilla and Jos Plateau provide travelers a lot of recreation, pleasure, amusement, entertainment, fun, leisure, relief, and sport. The Yankari games reserve repels the jinx of sorrow and poor health care to Nigerians and other world observers and users of the game reserve. Likewise, the Argungu fishing festival and different Durba displays among others are popular tourist attractions. The Ikogosi Wonder Warm Spring, Erin Ijesha amazing and astonishing water fall as well as the Osun Osogbo awesome festival and a lot of other marvelous, extra ordinary, and outstanding sites and festivals are famous in the South Western part of Nigeria that are not fully tapped and used to add sensational and staggering joy as tourist destinations and attraction in Nigeria. In the South Eastern part of is the historic and attractive Calabar carnival staged every Yuletide period to the influence of Christianity on the historical town, where Mary Slessor, a Christian missionary stopped the killing of twins and the mal-treatment of their mothers. It is important to note that any tourist who visits the Calabar area will see “in situ” some of the belongings of Mary Slessor and her burial site. The story of this great missionary is sensational and remarkable are her contribution to world civilization and humanity. Igbo land is also endowed with tourism potentials which include the undulating hills at Udi/Enugu, culture, caves, clement weather, new yam festivals and its variety of world famous masquerades, such as, Adaka, Njaba, IgbaIyabo-ukwu, Nwaahashi, Agu-Iyi and the Atilogwu dance troupe. They serve the purpose of entertainment, fun, harassment, music, dance and money-making. Other cultural manifestations and expressions among the Igbo include kola nut (orji) culture, “Isiagu” traditional attire and Igbo title culture, such as, Offalla, Ogbuefi, Ozo title taking festivals are all notable festivals as tools for cultural expressions and manifestation that are touristic attractions and as well as the Igbo-Ukwuculture and wonderful art works that express the Igbo civilization and cultural succession.

Ezinwa(2017).

Emeka(2017) pointed out that in Enugu State the state government had rolls out plan for tourism development through the reconstitution of the state tourism board. (Governor Ugwuanyi 2017) said he appointed persons with commensurate competence into its leadership adding that the new leadership of the Tourism board has a mandate to focus on promoting national endowment of the state which will attract tourism destination, as the government embarks on aggressive development of infrastructure, particularly roads that create easier access between the rural and urban centers through

rural electrification and grassroots projects to boost tourism with such facilities as International Convention Centre (ICC) which will accommodate about 80,000 persons in the main hall and relocation and establishment of modern zoo. This will make Enugu a safe haven for investment, recreation and boosting internally generated revenue with tourism.

### **Challenges Facing Tourism Development in Nigeria**

The challenges that are militating against tourism development in Nigeria include:

- i. Nigeria's tourism potential still remains untapped
- ii. Lack of infrastructural facilities, such as road networks, railways, and expensive airway fares, likewise power failure and lack of information and communication technology which is a bane to tourism development in Nigeria.
- iii. Difficulties in visa procurement and unstable exchange rates of dollar to naira are some of the banes of tourism attraction in Nigeria.
- iv. Over dependence on the revenue from the sale of crude oil as the Nigerian government operated a mono cultural oil economy, thereby ignoring other sectors of the economy like tourism.
- v. Economic recession caused by fall in oil price in world market and militancy destruction of oil pipelines in the oil rich region affects revenue generation from crude oil sale, hence, government finds it difficult to develop the tourism sector.
- vi. Lack of political will and legislation to regulate the tourism to keep abreast with the United Nations framework on sustainable tourism development efforts is a challenge to tourism growth in Nigeria.
- vii. Lack of government clarification, simplification, and interpretation of policies and programmes on tourism is a huge challenge of the sector to grow.
- viii. Tourism programmes most often do not target the youths and the needy of the society because of lack of education and awareness of the benefits of tourism caused by ignorance.
- ix. Because of lack of funds and ignorance, the federal government is finding it difficult to explore the tourism sector.
- x. The government and those who hold power sometimes see positive contribution to tourism development as a threat. Hence, government's failure to listen to tourism experts and those who are knowledgeable and wise hinders the growth of tourism in Nigeria.
- xi. Lack of government policy and will to stimulate tourism investment is a bane to the industry. Likewise, the trouble with political corruption and patronage among contemporary Nigeria leaders and politicians is also a bane to the tourism sector.

### **Federal Government Diversification Drive toward Tourism and Culture**

In line with the diversification agenda of the federal government, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has rolled out a number of measures, including technical assistance, capacity building and revision of the country's Tourism Master Plan as part of efforts to ensure the development of tourism in Nigeria.

According to (Anokwuru, 2016:36), the UN agency announced the measure

which also includes the organization of international conferences in Nigeria and the certification of Tourism courses, at the end of a two day meeting between the Minister of Information and Culture, Ahaji Lai Mohammed, and the global tourism agency in Madrid Spain. At the meeting Nigeria also expressed interest in hosting the 60th meeting of global Agency's Commission for Africa in 2018 in order to attract global attention for tourism in the country. In addition, the global agency is widening access to its e-library for Nigerian tourism officials and offering support for relevant tourism institutions and agencies in Nigeria.

Under the UNWTO's technical assistance programme, Nigeria will benefit in the area of data collection for the elaboration of tourism statistics, rural development, and hotel classification and in designing programmes to create awareness for tourism. In the area of capacity building, the focus will be on empowerment of young men and women in tourism through the centres being planned for the six-geopolitical zones, the training of festival managers and tour guides, film stars and producers will be of immense value for Nigeria youths to look beyond oil wealth. In line with the change mantra of the Buhari regime, a tourism consulting firm in Lagos has commenced training programmes that will give fillip to the manpower needs of the tourism and hospitality industry in Nigeria. Their aim is to provide training for front office, food and beverage, housekeeping, back office, accounts, human resources, marketing, and sales among others.

According to Prof. Philip Njemanze, a scientist of international acclaim, on *Sunday Telegraph*, July 17, 2016, even Though Nigeria is at cross road now, the present diversification agenda of the government is a great opportunity that could take us to our destiny. The Nigerian people and their ethnic groups which are their strength, among the Igbos, Yorubas, Fulanis, etc should develop their human and cultural civilization. We should develop our indigenous science and technology, we should welcome African industrial revolution of what our forefathers and mothers did, copy it, improve the engineering in it and put our indigenous labels on it and make it. We should learn to utilize our past great history and marketable skills of our ancient civilization and cultural succession of the Nigerian people; which is a complete departure from colonialist narrative and education we were thought in school. As Njemanze aptly stated

*"I spent two decades of research using population genetics, ethno-linguistic, archaeology, and anthropology to detail some of these facts in my new book: Igbo Ancestors of Yahweh Culture of Life" Volume 1-3. I exposed this past great history of Nigerian people, which is a complete departure from colonial narrative we were taught in school. If you just take that idea, you would come to the conclusion that Nigeria today is a tourist haven with all the Holy Christian and Islamic sites; form ancient Jerusalem in Israel in Igboland to the great cities of the Jebusites, Philistines, Amalekites in Western and Northern Nigeria. All these are presently existing tribes in Nigeria based on ethno-linguistics and population genetics. Only tourism could fetch Nigeria over 20 billion yearly if fully developed.*

In line with federal and state government diversification policy, Governor Akinwunmi Ambode of Lagos State on *Sunday telegraph* July 17, 2016, wrote that his

administration has embarked on strategies to boost the state's internally generated revenue through tourism, saying that the celebration of the state's Golden Jubilee is a further showcase of the state tourism potential to the world. This was even as experts charged the state government to explore some hidden cultures and values inherent in the state in order to save the state's identity from going into extinction.

It is important to note that culture and tourism showcase will help to preserve and enhance heritage for generations to come. Culture and tourism are also used to boost a state's cultural and historical glamour, glory and razzle-dazzle in the state metropolis and foreign observers. Culture and tourism are also used to generate state revenue and enhance investment and job creation opportunities.

Speaking on the colloquium entitled: "Hidden Cultures and Multiple identities in Lagos", the Director of center for the Black Culture and International Understanding, Dr Wale Adeniran, said there are lots of hidden languages and cultures across Lagos metropolis especially in Badagry axis of the state that are of great heritage, antiquity and cultural interest to the people.

Likewise, Stanley Ihedigbo on *Sunday Telegraph*, July 17, 2016, outlined the importance of Nigeria art and culture to take the country's fashion and culture to Rio 2016 Olympic. The Chief Executive officer and founder of OVCMODEL S21, Mr. Okafor Victor, explained that this company will promote Nigeria fashion worldwide by showcasing its beauty and culture.

Nigeria fashion promoters to join other nations from different continents to participate in the world game side attractions and show that circuit event is a big business and opportunity to tap into the rebranding of the battered image of the Nigerian youths both locally and internationally. It is also the opportunity of selling Nigeria's tourism culture, music and fashion to the international community. This will also earn foreign exchange revenue for the country and help eradicate poverty and underdevelopment of our rich cultural heritage.

### **Strategies of Boosting Internally Generated Revenue with Tourism in Nigeria**

In an effort to put the Nigeria economy in the forefront of global tourism through the diversification agenda of the federal government and people of Nigeria, the government needs to partner with the private sector and foreign collaborators to generate the much needed foreign resources as well as improve the internal generated revenue of the federal and state governments.

For example, the Lagos State government is highly committed to explore the potential inherent in the tourism sector. As Lagos is one of the fastest African mega cities. Lagos offers a wide variety of tourist attraction, which include exploration of historical sites and monuments, well located roomy rivers and ocean beaches ideal for relaxation and other water sports. Cultural festival as well as carnivals and monuments, such as, the first storey building in Nigeria – built by missionaries in 1842. This is found in Badagry town which remains the vestige, evidence, relic, sign and residue or trace of slavery in Africa and has museum that tells the slavery story. The wonder third Mainland Bridge, longest in Africa, the amazing National Arts Theatre, the Lagos Bar beach, the Lekki Conservation center, the Fela African Shrine and the Oni private

beach are some of the tourists sites in Lagos. Showcasing the history and rich cultural heritage of Lagos is also the renowned Eyo festival, various Egungun festivals, the Lagos carnival and recently, the one Lagos Fiesta, a one location event held at the Lagos Bar Beach was later expanded to hold concurrently in the five of the state. This is to enable those beyond to enjoy the yuletide and New Year seasons. Traders and other service providers make brisk businesses during this period which invariably, create employment as well as add to internally generated revenue of the state. (Bilkis, 2017).

If other states in Nigeria can emulate Lagos state's drive in boosting internally generated revenue with tourism, it will help in enhancing the Nigerian economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The diversification agenda of the federal and state governments to tourism will eradicate the over dependence of the 36 states on crude oil money from the rich Niger Delta. It will curb laziness and poverty as other states will look inwards to explore their own cultural heritage and endowment. It will open-up resource control fronts in all the 36 states of the federation for boosting healthy competition and growth of the national income and gross domestic product. It will bring development, growth and progress. The diversification agenda for tourism and culture will enhance indigenous science and technology. It will help to build self confidence in the society for autonomous and indigenous growth and development.

### **Conclusion**

The federal government diversification policy and programme beyond crude oil dependence is a good one to enhance tourism growth and development. But the tourism sector needs regular power supply, good road network, railway and airline connections to enable tourists locate their destination with ease. With the federal government diversification agenda tourism has become a very important major source of income for the country as it will affect positively the economy of Nigeria during this economic recession period. The economic potential of tourism is remarkable, with direct and indirect impact on employment, poverty reduction and wealth creation.

### **Recommendations**

This study therefore, makes the following recommendations for boosting Nigeria's internally generated revenue through tourism.

1. The federal, states and local governments should design and draft a blueprint and plan to effectively explore the untapped tourism potential scattered across the six-geo-political zones in Nigeria.
2. The government should partner with the private sectors, NGOs and foreign collaborators to redesign, refurbish, regenerate, revamp and modernize the tourism sector in Nigeria to world class tourism destination and attraction.
3. The government should also provide the needed infrastructure facilities such as, good roads, easy access to railway and airline connections, as well as regular water

and electricity supply, hotel accommodations to welcome tourists from and across the globe.

4. The government should staff each state tourism board with skillful and well trained personnels, such as, Archaeologist and tourism scholar to take charge and care of tourists who enter the country to avoid them falling into the hands of fraudsters and dubious Nigerian that may give Nigeria a bad name and image.

5. The government should seek the advice from professional bodies, such as, Archaeological Association of Nigeria, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, the various Tourism Boards, the Art Council and other Institutions with some bias toward archeology. This is because archaeologists are cultural resource managers and they will help revamp tourism in Nigeria effectively. (Ekechukwu, 1990).

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