

## **Assessment of perception of local residents in selected communities of rivers state, Nigeria for coastal tourism development**

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### **Abstract**

The true success of planning and development of tourism lies in the effective participation of the stakeholders; while the host community is a fundamental component of any tourism system. The study assessed the perception of local residents of Opobo, Bonny and Port Harcourt in Rivers State, Nigeria towards developing their communities into tourism destination. The data for the study were obtained through questionnaire from respondents of different age groups and genders. A total of 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed to Opobo, Port Harcourt and Bonny residents at 67, 238 and 95 copies respectively. The questionnaire was of two parts (A and B). While part A contained demographic information of the respondents, the part B focused on the perception of the local residents toward harnessing tourism potentials in their communities. The results showed high level of acceptance and willingness of the local residents to get involved in tourism development in their communities because of their understanding of economic benefits of tourism to their communities. It is recommended that adult local residents of different age groups and genders be fully involved in the decision making process of planning and development of tourism in their locality to ensure sustainable tourism development.

**Keywords:** Local residents, host communities, coastal tourism, tourism development, and Rivers State

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### **Introduction**

The host community being a fundamental component of any tourism system refers to the area the tourist visits. Host community in tourism is the place or area where tourist attractions are found and major activities of tourist take place. Residents of the community share facilities and services with the guests visiting the area, this makes the town and its inhabitants 'host' to the visitors (Cook, Yale and Marqua, 2006)<sup>[7]</sup>. Host communities are those places – villages, towns or cities that receive visitors and provide them with desired services. Community is referred to group of individuals living or working within the same geographical area with some shared cultures or common interests (Araf and Farshid, 2010)<sup>[12]</sup>. Local communities are regarded as legitimate and moral stakeholders in tourism development (Haukeland, 2011)<sup>[13]</sup>. Communities that host the attractions should be recognized as an invaluable asset for sustainable tourism development to be achieved. According to Jamal and Stroza (2009)<sup>[14]</sup> the interest of the local communities affect and are affected by the decisions of the key policy makers. So, for this reason, local tourism development requires people who are affected to be involved in both planning process and implementation of policies and action plans (Pongporat 2011)<sup>[15]</sup>. The role of communities towards tourism has made it significant to encourage the participant of the local communities to tourism development. Niezgodna and Czernek (2008)<sup>[16]</sup> noted that if decisions concerning development of tourism in a region are not made in consultation with the local communities during the design stage, it will be impossible for the local communities to be involved during the implementation. Tourism activities have many impacts on the host community either negatively or

positively. So any increase in tourism activities will inevitably accompanied by a growth in the number of local people affected. According to Smith (2001)<sup>[8]</sup> host communities refer to people who live in the vicinity of any tourist attraction that are directly or indirectly involved or affected by tourism activities. Social and cultural issues need to be considered because of the importance of host acceptance to the overall sustainability of tourism attraction (Burns and Sofield, 2003)<sup>[11]</sup>. The actual and perceived impacts of tourism will influence the attitudes of the host community and ultimately have an effect on sustainability (Hunke, 2004)<sup>[10]</sup>. The host community is an important element to consider in the concept of sustainability and sustainability of tourism is dependent in part on the supports from local residents and their satisfaction. Hosts satisfaction is related to both the involvement of local community members in tourism activities and benefits and disadvantages of tourism to host communities. Therefore, opportunities should be provided for local participation in tourism through investment in the tourism business by locals, employment or supporting activities such as agriculture and craft industries (Wall and Matheson, 2006)<sup>[9]</sup>. Community participation and stakeholders' involvement have become a critical factor in tourism planning and development. The true success of any planning and development lies in effective participation of the stakeholders in the decision making process. The participative exercises lead to people getting increasingly involved in their own society and influencing decisions that affect their lives (Markovic, Salta, Skaricic and Trumbic, 2009)<sup>[2]</sup>. The stakeholders of tourism development include the government, tourism business owners, employees of the business, tax payers, local communities,

donor agencies, tourism planners/developers/environmentalists and the tourists (Holden, 2008) [3]. Informing and involving people can be challenging and time consuming but can make a big difference for successful projects, plans and tourism products (Markovic *et al*, 2009) [2]. For stakeholders to be involved, researchers and planners must first identify and understand what elements comprise stakeholder's knowledge of the concept of tourism development.

Local residents have exhibited in so many ways, positive attitudes to both tourists and tourism industry. However, there have been number oppositions in many parts of the world. The contentious issues usually revolved around the displacement of the original settlers in the areas acquired for the development of resorts; and the cases of opposition due to objection to tourism being perceived as morally undesirable (Cooper and Wanhill, 1998) [1]. In Malaysia, protests have surfaced in Island and upland destination on account of environmental considerations. These protests have been instigated by opposition groups who are well linked to other movements based outside the country (Cooper and Wanhill, 1998) [1]. Also, in Mulu area of Malaysia, two of the power generators installed by the park management were burned down as a show of protest against the state government's decision to acquire their land to be occupied by a resort developer from outside (Cooper and Wanhill, 1998) [1]. However, considering the examples of protests by the local residents, given above; the participation of locals in communities where tourism will be developed becomes critical. In a country like Nigeria and Rivers State in Particular, where natural tourism potentials abound with cultural diversities and so many interest groups as well as high level of poverty among the citizenry. Also, due to the fact that there were records of restiveness in the state in the past, people are sensitive to the activities of both oil companies and government within the environment. Therefore, it is very important to ascertain the feelings of the local residents of communities towards tourists and tourism development within their environment before taking any positive step to harness the natural and cultural potentials the people are endowed with. Hence, the paper is aimed at determining the level of acceptance and willingness of the local residents (respondents) towards tourism development in their communities by providing answers to the following questions;

1. Do you welcome the idea of developing tourism in your community?
2. What benefits do you think developing tourism will bring to your community
3. If you do not welcome the idea of developing tourism in your community what are the reasons for your fears?.

Tourism development is concerned with provision of tourism infrastructure and superstructure (Okoli, 2001) [4]. Markovic, Salta, Skaricie and Trumbic, (2009) [2] discloses that tourism development especially in the coastal areas as dependent on the physical, environmental, cultural and socio-economic features of the receiving coastal environment. Cooper *et al*. (2005) [1] rightly observed that development of tourism has to be sustained before it can be classified as development at all, otherwise it is a short term growth. Tourism development refers to the increase in local income and employment as well as environmental benefits (PAP-RAC, 2009) [6]. For tourism to be developed, it requires the informed participation of all relevant

stakeholders. Acceptance and willingness of the people to participate in tourism guarantee cultural peace and harmony; and enabling environment for tourism to flourish. According to Ijeomah, Adedapo, Abimbola and Abedeen (2009) [5], tourism cannot thrive in crisis. Overcoming cultural challenges could be difficult but very crucial for success to be achieved in tourism. In some communities culture forbids none members of the community from visiting their streams and sacred forests. In others, culture may not allow pregnant tourist to enter destinations that are close to shrines (Ijeomah *et al*., 2009) [5].

## 2. Materials and Methods

The study was on Rivers State but was focused only on three Local Government Areas randomly selected. The Local Government Areas were Opobo, Bonny and Port Harcourt. A self-administered survey was conducted in August, 2013 where a total of 400 copies of questionnaire were personally administered and retrieved. In administering the questionnaire, 67, 238 and 95 copies were distributed to Opobo, Port Harcourt and Bonny respectively based on the population of each of the areas under study. This sample size was determined using Taro Yamen Formula.  $(n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2})$ . The questionnaire was of two parts – Part A and part B. While part A contained the demographic information of the respondents the part B focused on the perception of the Local residents of the various communities towards harnessing tourism potentials in their area.

The survey data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The frequencies involved the use of counts and percentages for individual variables. The answer to the relevant questions was expressed as a percentage of the total number of respondents in it, while the total number of respondents to the question was represented by 100%.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Demographic and Social Characteristics of Respondents

Information on the demographic characteristics of respondents was analyzed with regard to gender, age, marital status, educational qualifications, occupation, employment status and daily expenditure (Table 1). There is no sex discrimination in the expression of opinion, as both males (70.01%) and females (29.99%) expressed their views towards tourism development in their localities. Though, the majority of the respondents were males (70.01%) as against females (29.99%). This predominance was based on the general belief that men are the custodians of authority both in the homes and communities to take vital decisions.

The table shows that the majority of the average respondents fall within the age brackets of 30-39 years (28.06%) and 19-29 years (26.33%). A total of 32.84% for Opobo; 19.75% for Port Harcourt and 31.58% for Bonny were within the age brackets of 30-39 years while a total of 25.37% for Opobo; 10.50% for Port Harcourt and 43.16% for Bonny were within the age interval of 19-29 years. Then, following this were the respondents within the age group of 50-59 years (19.70%); where Opobo was 32.84% Port Harcourt was 21.01% and Bonny was 5.26%. The least respondents were received within the age groups of 70 years and above (1.4%) and 60-69 years (7.15%).

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Study sites			
	Opobo (%)	Port Harcourt (%)	Bonny (%)	Mean score
<b>Gender:</b> Male	50(74.63)	192(80.67)	52(54.74)	92(70.01)
Female	17(25.37)	46(19.33)	43(45.26)	35(29.99)
<b>Age:</b> 19-29 Yrs	17(25.37)	25(10.50)	41(43.16)	28(26.33)
30-39 Yrs	22(25.37)	47(19.75)	30(31.58)	33(28.06)
40-49 Yrs	6(8.96)	70(29.41)	13(13.68)	30(17.35)
50-59 Yrs	22(32.84)	50(21.01)	5(5.26)	26(19.70)
60-69 Yrs	0(0)	41(17.23)	4(4.21)	15(7.15)
70 and above	0(0)	5(2.10)	2(2.11)	2(1.40)
<b>Marital status:</b>				
Single	20(29.89)	24(9.24)	36(37.89)	27(25.66)
Married	39(58.21)	209(87.82)	58(61.055)	102(69.0)
Widowed	0(0)	5(2.10)	1(7.37)	2(3.16)
<b>Educational Qualifications:</b>				
Illiterate	11(16.42)	4(1.68)	7(7.37)	7(8.49)
Primary	7(10.45)	15(6.30)	9(9.47)	10(8.74)
Secondary	11(16.42)	66(27.73)	23(24.21)	33(22.79)
OND/NCE	22(32.84)	23(9.66)	24(25.26)	23(22.59)
HND/Degree	16(23.88)	130(54.62)	32(33.68)	59(37.39)
<b>Occupation:</b>				
Farming	2(2.99)	20(8.40)	8(8.42)	10(6.0)
Fishing	6(8.96)	3(1.26)	9(9.47)	6(6.56)
Trading	7(10.45)	71(29.83)	16(16.84)	31(19.04)
Driving	6(8.96)	10(4.20)	7(7.37)	8(6.84)
Industrial	0(0)	12(5.04)	6(6.32)	6(3.79)
Civil service	11(16.42)	26(10.92)	11(11.58)	16(12.79)
Oil exploration	0(0)	18(7.56)	1(1.05)	6(2.87)
Banking	0(0)	6(2.52)	2(2.11)	3(1.54)
Student	4(5.97)	23(9.66)	10(10.53)	12(8.72)
Others	32(47.76)	49(20.59)	25(26.32)	35(31.56)
<b>Employment state:</b>				
Employed	55(82.09)	192(80.67)	43(45.26)	97(69.34)
Unemployed	12(17.91)	46(19.33)	52(54.74)	37(30.66)
<b>Daily expenditure:</b>				
Below N210	6(8.96)	24(10.08)	26(27.37)	19(15.46)
Between N210-N550	11(16.42)	30(12.61)	45(47.37)	29(25.47)
Between N501-N1,000	39(58.21)	57(23.95)	10(10.53)	35(30.90)
Between N1001-N2,000	11(16.42)	22(9.24)	8(8.42)	14(11.36)
Above N2,000	0(0)	105(44.12)	6(6.32)	37(16.81)

Survey Study, 2013

That the majority of the respondents falling within the age brackets of 19-29 years and 30-39 years means that the responses were from the leaders of tomorrow and the security of life and property depend on them. This implies that getting the support of the young adults for tourism development is a right step towards the right directions that can lead to sustainable development.

The study also revealed that the majority of the respondents were married with average responses from the three study sites of 102 (69.03) where 39(58.21%) for Opobo, 209 (87.82%) for Port Harcourt and 58(61.05%) for Bonny. The average responses for singles and widowed were 27 (25.66%) and 2 (3.16%) respectively. The implication of the findings is that most of the respondents have family responsibilities and this suggests that they would be eager to have other sources of revenue generation and employment opportunities to increase their income earning capacity that will improve the standard of living of their families.

Educational qualifications of the respondents showed that the majority of the average respondents were holders of HND/Degree with 59(37.39%) responses. This was followed by

secondary (22.79%); OND/NCE (22.59%); primary (8.74%) and illiterate (8.49%). The predominance of the respondents being holders of HND/Degree indicate that majority of the respondents can reason critically and comparatively.

The study showed that the major occupation of the respondents was trading (19.04%); while 12.97% were in civil service, 8.72% were students; 6.84% were drivers, 6.56% were into fishing, 2.87% were involved in oil exploration, 1.54% were bankers and 31.56% were engaged in other activities. The occupation of the respondents for the study was quite reasonably distributed to obtain information. This indicates a good representation of different occupational groups for the study. The employment state of the respondents revealed that 82.09% respondents from Opobo were employed, 80.67% of respondents from Port Harcourt were employed, and 45.26% of the respondents from Bonny were employed, while the average respondents from the three study sites who were employed was 69.34%. The study showed that the average responses that were unemployed was 30.66%, where 17.91% was for Opobo, 19.33% was for Port Harcourt and 30.66% was for Bonny. This implies that any investment tourism development in those areas

will not be a waste of resources but a right step to the right direction. Such investment will reduce unemployment rate by providing job opportunities to the unemployed. The daily expenditure of the respondents revealed that majority of the average respondents used to spend between N210 - N500 (25.47%) and between N501 - N1,000 (30.90%). A total of 39(58.21%) for Opobo; 57(23.95%) for Port Harcourt and 10(10.53%) for Bonny use to spend between N501 - N1,000. While a total of 11(16.42%) for Opobo, 30(12.61%) for Port Harcourt and 45(47.37%) for Bonny used to spend between N210 - N500. Then, following this were the respondents who used to spend above N210 - N2,000 (16.81%) daily, where Opobo was 0(0%), Port Harcourt was 105 (44.12%) and Bonny was 6(6.32%). The average least respondents used to spend between N1,001 - N2,000 ((11.36%) and below N210 (15.47%). The results indicated that the total average respondents of 84.54% live above extreme poverty level of N210 (\$1.25) per day according to the Millennium Development Goals Target indication measure, while 15.46% of average respondents live below extreme poverty level since they spend below N210 (\$1.25) per person per day. This is the measure used by United Nations for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The applicable poverty line used has been updated to \$1.25 dollars per person per day converted into Nigeria Local currency (N) from 2005 Purchasing Power

Poverty (PPP) exchange rate. The measurement is based on the value of average daily expenditure (USAID, 2014) [18]. Expenditures are used instead of income because of the difficulty in accurately measuring income and because expenditure data are less prone to, easier to recall and are more stable over time than income data.

### 3.2 Perception of local residents towards developing their communities into tourism destination:

In determining the perception of people concerning tourism development within their communities, table 2 showed that majority of average respondents of 121 (91.70%) welcomed the idea of developing tourism in their community, where 62 ((92.54%) responses were for Opobo, 214 (89.92%) responses were for Port Harcourt and 98(92.63%) responses were for Bonny. Only average of 12 (8.30%) did not welcome the idea of developing tourism in the communities where 5(7.46%), 24(10.08%) and 7(7.37%) represented Opobo, Port Harcourt and Bonny respectively. This indicates that majority of the respondents understand what tourism is and its numerous benefits to the people and the communities and so they were ever prepared to embrace it. This is equally a good indication that majority of the people in three communities would welcome the idea of development tourism in their area.

**Table 2:** Perception of the local residents in the communities towards developing tourism their area into tourism destination

Questions and variables	Opobo (%)	P/H (%)	Bonny (%)	Average score (%)
<b>Do you welcome the idea of developing tourism in your community</b>				
Yes	62(92.54)	214(89.92)	88(92.63)	121(91.70)
No	5(7.46)	24(10.08)	7.7(37)	12(8.30)
<b>What benefits do you think developing tourism will bring to your community?</b>				
Income generation	62(100.0)	214(100.0)	40(42.11)	105(80.70)
Employment generation	62(100.0)	214(100.0)	60(63.16)	112(87.72)
Increase in standard of living	45(72.58)	212(99.07)	25(26.32)	94(66.0)
Development of local arts and crafts.	39(62.91)	309(97.66)	25(26.32)	91(62.30)
Improvement of health condition	39(62.91)	205(95.79)	8(8.42)	84(55.71)
Improvement of infrastructure	48(77.42)	194(90.65)	34(35.79)	92(67.95)
Fostering Host Tourist friendship	50(80.65)	214(100.0)	43(45.26)	102(75.30)
<b>Indicate your reasons for your fear of not welcoming the idea of developing tourism in your community</b>				
Cultural vandalism	5(100.0)	19(79.17)	7(100.0)	10(93.06)
Immorality	5(100.0)	24(100.0)	6(85.71)	12(95.24)
Insecurity	5(100.0)	24(100.0)	6(85.71)	12(95.24)
Introduction of diseases	4(80.6)	21(87.50)	4(85.71)	10(74.88)
Increased crime	3(60.0)	24(100.0)	5(71.43)	11(77.14)
Community conflict	5(100.0)	17(.70.83)	2(28.57)	8(66.47)
Loss of language	1(20.0)	8(33.33)	1(14.29)	3(22.54)
Increase in the cost of living	5(100.0)	24(100.0)	7(100.0)	12(100.0)
Crowding and congestion	2(40.0)	20(83.33)	7(100.0)	10(74.44)
Host/tourist hospitality	5(100.0)	18(75.0)	2(28.57)	8(67.86)
Pollution	5(100.0)	18(75.0)	6(85.71)	10(86.90)
Widening the gap between the rich and the poor	4(80.0)	13(54.17)	5(71.43)	7(68.53)

Survey study, 2013

The table revealed that majority of the average respondents were of the opinion that the benefits the development of tourism will bring into their communities was employment opportunities 112(87.72%), income generation 105(80.70%) fostering Host/Tourist friendship 102 (75.30%) increase in standard of living 94 (66.0%), improvement of infrastructures 92(67.95%) development of local arts and crafts 91(62.30%) and improvement of health condition 84(55.71%). The first in

the list of the benefits tourism development will bring to the communities as revealed by the study was employment opportunities. This shows that the respondents were aware off the important role tourism plays towards employment generation and its place in the global market. This has confirmed the assertion of WTO (1997) [17] that travel and tourism is the world’s largest creator of job, in most countries, providing employment for over 10 million people worldwide.

The study has also shown that the total of 36 respondents who did not welcome the idea of tourism development in their communities indicated the major reasons for their fears as increase in the cost of living (100.0%), immorality (95.24%), insecurity (95.24%), cultural vandalism (93.06%), pollution (86.90%) increased crime (77.14%), introduction of diseases (74.88%), crowding and congestion (74.44%) and the least amongst the reasons for their fears was loss of language (22.54%).

#### 1.4 Conclusion and Recommendations

Rivers State has unique and numerous tourism potentials distributed in all over the State which can transform the state into tourism destination magnet if properly planned and developed with the involvement of the host communities and other stakeholders. The participation of local residents in the decision making process will prevent opposition that may arise from the community because of their awareness of the potential benefit that tourism development will bring to them in there are. Also, because of the fact that they welcome the idea, it is certain that they will give their full support to see that success is achieved in the project. It is recommended that adult local residents of different age groups and genders be fully involved in the decision making process of planning and development of tourism in their locality to ensure sustainable tourism development.

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