



**Influence of Socio-Economic Factors on Sustainability of Ecotourism
in Cross River State, Nigeria**

**Ephraim Idongesit Emmanuel, Asanye Gloria Ikpeme,
Ekuri Helen Egba & Agbor Alice Jaka**

Department of Environmental Education, University of Calabar, Nigeria
idanet2002@gmail.com; gloriaasanye77@gmail.com;
helen.kings@yahoo.com & Aliceagbor18@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of socio-economic factors (accommodation and security) on the sustainability of ecotourism in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the increasing growth of global tourism and the need to balance environmental conservation with tourism development. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 23,717 residents and workers around selected ecotourism sites, from which a sample of 1,184 respondents was drawn using purposive, census, and proportionate sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Socio-Economic Factors and Sustainability of Ecotourism Questionnaire (SFSEQ), which was validated by experts. Two null hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that accommodation does not significantly relate to the sustainability of ecotourism, indicating that tourists are more inclined toward natural experiences such as camping rather than hotel accommodation. Similarly, security was found not to have a significant relationship with ecotourism sustainability, although its importance for safety and policy development was acknowledged. The study concluded that while accommodation and security are relevant, they do not significantly determine ecotourism sustainability in the study area. It was recommended that emphasis should be placed on environmental conservation practices, provision of mobile camping facilities, and community involvement in site protection rather than excessive infrastructural development.

Key words: Ecotourism, Sustainable Tourism, Accommodation, Security, Socio-Economic Factors, Environmental Conservation

Introduction

Ecotourism is a vibrant force that stimulates travels to explore nature, adventure, and cultural wonders. Ecotourism development attracts tourists to a particular destination to develop and sustain tourism industry. Moreover, ecotourism sustainability is a future based conscious effort aimed at conserving socio-cultural heritage and preserving natural resources to protect environmental ecosystems through supporting people's health and economic well-being. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2017), Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries, contributing more than 10% to global GDP. UNWTO (2017),

further defines sustainable tourism as tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of the visitors, the industry, the environment, and the host communities, (Mikagilov, Mochtarous, Mammadov, & Azizou, 2019). According to sustainable tourism report, it was recorded that twenty-five million international tourists visited different part of the world in 1970; the number reached 1.442 billion in 2018 and projected to be 1.8billion by 2030.

Mobilizing such a sustainable human-tourist mass is most likely to trickle environmental pollution along with its positive effects on employment, wealth creation, and the economies. Khater *et al* (2025), emphasizes the importance of law enforcement, public-private-partnerships (PPP), and continuous innovation to achieve green tourism (ecotourism) as an important contribution to long-term environmental and economic sustainability. They further emphasize the need to harness tourism to implement development plans and evaluate the legal and policy frameworks that support its implementation.

According to United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) target 8.9 which aim to ‘devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products’. The importance of sustainable tourism is also highlighted in SDG target 12.b, which aims to develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. Target 14.7 the SDG adds that by 2030 tourism should be one of the tools that would be used to increase the economic benefits of small Islands, developing states and least developed countries.

But there is also the challenge of pollution at ecotourism destinations which may include emission, noise, solid waste littering, sewage, oil and chemical, architectural/visual pollution, among others. In addition, there could be an uncontrolled, over-crowded, and ill-planned tourist population. This can have a substantial adverse effect on the quality of the ecotourism sites. It may result in the overconsumption of natural resources, degradation of service quality and an

exponential increase in wastage and pollution. Furthermore, tourist arrival beyond capacity on an eco-tourist site can bring problems rather than blessings such as leaving behind soil erosion, attrition of natural resources, accumulation of waste, air pollution, endangering biodiversity, decomposition of socio-cultural habitats and virginity of land and sea, according to Kostic, Milicevic, and Nedelykovic, (2016); Shaheen, Zaman, Batool, Khurshid, Shoukry, and Gani,(2019); and Andlib & Salcedo-Castro (2021).

Accommodation which refers to as a room, group of rooms, or building in which someone lives or stays in, may greatly influence the sustainability of an ecotourism sites. Good accommodation around an eco-site may increase the population of tourist as well as increase the prolong stay of tourist around and ecotourism sites thereby causing pollution, depletion and degradation of an eco-site. A dilapidated accommodations or inadequate accommodation around an eco-site may reduce tourist visit and their stay around an ecotourist site.

The condition where something or someone is protected from causes that are likely to cause harm to them is called safety. Protecting an organization or people against threat or danger is security. Thus, the sustainability of any ecotourism site depends on its security and safety of both the site and the tourist. Sustainable ecotourism must look out for the safety and security of the site, staff, and tourist against any predicted and unpredicted externalities. Safety measures must be strictly adhered to by staff and tourists while failure to comply, there should attract penalties. The aim of this study therefore is to examine the extent to which socio-economic factors like accommodation and security can affect sustainable tourism in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Research questions

The following research questions are formulated to guide the study.

- i. How does accommodation relate with sustainability of ecotourism?
- ii. In what way does security relate with sustainability of ecotourism?

Research hypotheses

The following research questions were transformed into null hypotheses to further guide the study. These are;

1. There is no significant relationship of accommodation on sustainability of ecotourism.
2. Security does not significantly relate with sustainability of ecotourism.

Accommodation and Sustainability of the Ecotourism

Accommodation refers to a room, group of rooms, or building in which someone may stay can greatly influence the sustainability of ecosystem sites. Still in the study carried out by Abou et al (2019), on ecotourism and sustainability; Practices of the Lebanese nature-based operators. The study which aims is to find the contribution of ecotourism on sustainable development in Lebanon from a market perspective. In order to assess the level of understanding of the ecotourism concept by the Lebanese nature based tour operators and their contribution to sustainable development, field data related to their profile and practices was collected and using a survey administered to 50 operators. The Nature Based Tourism Operator (NBTOs), who use accommodation services in their tours do not give a priority for Eco-lodges and guesthouses, 90% stated that they do not consider the eco-lodge as an accommodation option, and 64% do not use guesthouses.

They rather use resorts, hotels, and camping sites, which do not match with the ecotourism concept and principles. Similar to accommodation, the results of the food and beverage services showed a weak comprehension of the ecotourism concept and principles related to this subject where 70% of the NBTOs do not use the services of local bakeries, snacks or restaurants, and ask the tourists to bring their own food, however they all stated that they encourage tourists to buy locally produced handicrafts and processed food. In terms of hiring local guides, 74% of the interviewed NBTOs stated that they do it.

In a study by Miray, and Zihni, (2022), on Architectural characteristics of accommodation buildings within the context of sustainable ecotourism in Cyprus: evaluation and recommendations; they noted that tourism, a socioeconomic activity generally defined as an

exchange of culture, is diversified by its different purposes. Ecotourism, which emerged and has been constantly developing in the last quarter century, is based on the principles of protecting the natural environment and recognizing the original local culture in an interaction with the environment. As significant components of tourism activities, accommodation structures play a major role in the realization of ecotourism.

According to Henrieta, Tomáš, Alexander, and Iveta, (2024), on the sustainable management of ecohotels for the support of ecotourism: A case study of Slovakia (Prešov and Košice districts in Eastern Europe): The study concentrates on the willingness of tourists to use ecohotels as part of their tourist activities based on a questionnaire survey. The study identifies the factors of strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats of the use of ecohotels by tourists in supporting the development of ecotourism.

Through the exact quantification of the weights of individual factors in terms of Saaty's matrix and a SWOT analysis, an effective strategy for the use of Eco hotels in supporting the development of ecotourism is defined. In recent years, the stimulation and use of tourists' interest in environmental quality, with an emphasis on reducing negative impacts on the environment, has resonated; thus, a model of effective marketing strategy is presented, a questionnaire survey form with 11 closed questions and 1 open question, which determined tourists' awareness of Eco hotels and their provided services.

Based on the obtained partial results from the questionnaire survey, strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats were identified to make decisions about establishing an Eco hotel by SWOT analysis. The quantification of the weights of the explicitly defined factors of all analyzed SWOT areas in terms of the methodological procedure of the Saaty matrix was carried out. The dimensions of the Saaty matrix were directly determined by an interactive comparison of previously explicitly defined factors of identical order, a reciprocal value was assigned according to the criteria below. Given the above facts, the respondents' willingness to pay a higher amount for Eco hotel services in the selected holiday destination was determined. A

total of 28.4% would be rather willing to pay a higher amount of money for using the services of an Eco hotel.

In comparison, 22.3% would be willing to pay more money. The same number of respondents, 22.3%, would be rather not willing to pay an increased amount for using Eco hotel services, 19.2% categorically rejected such an option, and 7.8% could not comment on this fact. Of the 259 respondents who answered the above question in the affirmative (explicitly marked the answer as yes or rather yes), 63.5% said that they would be willing to pay an amount increased not more than EUR 10 for using the services of an Eco hotel, 24.7% increase in the range EUR 11–20, 8.8% increase in the range of EUR 21–30, and 3% increased more than EUR 31.

A total of 45.6% identified the mountain area as the decisive location of the Eco hotel; 26.9% were aged 26–35, 25.6% were aged under 25, and only 5.5% were aged over 66. Of the total number of respondents, 17.2% identified mountain and spa areas as the key determinant of the location of the Eco hotel; 34.1% were aged under 25, 26.1% were aged 36–45, 22.7% were aged 26–35, and only 1.1% were aged over 66. Of the total number of respondents, 6.65% identified mountain and village areas as the desired Eco hotel location; 32.4% were aged 26–35, 26.5% were aged under 25, 20.6% were aged 30–45, and only 2.9% were aged 56–65.

Of the surveyed respondents, 5.1% identified mountain and urban areas as the desired location of Eco hotels; 38.5% were aged 26–35, 26.9% were aged under 25, 15.4% were aged 36–45, 11.5% were aged 36–45, and 7.7% were aged 56–65. Of the total number of respondents, 2.35% indicated mountain, spa, urban, and village areas as the requested Eco hotel allocation; 16.7% were aged under 25, 50.0% were aged 26–35, 25.0% were aged 36–45. 8.3% were aged 56–45, and not a single respondent was aged 46–55 or over 66. Of the total number of respondents, 2.0% identified mountain, spa, and village areas as the requested location of Eco hotels, and 1.37% identified mountain, spa, and urban areas.

Security and Sustainability of the Ecotourism

Influence of Socio-Economic Factors on Sustainability of

The process of protecting organization/people against threat or danger is Security. Ecotourism thrive well in a secure site. In another study conducted by Abou *et al* (2019), on Ecotourism and Sustainability: practices of the Lebanese nature-based operators. The study aims to find the contribution of ecotourism on sustainable development in Lebanon from a market perspective. In order to assess the level of understanding of the ecotourism concept by the Lebanese nature based tour operators and their contribution to sustainable development, field data related to their profile and practices was collected and using a survey administered to 50 operators.

The Nature Based Tourism Operator (NBTOs) of the Lebanese, revealed that only 14% of the interviewed NBTOs respect the ideal group number for an ecotourism activity which is 12 to 20 persons per trip; while 18% allow between 21 and 40 persons, 38% have a group size ranging between 41 and 60 persons, and 30% between 61 and 100 persons per trip. Thus, the majority of NBTOs (86%) tend to constitute potential threats to the environment. This practice is contrary to what the ecotourism guidelines recommend regarding low visitor impact and being small scale.

In a study by Worimegbe, Mariam and Abiola-Oke (2019), on the extent to which political and economic risk have affected the tourism industry in Nigeria. The study aims to determine the extent to which political and economic risks have affected the tourism industry and the economy in Nigeria. In recent times, there has been a clamor for the development of the Nigerian tourism industry but such has been beset by a spate of religious intolerance, insurgency, and changes in government, among others. Regression statistical technique was used to examine the relationship between political and economic risk and tourism in Nigeria specifically between 2006 and 2017. The result of the relationship shows that political and economic risk have effects on tourism, and tourism has a significant impact on the economy. The significant effect of political and economic risk on tourism calls for adequate security in the country, and better legal

and institutional frameworks. This will enhance the economic impact of tourism on the Nigerian economy.

A case study conducted by Noble, Acquah and Aikins (2003) on Safety and Security Measures at Buabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary in Ghana,, the authors used interviews and observation to gather data from 10 management staff. The study revealed that safety signs, a first aid box, a fire extinguisher, washrooms, dustbins, tour guides, security personnel, visitors seating and an emergency unit were available at the site.

However, CCTV cameras, metal detectors and ambulances were not available. The study further established that safety and security measures at the site were generally inadequate; management did not consider the site to be under any threat, since the monkeys had never caused any severe harm or injury to tourists, which would call for stringent security measures. The study recommends that tourism stakeholders should endeavor to provide CCTV cameras, metal detectors and ambulances to deal with any incidents that may arise at the destination.

In a study by Jan, and Agnieszka (2024), on security and securitization in sustainability and tourism research; Safety has always been one of the most important issues for the existence of every human and their activities in life, work, and recreation. Safety in tourism is also one of the most important factors influencing the choice of destination or form of tourism. Moreover, sustainable development is closely related to both tourism and security. The topic, the analytical and review nature of the work undertaken implied an analysis of available publications in the fields of security, tourism, and sustainable development. The selection of publications was performed using the publicly available largest databases of indexed journals and scientific articles, Scopus and Web of Science. The quantitative analysis used simple statistical calculations showing the share of publications in the individual categories searched according to the selected key and in the presented time intervals.

Research design and Methodology

Survey research design was found suitable because of the need for wide coverage, time efficiency, cost effectiveness, anonymity, privacy during data collection, and versatility in the data collection process. The study was carried out in Cross River State, Nigeria. The population of this study is the projected population of the people working and living around an ecotourism destination within Cross River State, Nigeria, which is 23, 717 people. (Source: National Population Commission 2024). A multi-stage sampling of purposive, census and proportionate sampling techniques were employed by the study. First, purposive sampling technique was employed for this study to select three local government areas that have tourist attraction in them. After which Census sampling technique was used. The reason for census sampling technique is because the researcher counted the numbers of ecotourist site within the three Local Government Areas, within the best of her knowledge and they were six and the researcher decided to use the whole eco tourist site for the study.

Proportionate sampling technique was used to pick 5% of the population of the people working and living around the ecotourism site. The sample of this study comprised 1,184 respondents' business men and women, farmers, civil servant and youth from 18 years and above, working and living around the selected communities. 99 questionnaires were administered to each of the 10 communities sampled, 82 questionnaires were administered at Iku, because it has the smallest population and 112 questionnaires were administered in Kayang 1 because it is the largest community sampled, which was a total of 1,184 respondents. A structured questionnaire, titled "Socio-Economic Factors and Sustainability of Ecotourism Questionnaire (SFSEQ)". The instrument was divided into two sections, Section A and B. Content and face validity of the instrument was conducted by experts in the field, where some modifications were made.

Result and discussion

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between accommodation and sustainability of ecotourism. The independent variable here was accommodation. The dependent variable was sustainability of ecotourism. Pearson’s product moment correlation was adopted to test the hypothesis. The result is as presented in table 1. The result in table 1 indicated that the calculated r-value of .037 with a significant p-level of .204, was higher than 0.05, it means that the relationship was statistically not significant at the 0.05. This implies that, accommodation does not significantly relate with sustainability of ecotourism in Cross River State.

Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationships between accommodation and sustainability of ecotourism

Variables	x	SD	df	r-value	p level
Accommodation(x)	13.72	3.412			
			1,182	.037	204
Sustainability of(y) Ecotourism.	30.84	8.297			

*Significant at 0.05 level, df = n-2 =1182, critical r =.037

Whether there is an accommodation around an ecotourist site or not tourists will always visit that ecotourism site. They often prefer to stay in the wild under tent and camp fires in order to have clearer views of the natural environment, thereby having a first-hand experience of nature. Therefore, the null hypothesis earlier stated was accepted.

Hypothesis two

Security does not significantly relate with sustainability of ecotourism. The independent variable here was security. The dependent variable was sustainability of ecotourism. Pearson product moment correlation was adopted to test the hypothesis. The result is as presented in table 2

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between security and sustainability of ecotourism

Variables	X	SD	df	r-value	p.level
Security(x)	9.15	2.72			
			1,182	.045	.121
Sustainability of (y) Ecotourism.	30.84	8.297			

*Significant at 0.05 level, df =2, 1182 critical r =.045

The result in table 2 indicated that the calculated r-value of .045 with a significant p-level of .121, was higher than 0.05, it means that the calculated r-value was statistically not significant at the 0.05. This implies that, security does not significantly relate with sustainability of ecotourism in Cross River State. Therefore the null hypothesis earlier stated was accepted.

Discussion

Accommodation and Sustainability of Ecotourism

Hypothesis one: there is no significant relationship between accommodation and sustainability of ecotourism. The result in table 1 indicated that the calculated r-value of .307 with a significant p-level of .204, was higher than 0.05. It means that the calculated r-value was statistically not significant at the 0.05 level of significance. This implies that, accommodation does not significantly relate with sustainability of ecotourism in Cross River State. Tourist do not really need accommodation around an ecotourism site, they prefer to stay in the wild and experience the beauty of nature under mobile tents and camp fires. However this is not in support of Abou et al(2019) on Ecotourism and Sustainability; Practices of the Lebanese nature-based operators.

The Nature Based Tourism Operator (NBTOs), use accommodation services in their tours, they do not give a priority for Eco-lodges and guesthouses, 90% of them stated that they do not consider the eco-lodge as an accommodation option, and 64% do not use guesthouses. They

rather use resorts, hotels, and camping sites, which do not match with the ecotourism concept and principles. Similar to accommodation, the results of the food and beverage services showed a weak comprehension of the ecotourism concept and principles related to this subject where 70% of the NBTOs do not use the services of local bakeries, snacks or restaurants, and ask the tourists to bring their own food, however they all stated that they encourage tourists to buy locally produced handicrafts and processed food.

In terms of hiring local guides, 74% of the interviewed NBTOs stated that they do it, this is not similar with Miray, et al, (2022), on Architectural characteristics of accommodation buildings within the context of sustainable ecotourism in Cyprus: evaluation and recommendations; they noted that tourism, a socioeconomic activity generally defined as an exchange of culture, is diversified by its different purposes. Ecotourism, which emerged and has been constantly developing in the last quarter century, is based on the principles of protecting the natural environment and recognizing the original local culture in an interaction with the environment. As significant components of tourism activities, accommodation structures play a major role in the realization of ecotourism. Due to its location, cultural heritage and rich history together with its Mediterranean climate, Cyprus is an especially important tourism destination for people from Middle East and European countries.

The traditional living culture in this small Island country has created a huge demand for ecotourism in Cyprus. The ecotourism industry in Cyprus provides housing structures restored with the traditional architectural characteristics of the island as well as new buildings. The new accommodation structures should be constructed in compliance with the traditional architectural characteristics of Cyprus to contribute to the island's cultural tourism. As a result of these findings and based on the common architectural characteristics of existing ecotourism accommodation structures, the architectural characteristics of future accommodation structures have been identified accordingly. The findings of this study do not align with the hypothesis of

this study which state that, there is no significant relationship between accommodation and sustainability of ecotourism.

Therefore, Government should not bother much in investing in accommodation around an ecotourism site, because these will cause pollution, rather the government should make available mobile tents for tourists who are willing to spend nights around an ecotourism site. Therefore, whether there is an accommodation or not tourists should be encouraged to visit an ecotourism site, tourist should stay in the wild, under campfire, and mobile tent, to enjoy the beauty of nature rather than lodge in hotels around an ecotourist sites, these will help to achieve accommodation and sustainability of ecotourism.

Security and Sustainability of Ecotourism

The result in table 2 indicated that the calculated r-value of .045 with a significant p-level of .121, was higher than 0.05, it means that the calculated r-value was statistically not significant at the 0.05 level of significance. This implies that, security does not significantly relate with sustainability of ecotourism in Cross River State. Therefore, the null hypothesis earlier stated was accepted. Tourists are aware of the security state of the ecotourist site they want to visit, because there are no proper safety measures put in place for their safety, this information on security of the site and tourist do not discourage them from visiting any sites of their choice.

This is in support with the finding of Abou et al (2019), on Ecotourism and Sustainability: Practices of the Lebanese on nature-based operators. The results revealed that only 14% of the interviewed nature based operators respect the ideal group number for an ecotourism activity which is 12 to 20 persons per trip; while 18% allow between 21 and 40 persons, 38% have a group size ranging between 41 and 60 persons, and 30% between 61 and 100 persons per trip. Thus, the majority of nature-based operators (86%) tend to constitute potential threats to the environment. This practice is contrary to what the ecotourism guidelines recommend regarding low visitor impact and being small scale.

In another study by Worimegbe, et al (2019), on the extent to which political and economic risk have affected the tourism industry in Nigeria. The study aims to determine the extent to which political and economic risks have affected the tourism industry and the economy in Nigeria. In recent times, there has been a clamor for the development of the Nigerian tourism industry but such has been beset by a spate of religious intolerance, insurgency, and changes in government, among others. Regression statistical technique was used to examine the relationship between political economic risk and tourism in Nigeria, specifically between 2006 and 2017. Results of the study adopted a regression approach and found out that causality exists and there is a positive significant relationship between political economic risk and tourism in Nigeria.

The result of the relationship shows that political and economic risk have effects on tourism, and tourism has a significant impact on the economy. The significant effect of political and economic risk on tourism calls for adequate security in the country, and better legal and institutional frameworks. These two findings support our hypotheses, which state that security does not significantly relate with the sustainability of ecotourism. This will enhance the economic impact of tourism on the Nigerian economy. Security and safety measures at the ecotourism site were generally inadequate, safety measures such as safety signs, a first aid box, fire extinguisher, washrooms, dustbins, tour guides, security personnel, visitors seating, CCTV cameras, metal detectors and ambulances were unavailable at the ecotourism site. However, security measures need to be put in place at any ecotourism sites for ecotourism sustainability.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that; tourists do not patronize hotels around an ecotourist site, the desire to have first-hand information thereby they prefer to stay in the wild, under camp fire and mobile tents. The significant effect of political and economic risk on tourism calls for adequate security in the country, and better legal and institutional frameworks. This will enhance the economic impact of tourism on the Nigerian economy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the researcher made the following recommendations:

- i. Emphasis should be placed on less construction of houses around any ecotourism site, because this will be the medium for deforestation and pollution of the ecotourist sites. But rather mobile tent should be made available for visitors, especially those who want to spend days around an ecotourism site, this will enable them have a closer view of the wild.
- ii. Residents should be educated and empowered to participate in site security.

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