

## **TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: ATTRACTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF CARNIVALS AND FESTIVALS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Nigeria is blessed with several features which are reflections of the country's cultural diversity and historical trajectory. These cultural events including carnivals and festivals have attracted several international recognitions and made the country a preferred tourism destination. The carnivals and festivals possess the potentials for contributing to development of the country through economic empowerment and provision of infrastructure at such destinations. Prominent among such carnivals and festivals are the Grand Durbar Festival, the famous Argungu Fishing Festival, the Atilogwu Dancers and the New Yam Festival, the boat Regatta in Lagos and Yenogoa, the Olofin Festival in Idanre, Ondo state, Ojude Oba Festival, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, the Olojo Festival at Ile-Ife, the Osun Festival in Osogbo, Osun State, Lagos, Abuja, Calabar and Rivers carnivals. In spite of the benefits to the people and government through attraction of foreigners and locals to these events, there are deleterious consequences of tourism especially on human security which needs to be addressed. These include various environmental impacts on the event sites, people and surrounding areas, displacement of people and worshippers from such sites and lack of access to the economic resources such as water and land. The paper concludes that government should stimulate partnership with private individuals, groups and organizations in hosting such festivals to ensure sustainability and people's access to derivable socio-economic benefits. Also, there should be adequate regulation and control by government agencies to ensure sustainable tourists usage of such carnivals and festivals for the overall developmental interest of the country.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Sustainable Development, Carnivals, Festivals, Attractions, Limitations, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has been variously described as being vastly endowed with both natural and human resources. In other words, the country is blessed with both ecological and cultural resources which are highly essential for national development. The country has great number of population with well over 225 ethnic identities; and thus breads diverse cultural assets. There are various fascinating scenes such as mountains, springs, hills, waterfalls, grooves, shrines, among others in the country. The cultural events featuring attractive carnivals and festivals (such as the Grand Durbar Festival, the famous Argungu Fishing Festival, the Atilogwu Dancers and the New Yam Festival, the boat Regatta in Lagos and Yenegoa, the Olofin Festival in Idanre, Ondo state, the Olojo Festival at Ile-Ife, the Osun Festival in Osogbo, Osun State, Lagos, Abuja, Calabar and Rivers carnivals etc.) are all a part of resourceful features in Nigerian society. These variables have resultantly been aggregated to attract tourists across the world, thereby constituting gains to sustainable development in the country. Amalu and Ajake (2012) corroborating the above view held that tourism is so economically important that about 270 million tourists spend \$92 billion (US) annually in places outside their own countries. They contend further that it stands the most important export industry and earner of foreign exchange in many countries. Thus, visitors spending generate income for both public and private sectors, in addition to effecting wages and employment opportunities.

However, the side effects of tourism activities (as it regards carnivals and festivals), especially concerning human security cannot be ignored. "It has been noticed that many regions in the world are not in a position to reap the benefit of tourism simply because of the lack of infrastructures. In fact, if we look at the countries and the regions within the countries, the ones having adequate infrastructure are the greatest beneficiaries (Amalu and Ajake, 2012)." There are various environmental impacts on the event sites, people and surrounding areas-environmental pollution, displacement of the people and worshippers from such sites and lack of access of people to the economic resources such as water and land. It is on this premise that this paper contends that socio-economic potentials embedded in carnivals and festivals in Nigeria have not been adequately utilized towards national sustainable development. This also accounts for manifestation of certain challenges that carnivals and festivals posed to human security in our society.

In view of the above shortcoming, therefore, government should engage private individuals, groups and organizations in hosting such carnivals and festivals so as to ensure sustainable development and people's access to derivable socio-economic benefits of the events. The degree of control the local population has over tourism in their locality is generally perceived as being a significant element of sustainability (Mowforth & Munt, 2009 cited in Amalu and Ajake (2012)).

Of course, there are various institutions identified with tourism policy strategies in Nigeria. These institutions were put in place in line with government policy on tourism to generate foreign exchange, encourage even development, promote tourism based on rural enterprise, generate employment and accelerate rural-urban integration and cultural exchange (Nigeria Handbook, 2010). Such institutions are Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation, State Tourism Boards, Local Government Tourism Committees, National Art Gallery and Federation of Tourism Association of Nigeria (Ibid.).

For tourism to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development in Nigeria, government must look within or beyond the contexts of existing institutions to adequately regulate and control tourist potentials of such carnivals and festivals. By so doing, the issue of human security associated with carnivals and festivals in Nigerian society would be addressed.

### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF TOURISM**

Travelling to explore new places and looking for changes in environment has been a permanent feature in human history. Although, such voyages were in absentia of a range of facilities (i.e. well defined routes and safety measures etc.) characterizing modern tourism. Tourism means business activity connected with providing accommodation, services and entertainment for people who are visiting a place for pleasure (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary). It can be taken to comprising "activities of persons travelling to and staying in place outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year and not less than twenty-four (24) hours for leisure, holiday, business and other non-remunerated purpose (World Tourism Organisation, 1996)."

Tourism is viewed by Tunde (2012), while citing Glasson *et al*, (1995), as a "catalyst for national and regional development, bringing employment, exchange earnings, balance of payments advantages, and important infrastructural developments benefiting locals and visitors same way." Tourism thus can be conceptualized as involving the movement of the people from a given origin to specific destination(s) for the purpose of leisure, business, cultural familiarization, entertainment, education etc. It is in line with the above views that tourism can be viewed as the aggregate of the 'relationship and phenomenon' resulting from the travel and stay of strangers, save the stay is not to establish a permanent residence and does not involve a remunerated activity (Ibid.).

In a modern term, tourism is connected with both domestic and international visitors, including also all economic activities which are organised around the needs of such travelers. Thus, temporary and voluntary travels without an aim to earn any livelihood out of it (i.e. for holidaying, business or professional trip) are a part of tourism. However, the essence of business or professional tourism is for exchanging views for seeking collaboration between different parties. Tourism is an undertaking for the purposes of recreation rather than business (Getis et al, 2004)."

Balogun (2000) cited in Yusuf (2011) defines tourism as travel to enjoy the world's amazing diversity of natural and human culture. In his account, Yusuf (2011) notes service industries include transportation services such as cruise ships and taxis, accommodation such as hotels, restaurant, bars and entertainment venues, and other hospitality industries services such as spas and resorts as relating to tourism. Thus, to him, tourism deals with movement of people from their normal place of residence to another either for leisure, sport, business, health, recreation, religion, or conference. Because the whole world is infested with diverse problems, tourism serves as a temporary escape from usual, normal daily routine and can be termed as an escape from the crowded metropolitan problem to rural areas, secluded areas to haven serene at most quiet area where there is true display of nature as it were (Ibid.).

The importance of tourism nowadays is perceived more from its economic benefits especially to developing economies or economies experiencing depression (Adeyemo, 1995). It has been reported that each year over 600 million people travel

internationally; with hundreds of millions making journey within their home country for both work and pleasure. Thus, the tourism industry including hotels, resorts, airlines, travel agencies and other businesses that have direct influence on travel and travelers has been described as the world number one employer (Awake, 2005). In monetary terms, worldwide tourism industry generates an estimated trillion dollars annually (Conservation International, 2013; Awake, 2005).

## **TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

Tatyana (2000) relying on the classical definition given by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), puts that development is sustainable if it “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” He held further that for development to continue indefinitely, it should balance the interests of different groups of people, within the same generation and among generations, and do so all together in three major interrelated areas—economic, social, and environmental. In his words, “sustainable development is about equity, defined as equality of opportunities for well-being, as well as about comprehensiveness of objectives.” In his analysis, the writer thus gives the objectives of sustainable development as economic growth, efficiency and stability; healthy environment for humans, rational use of renewable natural resource, conservation of nonrenewable natural resources; and full employment, equity, security, education, health, participation and cultural identity.

It is on the above premise that sustainability should be seen as a broad field of inquiry, encompassing issues of cultural integrity, justice, and governance as well as questions of ecological limits to economic activity, the individual right to a safe and secure livelihood, and the national right to economic development. The prevailing thought on sustainable development, therefore, is that economic, social development and ecological conservation are mutually compatible objectives.

For tourism therefore, sustainable tourism involves tourism within destination areas as a triangular relationship between host, destination and environment, the tourists, and the products and service providers (i.e. industry operators) (Lane, 2005). Thus, Sustainable tourism aims to reconcile the tensions between the three parts of the triangle and maintain the equilibrium in the long term. The goals of sustainable tourism therefore will include minimizing environmental and cultural damage, optimistic visitor satisfaction, and maximize long-term economic growth for the region. This arrangement works to maintain a balance between the growth potentials of tourism and the conservation needs of the environment (Bramwell, 1990; English Tourism Board, 1991; Hawkes and Williams, 1993; Bramwell and Lane, 1993 cited in Lawal, 2014).

In Bassey’s (2013) account, the history of tourism in Nigeria is traceable to the beginning of life and ancient civilization. Buttressing this position, he quotes Ifegbo (2005) as saying:

*“History tells us that our fore-fathers offered hospitality and tourism services to strangers willingly. They were in the habit of being their brothers keepers.... Our forefathers practiced hospitality even before the arrival of the ‘white man’. However, it was the colonialists that commercialized hospitality as trade and commerce.”*

Nigeria is characterized with a myriad of natural, cultural and man-made tourism resources that are being developed into visitor ready attractions. There are abundant tourism resources with economic and commercial significance for the entrepreneur and social benefit of the society. Though, the country has been described as a mono-culture economy, relying heavily on crude oil. This is not unconnected with the fact that there are several other resources that are yet underutilized by the government. Tourism has been variously established to have enormous significance on socio-economic development of a society. Such benefits derivable from tourism include job opportunities, infrastructural development, increase individual and local community income and empowerment and self-confidence to traditionally subjugated people of the society. Amalu and Ajake (2012) paraphrasing Odunsanwo (2009) contend that Africa has been recently said to be the fastest growing tourism region with international arrivals reaching a 7.5 percent increase over that of the previous year with 360 million tourists recorded in 1998, 25 million (6.94%) visited Africa. In the same vein, Nigeria has been rated the most visited country in West Africa (WTO, 2004). This is not far from the fact that the country is richly blessed with such amazing elements that constitute tourist attractions.

Essentially, tourism has a prospect of becoming the favored development option for developing countries like Nigeria. It involves a combination of industries from different sectors of economic (formal and informal). This implies that it allows for wider participation in the industry. It is also pertinent to note that tourism activity is highly linked with natural resources and cultural activities, well entrenched, predominantly, in rural communities.

#### **ATTRACTIONS OF CARNIVALS AND FESTIVAL FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

Carnival is defined as a public festival, usually one that takes place at a regular time yearly, and involves music and dancing in the streets, for which people wear brightly colored clothes (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary). Similarly, according to Getz (1997), festivals are "events constituting one of the most exciting and fastest growing forms of leisure, business and tourism-related phenomenon." Carnivals and Festivals (which display different cultural forms) have been seen as mega businesses around the globe, and described as catalysts and backbones of a multifaceted economy. There are a great number of colorful and spectacular festivals and carnivals in Nigeria such as Osun Osogbo Festival in Osun State; Port Harcourt Carnival (Rivers State); Calabar Carnival (Cross River State); Argungu International Fishing Festival (Kebbi State); Eyo Festival/ Black Heritage Carnival (Lagos State); Durbar Festival (Kano State); Ojude Oba Festival (Ijebu Ode, Ogun State); Ofala Festival (Anambra State); Abuja International Carnival; among others. These carnivals and festivals are undoubtedly of huge importance to tourism development in Nigeria. This is because such eventful carnivals and festivals have attracted tourists from within and outside the country over the years thus making Nigeria a preferred tourist destination.

One of the important aspects of Port Harcourt Carnival, for example, is that it is being tagged with predominant theme each year. For instance, it has been maintained that the 2013 edition was tagged "*The Green World Edition*" in consonance with the universal crusade to go green. Expectedly, throughout the duration of the said edition, everything organic, respect for nature and sustenance of the environment was promoted. In the words of the organizers, this was in the quest to improve general wellness and the quality of life. The 2014 edition was themed "*One Love, One People*". According to the organizers of the Carnival, the theme was borne out of the need to break-down the barriers, the closing of ranks between people of diverse colors,

creed, culture, political leaning, race etc. (The Guardian, 2014). This alone explains the role of carnivals and festivals at bringing the people together.

Moreover, Port Harcourt Carnival has been described to be one of the biggest Carnivals in Africa. It is reported that over five hundred thousand participants, 23 local government floats, ten costume bands and visiting troupes from all over the world participate in the carnival yearly. The event involves over 14 kilometers street parade. Besides entertainment value of the Carnival, it has served empowerment purpose to the musicians, performers and entertainers who have utilized the opportunity to connect with their fan base. In the words of Sam Dede, the Director General of Rivers State Tourism Development Agency, SMEs and other businesses profit every year from the increased human traffic and patronage from the huge crowd that pours into Port Harcourt during the Carnival. He stresses further that hotels, recreational centres, tourist sites, arts, culture, advertising, publishing and creative companies, plus food and beverage companies etc. all profit from the increase in human and vehicular traffic during the period of the Carnival (The Guardian, 2014). This is said to be coupled with the creation of hundreds direct and indirect employments and sustenance along the value chain through the Carnival as millions of naira exchanges hands.

According to the organizers, the major highlights of the Carnival are as follows: the event features Kid Carnival which has not been favorable only for the kids but also for the parents and adults alike that use the rare moments to connect and bond with the younger generation. Praise Jam has been described as a veritable opportunity for corporate bodies to connect with their fan base and customers because it attracts an estimated turn out of thousands of people. Another event featuring the Carnival is Dance of Fireflies. It is set in the natural atmosphere of the old moonlight tales and this has pulled thousands of fans every year. Ekere- the Rhythm of the tribes is another flavor to the event. Egelege (Champion of the Sand Arena) is an undiluted gladiator show of masculine prowess where real men take on each other. This has also attracted thousands of fans yearly. The Carnival also features International Aquatic Fiesta which showcases the rich and aquatic splendor and everything that makes life at the river side a beautiful experience. Other events featuring the Carnival are The Black African Musical Festival, Reggae 360-degree, The International Heritage Parade and the Garden City Freestyle Parade (Ibid.)

Similarly, Osun Festival is an annual worship of the Osun goddess of fertility held in the second week of August in Osogbo, Osun State. Osun Grove, the site of Osun Osogbo Festival has been adopted in July 2005 by United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) as World Heritage Site. Before this time, the Federal Government of Nigeria had declared the grove a national monument way back in 1965. It has been maintained that the grove houses over 450 species of plants which are of economic and medicinal values (though protected by law). Following UNESCO's endorsement, Osun grove has since found its way in the world map of tourist destinations and the list of visitors has been growing on yearly basis (The Guardian, 2013). To the Curator and Site Manager, National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Mr. Makinde Olakunle, "there is never a dull moment at the grove because tourists from different parts of the world visit the place either for educational or scientific purposes." The increased awareness of the festival has also been linked with the confidence by many corporate sponsors for their continued partnership. Among the sponsors are MTN, Nigerian Breweries, Grand Oak Limited and Micom Hotels. Olakunle stresses further that about 100,000 tourists visit the grove yearly apart from those who come for the festival. He opined that this has translated into about 10 million naira annual earnings for the Federal Government (Ibid.). The festival usually involves the procession of Arugba, Osun devotees, the Osogbo community and tourists across the world to the grove

Furthermore, the Abuja Carnival was reported to have been initiated by the OlusegunObasanjo's administration in the year 2005 as an annual event. It was said to have been created to create a platform to present and preserved the rich intangible cultural heritage of Nigeria. The carnival has become major calendar event for the city of Abuja. The city has also been world-renowned for its rich history, cultural heritage and for hosting leading worldwide events giving it excellent tourism infrastructure. The Carnival allows for the involvement of women and youth organisations, school children, non-governmental organisations, military/paramilitary and culture/tourism groups. In the year 2013, Akwa-Ibom State presentation at the ceremony was a complete story of the Nigeria nation reflecting in visual every major political stage the country undergone from pre-independence through military era till date (The Nation, 2013).

The event also serves a platform to showcase the diverse culture of Nigeria as demonstrated by some members of the state's contingents who wore different traditional dresses identified with some ethnic groups in the country. Other special groups at the event included representatives of Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps, Eagles Nest (Naija Cultural Heritage Reality Show), United Foods, makers of Indomine, Maltina, Airtel among others. Some of the features of the Carnival include school children performances, durbar, cultural night/traditional cuisine and bush bar/traditional hairdo, masquerades performance, boat regatta, command performance and musical fiesta.

These and many other Carnivals and Festivals arguably have potentials of contributing significantly to the cultural and economic development of Nigeria. They have major impacts on the development of cultural tourism to the host communities. The organizers of such Carnivals and Festivals employ the historical and cultural themes to develop the annual events in an attempt to attract tourists and creating cultural appearance in the host metropolises by holding such events in the community settings. The organization of such events has been observed not explicitly to meet the needs of any one particular group, but also the hosting of such colorful events is often hinged on the tourism and economic opportunities in addition to socio-cultural benefits accruable from the events. It has therefore been well maintained that local communities through organization of Carnivals and Festivals play vital roles in the development of tourism in Nigerian society. Economic impact of tourism logically will depend principally on the consumption of tourism products in a geographical area. Similarly, one can be of the view that tourism related services, which include travel, accommodation, restaurants and shopping are the major beneficiaries of such carnival and festival events. This is attesting to the fact that festivals and carnivals are important agents of tourism in Nigeria. It also suggests that carnivals and festivals in Nigeria impact on the host populace and stakeholders in different ways. These include socio-cultural, physical and environmental and political economy dimensions; and this can also manifest in negative ways.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF CARNIVALS AND FESTIVALS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

It has been maintained that tourism activities are bound to interface with nature and produce changes in the environment (Girginous and Pary, 2005), and in some cases, such ecological impact can be positive and negative. No doubt carnivals and festivals are important tourism infrastructure in Nigeria. However, there are various challenges of carnivals and festivals as agents of tourism in the Nigeria perspective. These include environmental impacts on the event sites, people and surrounding areas as well as socio-economic insecurity to the people of host communities. It is therefore concluded that socio-economic potentials embedded in carnivals and festivals (as agents of tourism) in Nigeria have not been adequately deployed towards

national sustainable development. This is also responsible for relatively low level of development in tourism in Nigerian society.

To Gani Adams, “Nigeria is a good tourism destination but the security challenge is the first impediment. He opined that unhealthy political situation, corruption as well as lack of sincerity on the part of citizens must be addressed if tourism is to yield dividends for the country (The Guardian, 2014).” In the same vein, Shola Ilupeju views government’s stronghold on tourism development as a factor responsible for its unimpressive state. In his words, “it has been very low for now because the sector has not been encouraged and everything about tourism is being handled by the government. Expectedly, government’s role in tourism is to provide enabling environment and not to be the active organizers (Ibid).” He held further that tourism is supposed to be government led and private sector driven (i.e. it is community based and the people should be carried along for the sake of sustenance).

Guan (2008), cited in Amalu and Ajake (2012) held that there is bound to be conflict in value between the hosts living in closed societies with traditional lifestyles and the guests from modernized countries with foreign behaviors and new ideas in tourist’s destinations. He noted that these conflicts lead to host cultural drift and visitor misapprehension. He argued that making the local people take part in tourist organization, administration, guiding and services; and decide the amount and quality of cultural content as well as the communication methods in tourist activities would be a mitigating factor against such conflicts. He observed that tourism without host participation poses a major challenge to the host ethnic culture and noted that one major negative effect of such on host culture is that members of the host populations (especially the youths) are vulnerable to the superficial material supremacy of the foreigners, and “may copy the latter’s behaviors and consumption patterns, feeling ashamed of their own social customs and life styles, and consequently accepting alien values and attitudes without choice.”

Edim and Osaji (2014) citing Gossling (2002) held that tourism contributes to changes in land use, energy use, extinction of species, geographical spread of diseases and change to the perception of the environment. Citing him further, they held that tourism has increased the levels of transport on roads and in the air during the period of Calabar Festival, and is the consequent of wider effect on the environment and human health. According to these writers, “awareness of pollution emanating from various transport modes as well as direct effects on landscape and amenity values have escalated as transport infrastructure is further developed.” The negative effects are the pollution of the natural environment and damage to the quality of landscapes (Gossling, 2002). All these developments are observed in the Port Harcourt Carnival and Osun Osogbo Festival.

Also, the volume of tourists to these Carnivals and Festivals has increased tremendously (NTDC, n.d.). Thus corroborating the submission that the sheer volume of tourists today has been stressed leading to problems which if left uncontrolled can kill or stunt vegetation as hordes of tourists tramp through conservation areas (Lickorish and Jenkins cited by Awake, 2005).

Again, Murphy (2002) noted that “there may be a threat posed to traditional social values, the creation of factions of society who may take advantage of others and adaptation or weakening of cultural values. Similarly, Onah (2007) noted that the negative aspect of the Calabar Festival was much more than the positive aspect. He highlighted such negative impact of tourism as crime, lack of security, traffic congestion, inadequate light supplies, sanitation condition, and road network.

Nevertheless, Ukwayiet al (2012) in their study on “Socio-Economic Impact of Festivals on Community Development in Calabar, Nigeria” examined socio-economic impacts of the two leading events in Cross River State (Carnival Calabar and the Leboku new yam festival) especially on the host community. Their findings show that even though the events have played a significant role in socio-economic development of the areas, the events were not devoid of problems such as diffusion of ideas and increase in prostitution, inflation, rubbery among other social vices. Such problems include also youth disobedience to elders, increase in waste generation, increase in conflict etc.

## **CONCLUSION AND WAY OUT**

It has been demonstrated that Nigeria is sufficiently blessed with tourism infrastructures such that have made the country a preferred tourist destination. However, there are certain challenges characterizing tourism industry in Nigeria; and these have impeded its development in relation to developmental scale of tourism in other countries. Meanwhile, it has been argued that the developed economies tend to gain more from tourism than less developed nations. “In fact, if we look at the countries and the regions within the countries, the ones having adequate infrastructure are the greatest beneficiaries (Amalu and Ajake, 2012).” It is on this note that government should provide adequate infrastructures to support the voracious quest of tourists’ visiting Nigeria. By so doing, the country will reap the benefits accruable from her tourism potentials to the fullest. Not only that, government should stimulate partnership with private individuals, groups and organizations in hosting carnivals and festivals to ensure sustainability and people’s access to derivable socio-economic benefits of the events. Also, there should be adequate regulation and control by government agencies to ensure sustainable usage of the tourist potentials of such carnivals and festivals for the overall developmental interest of the country. This is because if the local people are provided with the opportunity to possess and run tourism facilities (especially carnivals and festivals), there would be an increased tolerance to tourist activities in their communities and thus give them a sense of responsibility and ownership. This is the practice in some countries such as UAE widely noted for their high tourism activities. For instance, visits to some cultural and religious sites in Dubai such as Al Boom Tourist Village and Jumeirah Mosque are conducted and guided by the locals within the sites (Government of Dubai, n.d).

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