

## INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' PERCEPTION OF ECOTOURISM IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The presents of ecotourism potentials in Cross River State has caused many scholars in the industry to question why the ecotourism potentials have not been fully explored by people especially the enclave communities within the ecotourism zones. However, two ecotourism zones were used which include Cross River State National Park and Okwangwo and two communities were selected from each zone. Two hundred respondents were used for this study of which fifty questionnaires were randomly distributed to each of the community. The questionnaires were design to capture the people perception of ecotourism and findings revealed that there was a low awareness and knowledge of ecotourism in the area. Besides, majority of the sampled population expressed indifference with regards to ecotourism. Therefore, adequate education on ecotourism must be given to the people especially to communities within the ecotourism zones in Cross River State.*

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, community, environment, potentials, perception.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent times, many scholars qualify ecotourism even more specifically, suggesting that it also must provide direct revenue towards the conservation or protection of natural areas and educate tourists about related environmental issues. Today, ecotourism as "travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing opportunities that make the conservation of the natural resources beneficial to local citizens (Eagles, 1992). Accordingly Dixon et al., (1995) argues that ecotourism must provide more than mere employment; it must foster change in the attitudes and behavior of tourists about the protection of natural resources. However, ecotourism provides a way of educating community to ensure the protection of the environment. Through travel also to ensure that the local community sustained their natural environment. Today, lack of local community enlightenment and awareness and positive attitude to ecotourism and the natural environment has led to the depletion of the environment through mass tourism (Doan, 2000). This was affirmed by Asuan Hotelier (1997) in his empirical finding of a Hong Kong travel agent who casually flicked his cigarette butt into the waters of the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, without any regard to the consequences of his actions. In Cross River State ecotourism projects have failed to address fundamental issues such as road network, security, and as a result the indigenous people within the ecotourism zone paid negative attitude to ecotourism since they lack adequate knowledge about the potentials of ecotourism. Besides, the ecotourism zone lacks standard facilities to attract tourist arrivals which would have been a mechanism to create a positive destination image and also encouraging interaction between the locals and other visitors in the area. Moreso, in Cross River State, the indigenous people are not adequately informed of the ecotourism criteria even though they are involved in tourism activities during the Christmas carnival, they do not understand the full concept of ecotourism and this has led to the neglect of

ecotourism in Cross River State which is the focus of this work to assessed indigenous people perception of ecotourism in Cross River State with specific reference to assessing the awareness and perception of indigenous people towards ecotourism and also to examine the major challenges towards ecotourism in the area.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The core meaning of perception is immediate awareness. To perceive something is to become directly or immediately aware of it. For example, by means of our senses we perceive or become aware of the objects, events, and persons in environment. Perception amounts to apprehension or intuition. Nearly any use of the senses can afford delight under the proper aesthetic attitude. People's information about a particular area may vary considerably, and the mental images they build up may reflect not only their surroundings but many other aspects of themselves and their lives. When the geographers use the term "environment" today, they do not think simply of the physical environment for they have greatly enlarged their spectrum to take in the man-made and social environments that are usually of much greater importance in human affairs. How men perceive their physical and social environment is a crucial question for the contemporary human geographers. It is also important for the way it directs the geographer's attention to other areas of the human sciences in which environmental questions are rapidly emerging. Herbert Simon has noted that it may be useful to think of human behaviour as being quite simple, but that most people live in very complex physical, man-made and social environments so their actual behaviour appears extremely complicated. He draws an analogy with an ant moving over a beach ribbed with waves of sand; a map of the ant's behaviour was directed at achieving her simple goal of getting back to her nest. The crooked path we see reflects the complicated wavy surface or environment in which her simple task is carried out, rather than truly complex behaviour or her part. Of course, this is only an analogy and given Simon's deep concern for understanding the human condition he would be the first to deny that men are simply ants. His approach to the understanding of human behaviour is most intriguing, however, and virtually reverses traditional viewpoints in which the extreme complexity of man's behaviour is seen to lie within him. The assumption that human behaviour is simple maybe very fruitful, just because it directs our attention to the environments in which people's lives are embedded. It has already led to some models of man that are extremely thought provoking and make good intuitive sense. George (1967) psychologist emphasised in a controversial work in operant conditioning were formulated after years of meticulous experiments with animals. His basic is that perception can be altered by controlling the environment in which perception takes place. Since we are already controlling human behaviour, whether we realize it or not, we should recognise this explicitly so that any alterations in behaviour by manipulating the environment can be dissected to useful social ends. His proposals have generated very violent reactions for his ideas evoker the specter of "Big Brother", and many are worried about the control of the controller. Some have pointed out the basic circularity of his arguments for the controllers themselves will have been conditioned by a controlled environment since childhood, and will continue to live their lives under such conditions. Nevertheless, his explicit recognition that the human environment is a determining force in man's behaviour is going to have a lasting impact upon human affairs. Foster (1972) has taken the view that a deeper understanding of man environment-interaction can be achieved by looking at the various psychological processes through which man comes to know the environment in which he lives, and by examining the way in which these processes influence the nature of resultant behaviour. Human existence is mostly hinge on perception. Most of the groups, eg cultural or individual rely's on perceiving as perception is one of the most clear instances of consciousness. Indeed, to be alive and active is to be sentient (Ebongm, 1995).

According to Ebong (1995) the key to successful control of environmental problem lies in the planner's effort to comprehend a whole range of problems intrinsic to people's perception of their environment and their concomitant behaviour. Environment perceived clarifies the notion that it is the human mind which not only drives the human body but shapes and moves the physical world, any change in man, his value, his attitude, his goals and aspiration, open to change by those who are trained and inspired to accomplish that goal (Ebong, 1995). Based on this concept, this research would necessarily suggest that the government considers the attitudes values and opinions of the inhabitants rather than promulgating and enacting laws, edicts, decrees and sanctions on defaulters. Mosley (1958) in his own opinion says the reason for different behaviours is the situation and the way in which things are perceived by us and others. The amount of information assimilated through our perception can affect our belief. Saying that perception and behaviour as a function represent the most pertinent portion of the environment. So the Okwangwo National Park, to be fruitful as an eco-tourism project, more interest and attention should be given to the problems, attitudes and the perception of both the elites and rural dwellers. Increasing recognition of the fact that, people respond not only to physical attributes of the environment but also to the psychological and sociological variables when they take decision on where they locate industrial establishment or how to utilise the earth's surface (Sonnenfield, 1990).

The perception of people mostly those of the elite's class and rural dwellers as regard the National Park in Cross River State (Okwangwo division) is quite distinct. Analysing these facts, an understanding of the interactions between human society and physical environment is inevitable. In some intellectualistic quarters, the tradition of analysing society separately from the environment is fully considered. This dualistic approach has its origin in the work of Strabo (64 BC-AD20), his work on Geographical drew distinctions between people and was reflected in the fashion for informal 'wild gardens'. The belief that communion with natural perception was morally and spiritually uplifting became widespread. Also the perception of the environment as nature unimpaired by people became distinct in outlook. Although the massive redistribution of population from the city did not take place till the 19th century. In Britain, the proportion of the population living in towns with more than 5000 inhabitants increased from 13-25% between 1700 and 1800. The new viewpoint of the countryside developed not only because of the physical problems of urban living-the towns were heavily polluted by coal burning and industrial processes - but also because the new merchant class sought to emulate the nobility by purchasing country estates or houses. The countryside had become fashionable. However, the country side itself was being transformed as the cultivated areas were extended and also between neat and orderly hedges. This tell the more reason why the Okwangwo National Park should be preserve for future generations irrespective of the perceptual level of the people involved (Elites/Rural dwellers). Thomas (1983) argues that the 18th Century taste for romantic, uncultivated landscape was, in part, a reaction to this shift in the nature of the cultivated landscape. Also he said, the beginnings of contemporary concern with the conservation of rural environments can be discerned. According to Worster (1977) he suggested that there were two main traditions in attitudes towards environment; the arcadian and the imperial, the ARCADIAN is typified for him by Gilbert White (1720-93), a quiet country parson in the village of Selborne who spent his days studying the natural history of the area.

## STUDY AREA

This study was conducted in two ecotourism zone which include Cross River national park which is located on longitude 5<sup>0</sup>05' and 6<sup>0</sup>29'N and Latitude 8015' and 9<sup>0</sup>30'E and rich with blends of unique relief features while the Okwangwo diversion lies on latitude 6<sup>0</sup>04'N

and longitude 9<sup>00</sup>' and 9<sup>027</sup>'E. However, the two ecotourism zone parades enough green vegetation, beautiful landscapes, agreeable climate and variety of flora and fauna which makes the areas a natural paradise.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study was concentrated in Cross River State taken into consideration two ecotourism zones which include Cross River National Park and Okwangwo Division. In each of the two ecotourism zones, two communities each were used to assess the community’s opinion about ecotourism. However, in Cross River National Park, the two communities selected were Nsoag and E kang while in Okwangwo the two communities were Belegete and Bamba. Two hundred copies of questionnaire were randomly distributed to the two ecotourism zones of which fifty copies were distributed to each of the community. The questionnaires were design on a likert-type scaling in which each of the community were requested to complete some questions concerning their knowledge and awareness of ecotourism, also to rate the significant aspects of ecotourism and the major challenge in embarking on an ecotourism trip.

**Awareness of Ecotourism**

The indigenous people’s awareness of ecotourism objectives presented in table 1 indicate that over 89% of the respondents are awareness that ecotourism objectives is to learned more about the environment which was also witness on the two communities in ecotourism zones with values of 21.5% and 23%. It was also observed that creating environmental awareness and reducing negative impact on the destination visit was another objective of ecotourism as observed in the two communities.

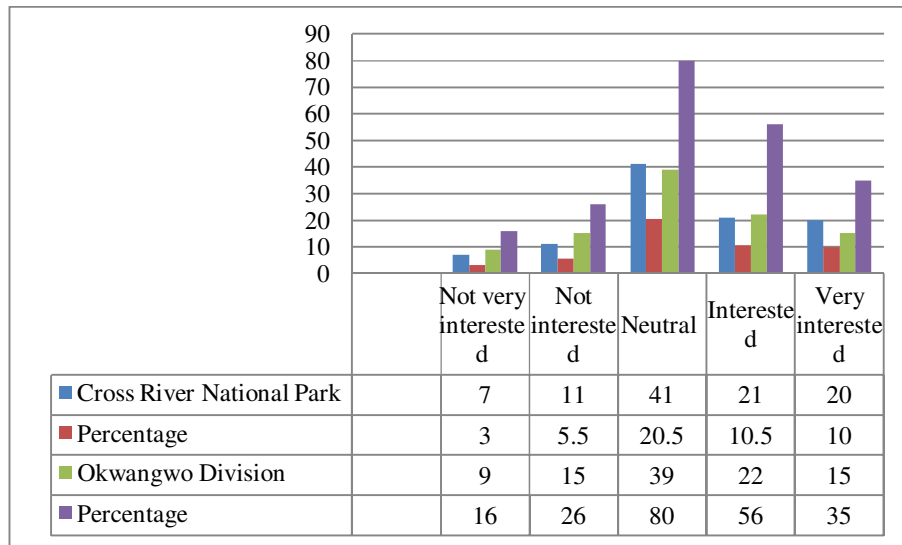
**Table 1. Indigenous people awareness of ecotourism**

<i>Sr</i>	<i>Awareness of ecotourism variables</i>	<i>Cross River National Park Pop sample</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Okwangwo Division</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	Wiling to knows the environment	43	21.5	46	23	89
2	Creating environmental awareness	21	10.5	19	9.5	40
3	Impacts on the natural ecosystem	19	9.5	16	8	35
4	Taking a trip to ecotourism destination	9	4.5	10	5	19
5	Funding for ecotourism conservation	8	4	9	4.5	17
	Total	100	100	100	100	200

Source: Field survey, 2011

**Indigenous People in Ecotourism**

The level of indigenous people interest in knowing about ecotourism indicated in figure 1 revealed that over 40% of the respondents in the two communities were neutral in their responses in knowing about ecotourism. Although, it was noticed that 20% and 80% of the respondents in the communities also remained neutral about their interest in knowing more about ecotourism. However, it was observed that 4% and 13% of the respondents were neither not very interested or not interest in ecotourism. This result was also witness in each of the ecotourism zone with values of Cross River National Park 3% while Okwangwo division 9% respectively.



Source: Field survey, 2011

Figure 1. Indigenous people interest in knowing about ecotourism

However, the level of indigenous people’s interest in taking part in ecotourism presented in table 2 revealed that 28% of the respondents in the two ecotourism zone were both neutral and very interested in taking part in ecotourism in the areas. Nevertheless, 10% of the respondents in the communities in the ecotourism zones were not very interested and not interested in taking part in ecotourism.

**Table 2. The people’s interest in taking in ecotourism**

Sr	Interest in involving ecotourism level of interest in ecotourism	Cross River National Park Pop sampled	%	Okwangwo division	%	Total
1	Not very interested	10	5	10	5	20
2	Not interested	9	4.5	10	5	19
3	Neutral	23	11.5	31	15.5	54
4	Interested	20	15	22	11	52
5	Very interested	8	14	27	13.5	55
	Total	100	100	100	200	200

Source: Field survey, 2011

**Major Challenges of Ecotourism**

The major challenges of taking ecotourism trip presented in table 3 show that 28% and 19.5% of the respondents in the communities in the ecotourism zone attest to the fact that absent of knowledge about the destination and travelling cost were the major challenges of taking ecotourism trip. Although, other challenges such as lack of time with value 9% and lack of companion with value 8.5% were also barriers in taking ecotourism trip. However, this result was also noticed in individual community as presented in table 2 with values of Cross River National Park 10% and 9.3% while Okwangwo Division had values of 13.5% and 10%

respectively. Moreso, data collected revealed that lack of interest in ecotourism and government regulations were not the major challenges to ecotourism in the areas.

**Table 3. Major challenges of involving in an ecotourism trip**

<i>Sr</i>	<i>Challenges indicators</i>	<i>CRSNP Pop sampled</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Okwangwo Division Pop sampled</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	Absent of knowledge about the destinations	29	10	27	13.5	56
2	Travelling cost	19	9.3	20	10	39
3	Lack of time	7	3.5	11	5.5	18
4	Lack of companion	8	4	9	4.5	17
5	Lack of security	9	4.5	7	3.5	16
6	Lack of destination	5	2.5	8	4	13
7	Lack of adequate transportation means	9	4.5	4	3	13
8	Lack of good facilities	4	4	3	1.5	7
9	Lack of interest in ecotourism	3	1.5	4	2	7
	Total	100	100	100		200

Source: Field survey, 2011

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Today, the rate of ecotourism awareness seems to be very discouraging especially within the indigenous communities around the ecotourism zones. Findings have shown that much is still need to be done in order to boost ecotourism in Cross River State and within the enslaved communities in particular. Therefore, this paper put forward the following recommendations if ecotourism must be given adequate attention by both the local residents and people in general.

1. The indigenous communities within the ecotourism zones must be enlightened on the potential impacts of ecotourism in the areas
2. The stakeholders in the industry should provide a conducive atmosphere that would encourage the locals to embarked on ecotourism trip
3. The lack of knowledge and community awareness of ecotourism is limited in the communities under study and unless further and appropriate standard of education is provided, the communities will not obtain a proper understanding of ecotourism and misconception with regards this form of tourism is likely to continue.

## CONCLUSION

In Cross River State, the lack of awareness and knowledge of ecotourism among the people and especially the residents within the ecotourism zones have hindered the effective ecotourism activities in the areas. However, findings revealed that lack of awareness and knowledge of ecotourism has seriously affected the level of indigenous people interest in taking ecotourism trip. Besides, it was observed that majority of the sampled population in the communities were not aware of ecotourism and if there were, the possessed limited



knowledge about ecotourism in the area. Majority of the sampled population also demonstrated some level of indifference towards ecotourism. To this end, the stakeholders in the industry must adequately enlighten the communities within the ecotourism zones on the need to participate in ecotourism activities.

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