

Full Length Research Paper**The Challenges of Rural Tourism Development in Nigeria: A Case of Yorro Iga, Taraba State Nigeria****E. D. Oruonye**

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Abstract

Despite her abundant natural resources and oil wealth, poverty has remained widespread in Nigeria. Rural infrastructure in the country has long been neglected, while investments in health, education and water supply have largely been concentrated in the cities. About 90 per cent of the country's food is produced by small-scale farmers, who subsist on cultivating tiny plots, and depend on rainfall rather than irrigation systems. Rural development and transformation effort has pre-occupied the attention of successive governments in Nigeria over the years. This is clearly demonstrated by the various rural development programmes and schemes established by successive governments which centres most on agricultural development and rural infrastructural provision. Despite all the efforts and resources committed to these programmes/schemes, they have met with little success while the rural areas continue to battle with very poor and delapidated infrastructural facilities, low crop yield, rural urban migration etc. This development has continued to worsen the condition of rural areas in Nigeria, thereby suggesting the need for alternative strategy to rural development and transformation in the country. This paper therefore examine the prospect of rural tourism as an alternative to the attainment of the much desired rural development in the country using the case of Yorro LGA Taraba State Nigeria. The findings of the study show that Yorro LGA has rich potentials for the development of rural tourism in the area. The study also shows clearly that rural tourism has a significant role to play in the development of employment opportunities and increases in the incomes of the rural inhabitants in the study area. However, in order to create a successful and attractive cultural and heritage rural tourism package or product for tourism consumption, there is need to mobilize the local communities to have a broad understanding of the cultural attraction mix strategies and to acquire certain skills necessary to identify business opportunities, initiate and nurture them. The study recommends the need to improve rural infrastructure and publicity on the rich natural and cultural tourist potentials of our rural areas.

Keywords: Challenges, Development, Rural, Tourism and Yorro.**Introduction**

Taraba State is well endowed with a lot of solid mineral resources and rich tourism potentials. However, despite its abundant solid mineral resources and tourist potentials, poverty is widespread in the state. This situation has worsened since the late 1990s, to the extent that the state is now considered one of the poorest state in the country. It is believed that over 60 per cent of the population is classified as poor, with 35 per cent living in absolute poverty. The rural areas are most affected by poverty with lack of or limited social services and infrastructural facilities. The great majority of those who live in rural areas in the state are poor and depend on agriculture for food and income. About 90 per cent of the state agricultural food is produced by these small-scale farmers, who subsist on cultivating tiny plots, and depend on rainfall rather than irrigation systems (Oruonye, 2011). Nationwide surveys show that across the country 44 per cent of male farmers and 72 per cent of female farmers cultivate less than 1 ha per household (IFAD). Women play a major role in the production, processing and marketing of food crops. The poorest groups eke out a subsistence living but often go short of food, particularly during the pre-harvest period. A high proportion of rural people suffer from malnutrition and other diseases related to poor nutrition.

Rural infrastructure in Nigeria has long been neglected, while investments in health, education and water supply have largely been concentrated in the cities. The situation is further worsened in the state by the neglect it has suffered over the years from previous government administration. As a result, the rural population has extremely limited access to services such as schools and health centres, and about half of the population lacks access to safe drinking water (IFAD). Limited education opportunities and poor health perpetuate the poverty cycle of the rural dwellers in the country. Neglect of rural infrastructure has also reduced the profitability of producing for the markets. Nigeria's rural road network is one of the least developed in sub-Saharan Africa (IFAD). The situation is worse in the state and LGA where the poor farmers live in isolated villages that can become virtually inaccessible during the rainy seasons. When there is a post-harvest marketable surplus, it is not always easy to reach the markets. Limited accessibility has also cut

off small-scale rural farmers from sources of inputs, equipment and new technology (IFAD). Crop yields are low because farmers lack these inputs. The lack of fertilizer, and the exorbitant prices of the commodity when available is a real problem in most parts of the country where farmers have to cope with diminishing soil fertility. The situation is made worst by the fact that many farmers have access only to small parcels of land for cultivation. The solution to increasing food productivity, reducing rural poverty and achieving food security lies in creating rural off-farm employment opportunities. Rural development and transformation effort has pre-occupied the attention of successive governments over the years. This is clearly demonstrated by the various rural development programmes and schemes such as the green revolution, operation feed the nation, back to farm scheme, farm settlement scheme, agricultural development programmes (ADPs), the directorate for food, road and rural infrastructure (DFFRI), better life for rural women, river basin development programme, national agricultural land development authority (NALDA) etc, which centres most on agricultural development and rural infrastructural provision. Despite all the efforts and resources committed to these programmes/schemes, they have met with little success while the rural areas continue to battle with very poor and delapidated infrastructural facilities, low crop yield and rural urban migration. This development has continued to worsen the condition of rural areas in Nigeria, thereby suggesting the need for alternative strategy to rural development and transformation in the country. The objective of this paper is to examine the prospect of rural tourism as an alternative strategy that can guarantee the attainment of the much desired rural development in Nigeria using the case of Yorro LGA of Taraba State Nigeria.

Definition of Operational Concept

Tourism

Tourism involves activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for leisure, business and other purposes. Getis *et al* (2004) on the other hand, defined tourism as undertaking for the purpose of recreation rather than business. Tourism has become not only the most important single tertiary sector activity but is, as well, the world's largest industry in jobs and total value generation. Tourism, from socio-economic and political perspectives have been globally acknowledge and accepted as a relatively new innovation in the human history of planned development (Dawaki, 2005). Today, tourism has been recognised the world over as a special economic endeavour that showers the global society with better chances of understanding one another; a tool for enhancing economic values as avenue through which the menace of unemployment and incessant rural urban migration could be addressed. In the middle and high income countries, tourism supports a diversified share of domestic expenditures through transportation-related costs, roadside services, entertainment, national parks visits, and the like. International tourism, on the other hand, generates new income and jobs of growing importance in developing countries (Oruonye and Abubakar, 2008).

Rural Tourism

Rural tourism is an old and a new phenomenon at the same time. The WTO has rated Rural Tourism as one of the fastest growing segments in the tourism industry, with an annual growth of 5 per cent worldwide and representing 6 per cent of the world GDP (Dilys *et al*, 2001). Although tourism is a sector which is not fully developed in Nigeria, rural tourism is a more recent phenomena which has not attracted the attention of policy makers in Nigeria. Though it seems simple to define rural tourism as "tourism that takes place in the countryside", this definition does not include the complexity of the activity and the different forms and meanings developed in different countries. According to a broader definition, "rural tourism includes a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their businesses" (Gannon, 1988, in te Kloeze, 1994). If this broader concept is accepted, rural tourism covers not only farm tourism or agritourism (which is generally what rural tourism means for most people), but also special interest in nature holidays, touring in rural areas and residential tourism, and the services include - besides accommodation - events, festivities, outdoor recreation, production and sale of handicrafts and agricultural products among others. Rural tourism encompasses all tourist activities and recreational experiences that occur in non-urban, populated areas. It offers opportunities for tourists to experience people, events, culture, cuisine and crafts that are not available in cities and larger towns. Rural tourism is a touristical activity, which provides accommodation, catering and programs from the point of view of the hosts, and it may be a cheap and active holiday for the guests (Oruonye and Abdullahi, 2010). It is a supplementary profit source for the host. This is because rural tourism supplements the profit gained from agriculture. The term "rural tourism" has different meanings in different countries. In Finland, for example, it usually means renting out cottages to visitors or providing catering services in the countryside. In Hungary, a special term of "village tourism" exists, indicating that only activities and services provided in villages are included in this kind of tourism (village tourism typically covers low-priced accommodation, involvement in agricultural or other local activities is not common). In Slovenia, the most important form of rural tourism is tourism on family farms, where guests stay either with the farmers' family or in a guest house, but visiting farms to have a meal and explore the farmyard is also popular (Verbole, 1995). In the Netherlands, the rural tourist product means especially camping on the farm, with most farm services being linked to route-bound activities as cycling, walking or horse-riding (Peters *et al*, 1994). In Greece, the main provision of rural tourism product is bed and breakfast with accommodation in traditionally furnished rooms and with traditional breakfasts often based on home-made products. Complementary activities - currently still on a limited scale - include restaurants and refreshment facilities or the organisation of cultural and recreational activities (Turner, 1993). Rural tourism is one of the main priorities of tourism development in many European countries, including Hungary.

Interest in countryside recreation started to grow in the 19th century as a reaction to the stress of the increasing urbanisation and industrialisation in developed countries. The rural scene was admired by poets and artists. The new railway companies transported

more and more tourists to the countryside. However, the rural tourism of modern era is quite different and has developed in all types of countryside instead of being limited to areas of exceptional scenic beauty. The key of rural tourism development is the local people who use the natural resources and man-made cultural and historical values and infrastructure to create tourism products and offer them to tourists. Nature and rural environment are the main precondition for rural tourism development. The most important resources are the varied landscape and biological diversity, waters (rivers, lakes, springs, wetlands), forests, the seacoast, meadows, marshes, protected nature areas (PNA) – biosphere reserves, national parks, nature parks, protected landscape areas, nature reserves, as well as particular species of wild animals and plants (LCTA, 2004). Cultural and historical heritage include ancient cult sites (stones, trees, caves, hills, groves), ancient burial sites, hill-forts, castle ruins, churches, manors, pieces of arts and crafts, etc. In recent years tourists are increasingly attracted by rural life, craft shops and farms where they can take part in work. Countryside events become popular as regional markets, days of crafts, celebrations of yearly festivities, traditions and customs, and daily life of rural farmsteads open their doors to visitors (LCTA, 2004).

Description of the study area

Yorro LGA is located between latitude 8°42'N to 9°12'N and longitude 11°20'E to 11°45'E. Yorro LGA with a land area of about 1,304 km² has a population of 89,410 (45,548 male and 43,862 female) according to the 2006 national population census. The present Yorro Local Government Area was created in 1991. Yorro LGA is bounded to the north by Lau LGA, to the northeast and southeast by Mayo Belwa (Adamawa State), to the east by Zing LGA, to the west by Jalingo LGA and to the south by Bali LGA (Fig. 1). Yorro LGA has four districts and four development areas. The districts are; Nyaja, Kwajji, Sawa and Kassa districts. The development areas are; Pantisawa, Lankaviri, Kassa and Pupule.

Yorro is a hilly and mountainous area, surrounded by chains of mountains, with only about 25 percent of the land been cultivable (Oruonye and Abbas, 2011). The mountains here are part of the Shebshi Mountain which extends up to the Republic of Cameroon. Settlements are highly dispersed and consist of farm stead and isolated compounds. Settlements are also found at the foot of the mountains and consist of round thatch huts with conical roof made of grass matings. Some of the compounds are fenced with live plants called *Kerina* in local language. Yorro LGA has little infrastructure and appears to be one of the poorest and least developed LGAs in the state (Oruonye and Abbas, 2011). There is no road network in the area and hence, most settlements are not accessible except by motor bike. This contributed to the problem of poor social amenities in the area. However, the LGA is well endowed with abundant cultural and ecotourism potentials. Some of the major ecotourist attraction in the LGA includes the Donki game reserve and the Pantisawa mountains. The cultural tourist potentials include the Kpanti Giriri's house in the old Yorro cave and the various cultural ceremonies and festivities.

Method of data collection

The data for this study was generated through systematic review of existing literature on the challenges of rural tourism development. Oral interview with stakeholders particularly officials of the Taraba State Tourism Development, Yorro Local Government Council staff and the traditional council members was conducted. Field survey and participant observation approach were employed in the study.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this paper is to examine the challenges of rural tourism development in Nigeria using the case of Yorro LGA of Taraba State. The specific objectives include;

- i. To identify natural and socio-cultural resources that can be used for rural tourism development.
- ii. To examine the potential benefits of rural tourism development to the transformation process of the rural landscape in the study area.
- iii. To examine the challenges of rural tourism development in the study area.
- iv. To recommend measures of improving rural tourism activities in the study area.

Results

The findings of this study indicated that Yorro LGA, like many rural localities, is well endowed with natural as well as socio-cultural resources that can be developed into tourism products. The abundance of natural, cultural and heritage resources indicate that there are opportunities for natural as well as cultural and heritage tourism development in Yorro LGA. The study area with its rich farms and agricultural environment has the potential for developing and promoting tourism activities such as agricultural product tasting, farm related activities, agricultural fairs and festivals. These are opportunities for tourism development that have not been explored in the study area. Some of these are discussed below.

The Yorro Cave

The Yorro cave is a very important cultural tourist attraction in the LGA. The Yorro cave is found in the Donki area. According to the Chief of Mumuye, all Mumuyes' all over the world originated from the Yorro cave in the Donki area. With increase in population and

the need for farmland, the people dispersed into the surrounding area to their present site of habitation. Hence, the traditional seat of the Mumuye Chieftdom was initially at Yorro and later moved to Lankaviri area and back to Pantisawa, the LGA headquarter. It is asserted that each Mumuye clan has a cave in the old Yorro settlement as a symbol of recognition and influence in the community. However, visitors are not allowed access to the Yorro cave because of the traditional ritual practices carried out in the place. This is the case with most of the cultural tourist sites in the state. The local people are usually aggressive with any visitor who attempts to get closer to the site because they believed that the person will desecrate the place and attract curses on the community. The Chief of Mumuye emphasized that the Mumuye people are peace loving people and hard working farmers. They have never fought a war and have never been defeated in a war since historical period. There is no doubt that the inter-cultural exchange, investment opportunities and the prevalence of peace and crime free environment in the study area is a very strong potential for the development of rural tourism in the area.

Donki Area

Donki area is said to be the area where most of the mineral and natural resources of Yorro LGA are located. The Donki area consist of four villages (Yorro, Donki, Gangoro and Lassawa). It is located on a highland which is part of the Shebshi Mountain. There is a game reserve in the area housing wildlife such as Buffalo, Antelope, Chimpazees, Monkey, Girrafe etc. Kurmin Goro (kolanut plantation) is found within the game reserve. The game reserve is found between Babalande at the border with Dakka Chieftdom in Taraba state, Ganye Chieftdom and Adamawa emirates (in Adamawa state). The game reserve is under continuous threat by poachers, making the animals to flee south ward into the Gashaka – Gumti game reserve area.

According to the Palace Secretary, the journey to and from Donkin cannot be made in a day. It is very far and close to Bali LGA. It need small number of people who are strong and can endure the very long period of trekking that may last a whole day from the LGA headquarter. Donki area is not accessible by road because of the hilly nature of the surrounding. This inaccessibility limits its potential for rural tourism development. The environment at Donkin is similar to that of Gembu town on the Mambilla plateau. There are pears all over the area. The spring water is very cold and pure. During the rainy season, it rains almost every day.

Cultural Tourism Potentials

Cultural tourism relates to visits by persons from outside the host community, motivated wholly or in part by interest in historical, artistic, scientific, lifestyle or heritage offerings of a region, community or group (Magnussen and Visser, 2003). Yorro LGA is well endowed with rich cultural heritage. This includes the Nse-seh memorial ceremony and the Tsavah Gosi or Santi new yam festival.

The Nse-Nseh ceremony is usually celebrated in the fifth month (May) of each year by all Yorro communities. The significance of the ceremony is to receive in advance those who are sympathetic to members of the communities who loss their love ones between May previous year and May of the present year. During the ceremony, gifts are offered as soveniers to bereaved family. Also different idols taken care of by the deceased are renamed during this festival and entrusted to an intimate associate of the deceased (Oruonye and Abbas 2011). Ancestral gods usually refered to as personal gods of the deceased, are entrusted to some other persons during this feativel. It is celebrated in all Mumuye communities. The LGA also has the annual new yam festival known as TSAVAH GOSI or SANTI in Yorro. It is usually celebrated to mark the beginning of the eating of the new yam in each year. The new yam festival is usually celebrated in September each year. Other cultural festivals in the LGA include the Javah new yam festival in Kajji district and the Nyapuru Gweeh farm harvest festival of Kwajji and Pupule.

Prospects of rural tourism development in Yorro LGA

Tourism, and more specifically rural tourism, has been seen as a vehicle that has the potential to influence socio-economic changes through the use of natural, socio-cultural and economic resources (Nzama, 2010). It has been seen as a tool with a potential to enhance the development of rural areas on an ecologically and economically viable basis, and also as a means that can improve the quality of life of people living in the rural areas. Thus, tourism has been linked with poverty reduction for a number of reasons, such as its ability to thrive in rural areas using readily available natural and socio-cultural resources, thereby creating job opportunities for the local residents (Ashley and Roe, 2002).

Rural tourism is a segment of the tourist industry which is particularly important in the study area with spectacular natural attractions, such as high mountains, scenic landscape and herds of exotic animals. There are many different ways to enjoy rural tourism, depending on the inclination of the traveller. While some tourists view village holidays simply as a chance to enjoy a slower pace of life in small rural hotels or homestays, others see cultural tourism as opportunity wherein they get to experience village culture, cuisines and crafts. For those more physically inclined, rural tourism potentials in Yorro LGA offers endless opportunities for mountain biking.

Yorro LGA, with its attractive cultural landscapes, small villages, mountains, caves and rivers, combined with the traditional hospitality and prevalence of peace have the prospect of offering pleasant experiences to the kind of tourist who is looking for relaxation and recreation in a calm setting. The local people have been known over the centuries for their hospitality especially to strangers. The study area is also well endowed with rich cultural heritage such as crafts, scenic landscape, traditional musics, cultural

dances, traditional ceremonies and festivities, tombs of traditional leaders, shrines etc which no doubt could be described as the starter and the main dish of a planned tourism industry. The role of rural tourism as a catalyst of rural economy is widely recognised and there are growing numbers of rural tourism business operations in different parts of the world. Given the general increase in population of the area, and resulting pressure on the farmland, reduction in fallow period, depletion of soil nutrient, degradation and reduction in farmsize, the farmers can transfer from the traditional farming to tourist business, enlarging rooms, building separate cottages for tourists, opening small hotels and guesthouses, opening and improving camping sites etc.

Benefits of Rural Tourism

The benefits of rural tourism to local communities are mainly financial, for tourist enterprises offer a viable additional income, if not an alternative, to farming. This is especially true for mountainous regions like the study area where farming is not always very lucrative as a result of poor soil fertility. In fact, analyses of rural tourism initiatives worldwide indicate that they have benefited some of the poorest countries like Nepal, India and several African nations (Dilys *et al*, 2001). Village crafts people could also benefit from Rural Tourism by increased sales of crafts. For example in India, one of the places developed as a rural tourism destination is Hodka in Gujarat, which is well known for its fine handicrafts. The tour package for Hodka includes visits to crafts villages which would educate visitors about the handicraft as well as offer them the opportunity to buy it (Dilys *et al*, 2001).

Rural tourism has the potential to leave a positive impact on the economic environment and development of the study area, through increasing employment opportunities, increasing business diversity and activity, improving sales of goods and services, higher amounts collected in taxes, renovation and maintenance of cultural and historical heritage. This will make the local population to take pride and care of the natural and historical values of the region, the development levels between regions start to equalise. Rural tourism development can play an important role in the diversification of the state tourist supply and in the creation of a more complex and colourful country image. On the other hand, rural tourism is not only the end, but the means to stimulate economic growth in the rural areas, to increase the viability of underdeveloped regions, and to improve the living standards of local populations. If rural tourism is to fulfil all these roles, it has to be developed in a way that ensures the long-term sustainability of the resources and that of the development process itself.

Rural tourism seems to be an appropriate tool to revitalise the declining rural areas and to ensure their sustainable future by job retention or even job creation, increased job diversity, service retention, farm support, broadened cultural provision, landscape and nature conservation or the maintenance of rural arts and crafts as tourist attractions. Rural tourism often provides an incentive (and part of the necessary funding) for infrastructural development, which then contributes to the growth of other economic activities in rural areas. A specific benefit of rural tourism development can be the increasing number of opportunities for social interaction for local people who often live relatively isolated lives in agricultural communities (Swarbrooke, 1996).

Challenges to Rural Tourism development in the study area

There are a number of challenges that have been associated with tourism development in rural areas, such as the general lack of capacity and tourism development related skills. Most rural areas in Taraba State are characterised by lack of infrastructure, high illiteracy rates, unemployment, underdevelopment, poverty and a general lack of knowledge and understanding of tourism development issues. Tourism infrastructure, especially in rural areas of the state is poorly developed. Development of infrastructure facilitates development of rural environment, ensuring compliance with environmental protection requirements. Rural tourism development is hampered by the poor quality of roads. At present, there are just few bicycle roads while roads in general are not suitable for bicycling tourism because of poor condition of road surface. Most rural tourism attraction sites are not accessible by vehicular transport. This limits their potential for rural tourism development.

There is the problem of inadequate publicity of the tourist potentials in the area. Most people within the State, LGA and community often times are not aware of the existence of tourist potentials such as attractive cultural ceremonies and festivities, scenic sites and unique features around them. There is therefore the need to package the tourist products properly and make it known to the people through media adverts in Radio houses and Television stations.

Lack of information or ignoring the basic principles of sustainable rural tourism development can create serious problems to rural tourism businesses as well as local population. Initially, as the numbers of tourists were comparatively low rural tourism entrepreneurs offered free rooms to tourists in their family homes. With growing numbers of visitors, the farmers started to transfer from the traditional farming to tourist business, enlarging rooms, building separate cottages for tourists, opening small hotels and guesthouses, opening and improving camping sites. These activities involved a more intensive use of natural resources, increasing volumes of waste, the use of chemicals, etc., thus increasing environmental impact.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study it is clear that Yorro LGA has rich potentials for the development of rural tourism in the area. The study has shown clearly that rural tourism has a significant role to play in the development of employment opportunities and increases

in the incomes of the rural inhabitants in the study area. Thus, rural tourism has the potential of serving as an alternative strategy of rural development in the state. The Natural environment has been appreciated in our urbanised society. The essence of the rural tourism is that the urbanised people enjoy rural lifestyle; connections with rural communities, and find a remote ideal, relaxing environment with positive experiences. However, in order to create a successful and attractive cultural and heritage rural tourism package or product for tourism consumption, there is need to mobilize the local communities to have a broad understanding of the cultural attraction mix strategies. In addition also, the local communities need to acquire certain skills necessary to identify business opportunities, initiate and nurture them. This study also recommends the need to improve rural infrastructure and publicity on the rich natural and cultural tourist potentials of our rural areas.

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