



Challenges of Community-based Ecotourism Development in Southern Eastern Nigeria: Case Study of Iko Esai Community

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The research assessed the challenges of community-based ecotourism (CBE) in Iko Esai Community, Cross River State, Nigeria. Multistage sampling method was adopted for the study. Two wards were randomly selected from four wards in the study area and with sample size of 5.57% of total population, 150 structured questionnaires were administered for data collection. Data were analysed using frequency tables and chi-square analysis in STATVIEW version 5.0.1 at 5% probability level. The results indicated that the challenges militating against CBE in the area were lack of ecotourism marketing ($P = .0496$), limited access to funds ($P = .0004$), negative impact of tourism on the indigenes ($P = .0003$) and poor infrastructural development ($P = .0483$). Although results from the respondents indicated that conflicts between stakeholders, absence of capacity building and balanced sharing of benefit between tourism operators and the communities, the chi-square analysis indicated that these challenges significantly limited CBE in the area. The indigenes

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exhibited willingness to develop CBE in the area but their effort has been frustrated by these challenges. Thus there should be active participation and collaboration with stakeholders for the development of CBE in the area while encouraging the full involvement of the community in the development process.

Keywords: Challenges; community-based ecotourism; rural livelihoods; benefit sharing; rural participation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the tourism sector has shown remarkable growth over the years contributing significantly to the GDP of both developed and developing countries [1]. With twice the growth rate of industrialized markets, the tourism sector surpasses every other sector in terms of job creation and wealth spread [2,3]. Ecotourism, a form of tourism, offers market-based tourism development approach that ensures improvement of the welfare of rural communities while conserving the natural environment [4,5]. This form of tourism has been successful adopted globally by most rural host communities with tangible positive impact while still evolving in other areas [6,7].

Community based ecotourism (CBE) is a distinct sustainable strategy that emphasizes on a combination of travels to nature area, nature conservation, education, rural livelihood and active participation of the community [3,8,9,10]. According to Fonseca [10], ecotourism should be specifically characterized by “visitor behaviour is conscious and causes low impact, sensibility and appreciation with respect to local cultures and biodiversity, support for local conservation efforts, sustainable benefits to local communities, local participation in decision making and educational components for the traveller and local communities”.

Nigeria is globally recognized to be endowed with several biodiversity hotspots some of which have been developed for tourist appreciation while others are yet to be harnessed [11]. According to Federal Ministry of Environment (FME) [12], Cross River State is classified amongst one of the world's 25 biodiversity hotspots. Most of these biodiversity hotspots reside in rural communities who are solely dependents on these resources for their livelihood sustenance. The development of these resources as ecotourism sites will require the active participation of the host communities in all aspects of the decision-making process

[13,14,15,16]. But this process has taken a rather slow pace in Cross River State thus, limiting the development of CBE in the State. Fonseca [10] pointed some of the challenges of CBE to include: poor planning and management, threat to the integrity of ecosystem and local cultures in sensitive natural area, environmental degradation, adulteration of native culture, benefit sharing, conflicts in stakeholder's interests and poor marketing, absence of supportive policies and funding.

Iko Esai Community is one of the biodiversity hotspots in Cross River State with high potentials for CBE development [11]. According to CERCOPAN [17] and Asuk et al. [18], CERCOPAN (Centre of Education, Research and Conservation of Primate and Nature) has been in Iko Esai community since 1995 on a primate conservation and rehabilitation project. During their stay, CERCOPAN has assisted the community in designing and developing their natural resources for visitor's appreciation. Despite this effort, the rate of ecotourism development in the area has been rather slow compared to other location. In addition, Asuk et al. [18] reported that some potential ecotourism sites yet to be developed still existed in the study area. Some of these sites included mountains, waterfalls, springs and others. If the factors limiting successful development of CBE in the area are not identified and tackled, and basic structures that contribute to successful CBE are not provided, CBE projects in the area may likely fail or remain dormant.

Thus, the study aims to assess the challenges limiting successful development of CBE in Iko Esai Community. Currently, there is hardly any study on the challenges of CBE in the study. Some few researches carried out in the area only points to the potentials and prospects of CBE in the study area. Thus, this will help fill the research gap, inform proper planning, development and management of community based ecotourism and significantly put the community in the ecotourism map globally.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 The Study Area

This research was carried out in Iko Esai Community which is made up of four wards including Eyeyeng, Okoyong, Bukuri and Esereset. Iko Esai is located in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Geographically, the community is situated between latitude $4^{\circ}37'32''\text{N}$ and $5^{\circ}43'09''\text{N}$ and longitude $8^{\circ}11'57''\text{E}$ and $8^{\circ}20'12''\text{E}$. Iko Esai community has a total land mass of about 21,000 hectares and is bounded by Iko Ekperem, New Ekuri and Agoi all in Akamkpa Local Government Areas of Cross River State. The population of the people of Iko Esai community is estimated to be 2,693 people. The temperature of Iko Esai community ranges from $23\text{-}37^{\circ}\text{C}$ with a relative humidity of 90-100% in the rainy season and 70-80% in the dry season. The area is also characterized by high rainfall with an average of 3,000 mm per annum being recorded, while the dry season, last for up to four (4) months (December to March). Iko Esai community consists of a moist tropical lowland forest in its natural state.

The area has about 12,000 hectares of community forest which is managed by the community and CERCOPAN including 400 hectares carved out as core area for intensive protection, 4000 hectares as research area co-managed by CERCOPAN and the community and 3000 hectares as farmlands. The soil is deep and well drained with high humus content. The area consists of a rich diversity of indigenous flora and fauna species. These include numerous genera and species of butterflies, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and plants, some of which are endemic [19]. Specifically, the primate species present in the study area range from small primates (such as Galagos and Pottos) to medium size monkeys (especially of the genus *Cercopithecus* and *Cercocerberus*) to large primates (which includes chimpanzees and lowland gorillas).

Established in 1995, CERCOPAN has contributed towards the forest conservation and ecotourism development in the area [17]. The organization had established an education centre for ecotourism development and constructed accommodation facilities for housing tourist. A one hectare Mangabey enclosure was constructed in the heart of the rainforest by CERCOPAN for tourist appreciation [17,18]. This

has since been the hallmark of their contribution to ecotourism in the area. Furthermore, CERCOPAN and Village's Community Conservation and Development Committee (CCDC) were also set up to facilitate community participation in the conservation of their natural resources [18].

2.2 Methods of Data Collection

Data for the study were collected with the aid of structured questionnaires as interview instrument in 2014. The questionnaires were structured around a Likert scale [20] which varied from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), not sure (NS), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Multistage sampling method was used for the study. First two wards (Eyeyeng and Okoyong) were randomly selected from the four wards in Iko Esai Community. With sample size of 5.5% of the total population of 2,693 people, 150 adult respondents were selected for data collection. Then, using equal allocation method, 75 individuals were interviewed through group discussion at the village square in Eyeyeng and Okoyong each although, at the end of the interview, only 71 questionnaires were retrieved in Okoyong.

Members of the community were mainly farmers. They went off to their farms early in the morning and returned in the evening. This made it difficult to access member of the community in the day and also prolonged data collection. To overcome this challenge group discussion was limited to evenings when members of the community were back from the farm and rested.

2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected for this study were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analysts. While some data were analysed using tables and percentages, others were analysed using chi-square analysis to test for independence or association at a five percent (5%) level of significance in STATVIEW version 5.0.1. For cells with frequencies lower than 5, Fisher's Exact *P-Value* was used in place of Chi-square *P-Value*.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Ineffective Ecotourism Marketing

As revealed in Table 1, 96.57% of the respondents agreed that ineffective marketing

due to poor tourism networking, marketing skills and tools was a problem, 2.05% were not sure, while 1.38% disagreed. The X^2 analysis was significant ($P = .0496$).

Lack of special skills including those in the managerial and marketing sector can adversely affect the success of CBE projects. These are very essential attributes that ensures that the market is adequately explored to gain sufficient benefits from tourism programmes [21]. High level of involvement of local communities in CBE projects and strong involvement of NGO's in marketing of ecotourism products are essential to the development of CBE programmes [22]. The absence of these key CBE parameters in Iko Esai, will likely lead to the failure of CBE programmes in the area [14,23].

Furthermore, sufficient human and capital resources are required to market a product [22,24]. Unfortunately, Iko Esai has members with limited financial resources resulting from low household income levels [25]. These elements are very essential towards the success of the CBE programmes. Although Iko Esai community has been considered as having potentials for developing CBE [11], the project is likely to fail due to the fact that these basic structures that contribute to a successful CBE programmes are lacking. These include; local community participation, strong NGO involvement and adequate marketing skills [22].

3.2 Lack of Access to Finance and Investment

Based on the response on the lack of finance and investment in Table 2, 69.18% of the subjects agreed, 8.22% were not sure while 22.60% disagreed. The X^2 analysis was significant ($P = .0004$).

Effective participation of local communities in CBE programmes is not only limited to the ownership of the resources in the community and commitment towards the success of CBE projects but also in the availability of financial resources [26]. The ability to access finance to support ecotourism investment programmes is a big barrier to the success of CBE in the community as shown in the study (Table 2).

Majority of the sampled population admitted to lack of financial resources being a limiting factor to their full participation in CBE programmes.

This is in line with findings of Fonseca [10] who opined that funding was one of the major challenges of CBE globally. The lack of funding for CBE in Iko Esai has made it impossible for the development of necessary ecotourism infrastructure in the area such as quality accommodation for visitors including clean toilets, bathrooms and favourable catering environment. As revealed by group discussions, no significant financial support has so far come from investors including the NGOs operating in the area. Rather, members of the community are periodically levied to raise funds for the support of community development project which can do very little.

3.3 Conflicts among Stakeholders

Table 3 revealed that 31.51% of the respondents agreed that conflicts among stakeholders was a problem, 9.59% were not sure, while 58.90% disagreed. The X^2 analysis was significant ($P = .0005$).

The study revealed that there was significant ($P = .0005$) level of conflict amongst stakeholders in the study area. Nelson [9], Fonseca [10] and Mensah [3] had pointed out that for CBE to be successful there must be full participation of all the stakeholders and this will only be possible when all conflicts have been resolved. Ndlovu and Rogerson [27] also noted that a number of challenges may potentially impact negatively on the success of CBE programmes in developing countries including marginalization, sometimes in decision making, in accessibility to information and lack of cooperation among stakeholders. Furthermore, Scheyvens [28] stated that one of the challenges of using ecotourism as a strategy for community development is the inability for local communities to operate at same level with other stakeholders in the industry due to their lack of resources, information and technical skills. Thus the conflict in terms of interest and ideologies would have to be addressed to enhance CBE programmes in the community.

3.4 Poor Capacity Building for Sustainability

From data on capacity building for sustainable CBE as indicated in Table 4, 22.60% of the respondents agreed that poor capacity building is a problem, 5.48% were not sure while 71.92% disagreed. The X^2 analysis was significant ($P = .0014$).

Table 1. Ineffective ecotourism marketing due to poor tourism networking, skills and tools

Response	Eyeyeng	Okoyong	Total	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	39	37	76	52.05
Agree	34	31	65	44.52
Not Sure	2	1	3	2.05
Disagree	0	1	1	0.69
Strongly Disagree	0	1	1	0.69
Total	75	71	146	100.00

*DF = 4; Chi Square = 8.417; Fisher's Exact P-Value = .0496*****

Table 2. Lack of access to finance and investment

Response	Eyeyeng	Okoyong	Total	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	34	30	64	43.84
Agree	16	21	37	25.34
Not Sure	12	0	12	8.22
Disagree	11	10	21	14.38
Strongly Disagree	2	10	12	8.22
Total	75	71	146	100.00

*DF = 3; Chi Square = 18.057; Fisher's Exact P-Value = .0004*****

Table 3. Problem of conflicts among stakeholders

Response	Eyeyeng	Okoyong	Total	Percentage (%)
Strongly agreed	0	0	0	0.00
Agree	26	20	46	31.51
Not Sure	14	0	14	9.59
Disagree	8	11	19	13.01
Strongly Disagree	27	40	67	45.89
Total	75	71	146	100.00

*DF = 3; Chi Square = 17.682; Fisher's Exact P-Value = .0005*****

The sustainability of CBE programmes is hinged on existing operational and technical capacity of the locals to fully participate in the planning, decision making and implementation stages of CBE projects [26].

Although results in Table 4 indicated that majority of the respondents (71.92%) were of the opinion that poor capacity building was not a challenge in the management of CBE programmes in Iko Esai, a senior member of staff of CERCOPAN identified inadequate trained manpower as one of the biggest challenges in the management of the programme. The chi-square analysis from the study indicated that there was significant ($P = .0014$) capacity building for sustainability of CBE programmes in the area.

During an in-depth interview with some members of the community, it was mentioned that the tourist guides had received only basic in-house training and as such lacked the proper skilled for effectively promotion of ecotourism activities.

3.5 Sharing/Balancing Benefits between Indigenes and Tourism Operators

In Table 5 it was shown that 26.71% agreed that sharing and balancing of benefits between local people and tourism operators is a problem, 19.18% were not sure while 54.11% disagreed. The X^2 analysis was significant ($P = .0145$).

It has been reported in recent studies on CBNRM that sustainability of projects whose cost outweighs benefits are rare with high levels of failure [29,30]. This is due to the fact that communities tend to support projects with more socio-economic benefit. The respondents were of the opinion that benefits accrued by the tourism operators were not properly shared with them thus making this a significant ($P = .0145$) challenge in the area.

Community Based Tourism should therefore be seen as a means towards empowering poor communities to enable them take control over the land and resources as well as ensure that basic

skills are acquired to effectively manage their resources [31]. Fonseca [10] and Ketema [32] identified poor benefits sharing as another challenge of CBE. The support and full participation of host communities in the planning and decision making of tourism projects is fundamental to the success of CBE programmes [33].

3.6 Negative Influence on Indigenes by Tourists

Concerning responses on negative of tourist on indigenes in Table 6, 87.67% agreed, while 12.33% disagreed. The χ^2 analysis was significant ($P = .0003$).

Iko Esai community has potentials that can boost CBE in the area including natural, physical and cultural assets [25]. These assets if well managed will enhance employment and business opportunities in the community. However, majority of the respondents (87.67%) submitted

that the presence of tourists will have negative influence on indigenes of the community. This result was in line with the submission of Fonseca [10] and Mensah [3] who pointed out that the continuous growth of the ecotourism industry will possibly impact negatively on the indigenes.

3.7 Infrastructure Challenges

As observed from Table 7, it revealed that 94.89% of the respondents agreed that poor road network is a problem, while 4.11% were not sure. The χ^2 analysis was significant ($P = .0483$).

Based on the results from the study, lack of basic infrastructure was considered as a challenge in the operation of CBE in Iko Esai community (Table 7). Facilities lacking in the study area include tourist chalets, restaurants, electricity, clean water supply, poor communication facilities and laterite roads. The most demanding need was telecommunication which was completely absent.

Table 4. Problem of poor capacity building for sustainability

Response	Eyeyeng	Okoyong	Total	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	11	10	21	14.38
Agree	10	2	12	8.22
Not Sure	8	0	8	5.48
Disagree	31	30	61	41.78
Strongly Disagree	15	29	44	30.14
Total	75	71	146	100.00

DF = 4; Chi Square = 17.756; Fisher's Exact P-Value = .0014

Table 5. Problem of sharing/balancing benefits between indigenes and tourism operators

Response	Eyeyeng	Okoyong	Total	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	17	10	27	18.49
Agree	2	10	12	8.22
Not Sure	16	12	28	19.18
Disagree	30	20	50	34.25
Strongly Disagree	10	19	29	19.86
Total	75	71	146	100.00

DF = 4; Chi Square = 12.412; Fisher's Exact P-Value = .0145

Table 6. Negative influence on indigenes by tourists

Response	Eyeyeng	Okoyong	Total	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	17	30	47	32.19
Agree	41	40	81	55.48
Not sure	0	0	0	0.00
Disagree	8	1	8	5.80
Strongly Disagree	10	0	10	6.85
Total	75	71	146	100.00

DF = 3; Chi Square = 18.904; Fisher's Exact P-Value = .0003

Table 7. Infrastructure challenges

Response	Eyeyeng	Okoyong	Total	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	45	55	100	68.49
Agree	25	15	40	27.40
Not Sure	5	1	6	4.11
Disagreed	0	0	0	0.00
Strongly disagreed	0	0	0	0.00
Total	75	71	146	100.00

DF = 4; Chi Square = 6.062; Fisher's Exact P-Value = .0483

A common problem linked to CBE is lack of basic infrastructure in tourism destinations [21]. These include inadequate water supply, electricity and medical facilities. The only road linking Calabar, the major city in the state to Iko Esai community, is a laterite road that is seasonal and thus accessible only during the wet season, March-October. Majority of the respondents (94.8%) were of the opinion that the road network to Iko Esai Community was poor with only motorcycles as the major means of transportation (Fig. 1). The community was also not linked to the national grid to provide regular electricity. Accommodation facilities for tourists are a few spaces provided by CEARCOPAN which are grossly inadequate and of low standards. The attractions in the destinations will not compete effectively with those that are more developed with better access. Thus, the poor network of roads in Iko-Esai community with the accompanying low quality accommodation facilities as well as lack of basic amenities (electricity and water) can have negative impacts on ecotourism development in the area. This has been the case in many CBE programme [32]. Similarly, Eshiete [34] reported that facilities like electricity, road network and health centres were not adequate in most CBE programmes in Ethiopia including acute shortage of clean water [35].

Although it has been reported that there is significant level of community participation in the implementation and operations of CBE projects and programs in the community [11,36], this was limited to involvement in building construction works and invitations for general meetings with CERCOPAN. Moreover, the community is not involved in monitoring and evaluation of tourism projects. This has been a challenge in the Community-CERCOPAN relationship.

The situation that compromises active participation of local communities leading to unsustainable execution of CBE projects and programmes [10]. Tosun [14] has identified three

main limitations to active participation in CBE programmes including operational, structural and cultural limitations. It is therefore necessary to identify, manage and address any of these factors so as to strengthen community participation in CBE development projects and programmes [37].



Fig. 1. An access road linking Iko Esai Community to the Federal High way at Ibogo Junction

Iko Esai community has many untapped potentials that are viable for development but neglected due to many challenges including financial limitations and weak capacity and skills by the local people to exploit and develop them for effective use. The community has the benefit of being organized with strong leadership qualities. In addition, the community is blessed with cultural features that could be marketed including local dancing festivals, marriage ceremonies, and annual festivals. These features will be a good starting point for development as they require little or no training and relatively less funding.

4. CONCLUSION

The slow growth and development of CBE in Iko Esai Community was explained by insufficient ecotourism marketing, poor funding, negative influence on indigene, poor infrastructural development and to some extent conflict among stakeholder and benefit sharing between ecotourism operators and the community.

Despite the numerous challenges which have almost crippled CBE development in the area, there is still a passionate willingness of indigenes of Iko Esai community to make sacrifices towards ecotourism development in their community. This is an indication that if measures are put in place to reduce or eradicate these challenges, CBE has viable prospects and opportunities in the area. It was recommended that different stakeholders in the tourism sector should actively participate and collaborate to ensure that CBE is developed to a standard that can compete globally. The full involvement of the community in all aspect of CBE development process including planning, decision making, implementation and benefit sharing should be encouraged.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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