



Contributions of Nigeria Rural Women to the Indigenous Economic Activities Component of Ecotourism

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Abstract

This work examined the diverse economic activities engaged in by rural women in ecotourism development. Theoretical and empirical analysis of print and electronic materials was employed in carrying out this work. Women constitute more than fifty percent of workforce in tourism industry in Nigeria. However, their indispensable micro economic activities have not been fully recognized in tourism development. Rural women engaged in some of these ecotourism businesses: artifact (pottery, mat-weaving, gourd/calabash decoration), Local souvenir (vest, handkerchief, face cap and wristband design), traditional textile/fabrics production, Traditional entertainment (cultural song and dance), food vendor (local food and drinks preparation). Looking deeply at these ecotourism businesses, there are some sorts of direct or indirect needs for them by every tourist. Women involved in these economic activities support their family financially and improved their standard of living through reduction of poverty. Most the women across these business line are identified through poor capital base, low income earning and poor educational level. Another identifying factor is micro-scale of investment making it difficult for them in assessing loan from commercial bank. The only available option is family contribution and thrifty and cooperative society. Ecotourism industry cannot thrive significantly without responsible mentioned economic services by the rural women. For this reason, mechanism for economic support for these women should be developed and set in motion for immediate implementation.

Keywords: *Ecotourism, Rural women, Economic activities, Women emancipation*

Introduction

Tourism is a labour intensive industry that creates most of the world jobs. It is an industry that accommodates all classes, group, and individual, local, international, nation, conglomerate and corporate organizations, governmental and Non-governmental agencies in its fold. All these have different niches to play. Iwan *et al.* (2016) opined that ecotourism activities in the village come from social and cultural life, environment and economic activity. Iwan *et al.* (2016) further opined that the social and cultural life of the village in terms of the residential (home), clothing, food (beverages), art, traditions, values / norms and its dynamics of life can be promoted to provide an added value of tourism. Women constitutes well over 50 per cent of the labour force and are producers of agricultural, products meant for the furtherance of societal economies (Otunu-Ogbisi, 2011). Biodiversity gives birth to ecotourism and Agro-Allied entity which women are actively involved, thus women roles in rural economic development cannot be over-emphasized. Many micro businesses in the ecotourism are rendered by rural women. These women are economically poor and could not do much in their chosen carrier. Some of the often times goes in and out of business. In Africa, women accounts for between 60-80 per cent of the rural economy and family sustainability (Achunine, 2009). Tourism today has become worldwide phenomenon and increasingly competitive entailing different classes of exotic hotels/accommodation, modern transportation, advance communication processes among other. However, the fundamental pillars of the above mentioned aid to ecotourism are economic activities engaged in by rural women. In Nigeria ecotourism, women offered more than 73 per cent of the micro scale services in the industry. Women and girls have been found to be crucial in ecotourism business. Some take their

trade in tourism as part-time while others are permanent workers. At times, the rural girls during holiday engaged in ecotourism ventures to raise some little capital for their personal needs before school resumption. Some of the ecotourism ventures engaged in by rural women in Nigeria are: artifact (pottery, mat weaving, gourd/calabash design), souvenir (designing of vest, handkerchief, face cape and handband), traditional textile/fabrics manufacturing, cultural entertainment (traditional song and dance), vendor (local food and drinks preparation) to mention but a few. United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, (2012) stated that women support families through wage labour, preserve traditional knowledge, maintain biodiversity, and ensure household food security and nutrition. Despite these critical roles, women and young girls continue to suffer the effects of poor economic emancipations (International Women's Day, 2017). In bring forth the socio-economic relevance of women in society; March 8th of every year is declared as women day by International Women's Day. This organization is meant to establish the significant contributions of women gender to economical emancipation even remotest part of the world. Furthermore, Most of the economic services/businesses rendered by women in ecotourism industry have long-time memory impact on tourist. Economic empowerment of women has significant potential to reduce poverty. On average, women reinvest up to 90 percent of their incomes back into their own households, compared to 30-40 percent by men (International Planned Parenthood Federation, 2015). Most economic activities of rural women in ecotourism are labour tasking and can be seen as low income earning. However, these activities sustain the major services/productions activities in the industry keeping it flourishing. Most rural women possess skill and indigenous knowledge of producing and or rendering the needed outstanding economic services to tourist. Women's unpaid labour is estimated to contribute up to 50 percent of GDP in some countries (<http://www.worldwatch.org/critical-role-women-sustainable-development>, 2017). Kamaret *al*, (2014) wrote that engaging women in rural economic development is as good as reaching every member of the society. Nseabasi (2015) identified the role of women in rural economic development has broadly categorized as:

- a. Food producers and active participants in the agrarian sectors
- b. Daily household maintenance tasks
- c. Small scale income generating activities
- d. General contribution to the wellbeing of their rural community.

Rural Women and Native Ecotourism Businesses

In ecotourism destination, the rural women and children constitute the bulk of the residents' population. Because of long years of residing in the host community, most residential women understand some of the tourist needs outside tourism site. These objects/items add values to tourist visit making it more memorable. Tourists are readily willing to have experience of one or more of these activities by paying for purchase or viewing.

List of Ecotourism Businesses Engaged In By Women

1. Cultural Artifact:

These are cultural and historical objects that are attached to some people ways of life. Their making reflects the mind and interpretation of environmental issues by people of that particular region. So, artifact is unique and mostly distinguishable from one race, region, clan, society to another. Cambridge Dictionary (2016) defines artifact as an object that is made by a person, such as a tool or a decoration, especially one that is of historical interest. Some of the objects carves out as artifact

and sold by women and girls are: statue, painting work, wood carving, grinding stone, pottery and mat weaving, mortar and pestle. Women of different ages are involved in the sales of the artifact. Individual women selling artifacts erect their sheds at any location that pleases them but, not necessarily far from tourism site. International tourists are most figured in the purchase of artifacts of Nigeria origin. Though most of the artifacts are produced by men, but sales is mainly through women and girls in the community. Basically, if it's made by a person, it's probably a cultural artifact. The important point is that you're bringing the "sociological perspective" to it - you're looking at that object not just for what it does, but for what it means to the people using it, and for what the greater significance to society is (Enoch, 2015).

2. Souvenir: Man naturally loves to keep memory of events in his sub-conscious mind. However, In contrast, time takes away some experience. For this singular reason, man adopts shopping for some items to improve their visitation experience. Shopping was identified as representing third of the total travel spend in tourism expenditure (Fairhurst, Costello and Holmes, 2007). Women and girls are actively involved in the sale and marketing of souvenir at tourism destination. Different classes of souvenir are sold by local women. These souvenirs serve to refresh tourist mind of their visit to the tourism site in future. It is a systematic means of keeping afresh the fascinating experience gathered during the course of staying at the tourism destination. Souvenirs purchase makes tourism experience tangible, either for consumption by others or prolonging ones experience (MacCannell, 1989).

Both young and old women make profit from the sale of souvenir items such as: local drum, designed T-shirt/vest, special face-cap, and customized hand-band, locally made hand fan, decorated calabash/gourd, and native handcraft among others. All these are sold to both local and international visitors who crave for them. Sale of souvenir is more general economic venture in tourism host community. Good number of women makes additional income from the sales of souvenir.

3. Dyeing and local fabrics manufacturer

Many women tourist especially of Afro-Caribbean descents patronize women selling local ornament and fabrics. These items in different shapes and designs are displayed for sale by local women. The indigenous knowledge of producing them are well understood by the women. The sales of these items are usually informal and organized at local points or markets. Beads, local fabrics and costume are sold in many tourist area of the country. Critical analyses show that many rural women earn their livelihood from this trade. Wilson (2003) affirmed that beads can be worn around the neck as adornment and daily wear, but more importantly they should be worn for local festivals. Beads, local dyeing and regalia, costume (kampala and adire) and horse tail. This trade helps many domestic household. Gausa and Abubakar (2015) stated that Tie-dye craft is produced for various reasons, which includes social, cultural, aesthetic, political and religious. Its creative characteristics influenced the consumers to crave for them if they are well finished. The craft of tie-dye tends to influence the educational, cultural, aesthetic and economic lives of the people of Nigeria. The rural women around tourism location are making money in trading of this.

4. Cultural dance and entertainment

The World Bank (1994) defined cultural heritage as a record of humanity's relationship to the world, past achievements, and discoveries. It is the present manifestation of the human past. Cultural heritage refers to sites, structures, and remains of archaeological, historical, religious,

cultural, or aesthetic value. Many local women and girls are singer, chorister, dancer, back stage dresser in organized entrainment and traditional dance. A lot of money is regularly made by local women involved in this act. Rural women normal organized local shows where some tourists are entertained. Music and entertainment have great psychological and sociological influence on man. From time immemorial, man evolved different means of relaxation. Music is hold in high esteem by Nigeria. African music is the music of Black Africans living south of the Sahara, as distinct from the Arab music of North Africa. A rich musical tradition has developed in this vast region of more than 40 nations, each with its own history and unique mixture of cultures and languages (Microsoft Encarta Premium Suite, 2003). This definition elucidates the key role occupied by music in tourism and women are actively involved.

5. Local food and beverages vendors

Many rural women trade in sales of locally prepared food and beverages. These vendors earns their living from daily preparation of local consumptive food and beverages. Good number of mostly national and some encouraging number of international tourists patronise these local canteen around tourist site. Majority of these stall owners are women. The local beverage “*Ogogoro, Oguro and Emu*” hawkers are also more of women population than men. Ownership of pepper soup joint, assorted traditional food are also of more women than men. This is another area where women trend very well contributing to tourism success.

Conclusion

The activities of rural women in tourism business might be small/micro scale or poorly recognized, however, it absorbs good number of rural women and serves as essential and irreplaceable components of successful tourism. Many rural women are directly or indirectly earn their livelihood from supporting tourism businesses. There is no doubt that tourism is incomplete and cannot be fully memorable in the absence of these economic activities.

Recommendation

Tourism development initiative that will incorporate rural women economic enmacipation is suggested by Federal government and State ministry of rural development. This programme should essentially be designed for economic advancement of women in the tourism business.

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