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TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN SELECTED ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS IN THE NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta region is yet to derive significant financial benefits from the global tourism market due to the nature of her tourism site development and management as most eco-destinations are fragile and require efficient management. The study examined tourism management and its implication on conservation of wildlife resources, and tourists' satisfaction using personal observations, in-depth interviews and structured questionnaires. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics in form of percentages, frequencies and tables, while Chi-square was used to test for significance of relationships. Results revealed that the tourist attractions at Port Harcourt Zoo were 17 different species of wild animals managed in captivity. Among them are Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*), Lion (*Panthera leo*), and Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus nilotica*). The major attractions in Akassa Turtle Station are boating, the annual Akassa beach party and viewing of water turtles that seasonally migrate to Akassa during their breeding season. Having wilderness experience and sighting of the African elephant in its natural habitat are the attractions at the Famous Elephant Sanctuary. Findings from the study also showed that tourist visits to Port Harcourt Zoo is low and continuously decreasing as majority of the respondents (56.0%) would not want to repeat visits due to limited attractions and boring experiences. Though visitation of tourists to the Akassa Turtle Station was lower than that of the Port Harcourt Zoo, tourists' satisfaction level was higher and visitors have been repeating visits. Household respondents in Akassa community (100.0%) irrespective of gender and age were aware of the Akassa Turtle Station and are so interested and enthusiastic in conserving the water turtles that a turtle club was formed in Akassa community. The managers of the Akassa Turtle Station are indigenes of Akassa community. All the household respondents (100.0%) at the Famous Elephant Sanctuary in Ikuru community were not interested in the protection of the elephants and were ready to kill the elephants if opportuned. Household respondents in Ikuru complained that the site had not benefitted them and even the elephants have been destroying their crops. Chi square tests of relationship between age, gender and willingness to kill the elephants were not significant ($p < 0.05$). These ecotourism destinations will be a major tourist attraction of global attention if properly managed and fully developed.

Keywords: tourism management, ecotourism sites, Akassa turtle station, elephant sanctuary, Port Harcourt zoo, wildlife conservation.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important opportunity to diversify local economies (Falade and Ayodele, 2003). It can develop in poor and marginal areas with few other opportunities and diversification options. Remote areas particularly attract tourists (Kamuaro, 1996) because of their high cultural wildlife and landscape values (Ayodele, 1991; Yunis, 2004, Ayodele, 2002). It can bring about non-material benefits such as pride to local culture and adds value to the surrounding natural environment in the eyes of local communities (Ijeomah, 2007).

It was on this basis that the management of wildlife and wilderness areas for tourism has become a global business as many nations, communities and private sectors are eager to get their own share of tourism benefits. The viability of tourism business among other factors is seriously affected by the availability of tourism potentials, level of development of tourism facilities and accessibility to the tourism sites (Atlas of Nigeria, 2002). The perceptions, expectations and experiences of tourists are also functions of the management and marketing of inherent potentials in tourism eco destinations (Ijeomah, 2007). Many unpopular nations and communities have been brought to fore due to tourism as their age-old abandoned or less valued local resources such as

waterfalls, sacred forests, unique landscapes, beautiful cultures, wildlife and other protectively un-spoilt areas are revisited and managed for the attraction of tourists who crave for unique experiences (Ijeomah, 2007; Ijeomah and Alao, 2007).

There is no part of the world without attractive virtues. No wonder the Atlas of Nigeria (2001) maintains that tourism potentials are fairly evenly distributed in Africa. However, Ijeomah (2007) observed that some areas maybe more endowed than others. The major tourist attraction in Africa is wildlife (Kamuaro, 1996) and the Niger Delta of Nigeria is well endowed with these resources. In spite of this great endowment, the economies of many rural agrarian households in the Niger Delta are not diversified in the face of high level of environmental pollution (from many years of petroleum prospecting and exploration), which has paralyzed farming, the mainstay of the communities' economies - farm lands have been destroyed, crop yield drastically reduced, fishing activities grounded and aquatic lives virtually castrated (Ibaba, 2002), as many other sectors in the Niger Delta region have consistently suffered cultural neglects due to over dependence on revenue from petroleum products. Poverty has become prevalent among households in Rivers and Bayelsa States, who should not have any genuine reason to



be poor if available resources were properly managed for maximal utilization (Partnership for Development, 2002). Households in the Niger Delta are therefore desperately in need of a land use practice that can conserve their environment, empower the people and bring about sustainable development. Tourism does not regulate itself but regulated by planners and managers to achieve desired objectives. Analyses of eco destination managements and conditions of ecotourism resources in the region can predict the potential impact of tourism therein.

Perception of the local people towards identified tourism potentials; packaging of these tourism virtues into products together with the management and marketing of the products, are functions of culture and attitude of the people. The target in tourism management is not only to draw tourists and dominate the tourists market but also to sustain the benefits derived from tourism. These benefits are anchored on the popularity of the eco destination, which is a function of tourists' satisfaction and sustainability of tourist experience. Tourist satisfaction cannot be sustainably guaranteed unless the resources in the site are wisely utilized. The study therefore evaluates the implication of tourism management strategies and activities on tourists' satisfaction and conservation of inherent tourism resources in various eco-destinations.

Objectives

The general objective of this study is to assess the implication of tourism management in selected eco tourism destinations in Niger Delta on wildlife conservation and tourist satisfaction, while the specific objectives are to:

- a) identify the tourist attractions in the ecotourism destinations;
- b) assess the benefits generated from the sites;
- c) evaluate the factors militating against tourists visitation and the effect of the various management strategies on tourists satisfaction;
- d) compare the management strategies of the study sites; and
- e) assess the level of awareness of the sites as an ecotourism destination among households adjoining the tourism sites.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

The study was carried out in three ecotourism sites in the Niger Delta. These areas are:

- (a) The Turtle Station at Akassa in Brass Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Akassa is located within latitude $4^{\circ}21'N$ and Longitude $5^{\circ}59'E$ (GPS).
- (b) The proposed Famous Elephant Sanctuary at Ikuru community in Andoni Local Government Area of Rivers State located at latitude $4^{\circ}48'N$ and longitude

$7^{\circ}43'E$ (GPS). The area has forested wetland and mangrove swamps.

- (c) The Port Harcourt Zoo in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State.

The Port Harcourt Zoo formerly known as the Garden City Zoological Garden is located within Latitude $4^{\circ}48'N$ and longitude $7^{\circ}2'E$ (GPS). The Zoological Garden was formerly a forest reserve. The Zoo was first opened to the public on the 1st of October 1975 and the first set of animals where procured from Tanzania.

Data collection

Information for this study were collected mainly through structured questionnaire and complemented with personal observations and in-depth interviews conducted with knowledgeable persons who had lived in the community for a minimum period of ten years.

The total number of household in the host communities were listed using members of the communities who were quite knowledgeable about the area as was done by Omonona (2000). A total of 1453 and 1351 number of households were recorded at Akassa and Ikuru community, respectively. A set of questionnaire was randomly administered to 10% of the total number of Households in the host communities (Ikuru and Akassa). A total of 145 and 135 questionnaires were administered in Akassa and Ikuru communities, respectively. No questionnaire was administered to households living around Port Harcourt Zoo as there were none because of its location in a commercial area. Another set of questionnaire was administered to all members of the staff and management of the selected ecotourism destinations. No questionnaire was administered to the management of ecotourism destination in Ikuru community as there was no form of management therein. The third set of questionnaire was administered randomly to 50 tourists at Port Harcourt Zoo. Results collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics while Chi square was used to test for significance of relationship.

RESULTS

Attractions and management strategies

Results on tourist attractions and the management strategies in the eco-destinations are presented in Tables 1 and 2. At Port Harcourt Zoo, the attractions are viewing of the wild animals in captivity, horse and donkey ride. Tourists are attracted to Akassa to either sight the turtles or witness the Akassa community beach party. At Ikuru community, sighting of elephants, wilderness experience (Figure-1) and annual boating are the tourists' attractions. Among the attractive animals in Port Harcourt Zoo are Lioness (*Panthera leo*), Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus nilotica*), Royal python (*Python sabae*) etc. as presented in Table-2.

**Table-1.** Tourist attractions and management strategies in selected ecotourism destinations.

| Eco-destination | Tourists attractions | Management strategy |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Port Harcourt Zoo | - Wild animals - Horse and donkey ride - feeding of lions with life goat | The animals are managed in captivity (ex-situ conservation) by the state government |
| Akassa Turtle Station | Turtle Annual beach party | An in-situ conservation |
| Elephant Sanctuary Ikuru Town | Elephants, wilderness experience, boating | There is no form of management |

Source: Field Survey 2010.

**Figure-1.** Dung of elephant at the proposed Famous Elephant Sanctuary in Ikuru community, Andoni

Source: Field Survey 2010.

**Table-2.** List of available animal species at Port Harcourt Zoo.

| Common name | Scientific name | Family | No. of animal |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Lioness | <i>Panthera leo</i> | Felidae | 2 |
| Royal python | <i>Python sabae</i> | Pythonidae | 1 |
| Nile crocodile | <i>Crocodylus nilotica</i> | Crocodylidae | 5 |
| Patas monkey | <i>Erythrocebus patas</i> | Cercopithecinae | 3 |
| Chimpanzee | <i>Pan troglodytes</i> | Homininae | 2 |
| Tantalus monkey | <i>Cercopithecus tantalus</i> | Cercopithecidae | 3 |
| Monitor lizard | <i>Veranus niloticus</i> | Varanidae | 1 |
| Tortoise | <i>Kinixys erosa</i> | Testudinidae | 1 |
| Baboon | <i>Papio anubis</i> | Cercopithecidae | 1 |
| Turtle | <i>Dermochelys coriacea</i> | Testudinidae | 3 |
| Ostrich | <i>Struthio camelus</i> | Struthionidae | 1 |
| Horse | <i>Equus caballus</i> | Equidae | 1 |
| Donkey | <i>Equus asinus</i> | Equidae | 5 |
| Geese | <i>Branta canadensis</i> | Anatidae | 4 |
| Peacock | <i>Pavo muticus</i> | Numidiidae | 1 |
| Black kite | <i>Milvus migrans</i> | Accipitridae | 5 |
| Eagle | <i>Aquila vapax</i> | Accipitridae | 2 |

Source: Field Survey 2010.

Factors affecting tourist visitation

Table-3 presents factors militating against tourist visitation to selected ecotourism destinations. All respondents listed lack of animal, dirty environment and poor condition of the available animals as some of the factors militating against tourist visitation at Port Harcourt

Zoo. The high trend of militancy, distance, cost of transportation and accommodation are among the factors hindering tourist visitation to Akassa while at Ikuru community, the difficulty in sighting the elephants and accommodation impedes tourist visitation.

Table-3. Factors militating against tourists' visitation to selected ecotourism destination.

| Eco-destination | Factors militating against tourist visitation |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Port Harcourt Zoo | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of animals especially the endangered species and big games - Dirty environment and poor condition of facilities and structures - Poor condition of the available animals and their cages |
| Akassa Turtle Station | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Militancy - Distance and cost of transportation - The breeding period of the turtle - Accommodation |
| Elephant Sanctuary Ikuru Community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulties in sighting the elephants - Insufficient accommodation - Poor awareness level |

Source: Field Survey 2010.

Table-4 and Figure-2 present the challenges faced by ecotourism officials in the management of species at ecotourism sites. At Port Harcourt Zoo, the officials are

faced with the challenge of feeding the species (100.0%), hostility from the animals (80.0%), mortality (80.0%) and boredom of species (70.0%). At Akassa, the officials face



two major challenges: water current and traps of fishermen.

Table-4. Challenges faced by ecotourism officials in the management of species at ecotourism sites.

| Challenge | Frequency of respondents | Percentage |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Port Harcourt zoo | | |
| Feeding | 10 | 100.0 |
| Boredom | 7 | 70.0 |
| Hostility from animals | 8 | 80.0 |
| Mortality | 8 | 80.0 |
| Akassa turtle station | | |
| Water current | 4 | 100.0 |
| Trawlers of fishermen | 4 | 100.0 |

Source: Field Survey 2010.



Figure-2. Fishermen rescuing water turtle from their trawler.

Source: Field Survey 2010.

Social characteristics of respondents

Table-5 presents the social characteristics of ecotourism staff respondents as analyzed with regard to gender, age and educational qualification. Most (70.0%) of the respondents in Port Harcourt Zoo are males while in Akassa turtle station all respondents are males. Educational qualification shows that majority (70.0%) of

the respondents in Port Harcourt Zoo are National Diploma/First Degree Certificate holders while 50.0% of respondents from Akassa had the Senior Secondary School Certificate and others had no formal education (50.0%). The age range of most respondents in Port Harcourt Zoo was between 31-60 (50.0%) and 21-30 (75.0%) in Akassa.

**Table-5.** Social characteristics of ecotourism officials.

| Parameter | Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Port Harcourt Zoo | | | |
| Sex | Male | 7 | 70.0 |
| | Female | 3 | 30.0 |
| Age | 10-20 | 0 | 0.0 |
| | 21-30 | 1 | 10.0 |
| | 31-40 | 5 | 50.0 |
| | 41-50 | 4 | 40.0 |
| | 51-60 | 0 | 0.0 |
| | 61 and above | 0 | 0.0 |
| Educational level | No formal education | 1 | 10.0 |
| | SSCE/WASCE * | 2 | 20.0 |
| | BSc/ND/HND** | 7 | 70.0 |
| | MSc*** | 0 | 0.0 |
| | PhD**** | 0 | 0.0 |
| Akassa Turtle Station | | | |
| Sex | Male | 4 | 100.0 |
| | Female | 0 | 0.0 |
| Age | 10-20 | 0 | 0.0 |
| | 21-30 | 3 | 75.0 |
| | 31-40 | 0 | 0.0 |
| | 41-50 | 1 | 25.0 |
| | 51-60 | 0 | 0.0 |
| | 61 and above | 0 | 0.0 |
| Educational level | No formal education | 2 | 50.0 |
| | SSCE/WASCE * | 2 | 50.0 |
| | BSc/ND/HND** | 0 | 0.0 |
| | MSc*** | 0 | 0.0 |
| | PhD**** | 0 | 0.0 |

Source: Field Survey 2010.

*represents senior secondary school certificate examination/west African senior certificate examination

** Bachelor of Science/National Diploma/Higher National Diploma

***Master of Science

**** Doctorate Degree

Table-6 presents the results on demographic characteristic of tourists in Port Harcourt Zoo. Most of the respondents were males (64.0%) and are all Nigerians that have lived in Port Harcourt from birth (60.0%). Many of the respondents were between the age range of 21-30

(48.0%). In educational qualification, majority (50.0%) of the respondents in Port Harcourt Zoo was National Diploma/First degree certificate holders while 38.0% had the senior secondary school certificate.

**Table-6.** Demographic characteristics of tourists in Port Harcourt Zoo.

| Parameter | Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Port Harcourt Zoo | | | |
| Sex | Male | 34 | 64.0 |
| | Female | 18 | 36.0 |
| Age | 10-20 | 2 | 4.0 |
| | 21-30 | 24 | 48.0 |
| | 31-40 | 12 | 24.0 |
| | 41-50 | 9 | 18.0 |
| | 51-60 | 2 | 4.0 |
| | 61 and above | 1 | 2.0 |
| Nationality | Nigerian | 50 | 100.0 |
| | Foreigner | 0 | 0.0 |
| Educational level | No formal education | 2 | 4.0 |
| | FSLC * | 1 | 2.0 |
| | SSCE/WASCE** | 19 | 38.0 |
| | ND/HND*** | 11 | 22.0 |
| | BSC**** | 14 | 28.0 |
| | MSc***** | 3 | 6.0 |
| | PhD***** | 0 | 0.0 |
| Time in Community | From birth | 30 | 60.0 |
| | For few years | 19 | 38.0 |
| | For few weeks | 1 | 2.0 |

Source: Field Survey 2010.

* First School Leaving Certificate

** Senior secondary school certificate examination/west African senior certificate examination

*** National Diploma/Higher National Diploma

**** Bachelor of Science

***** Master of Science

***** Doctorate Degree

Tourist visitation, experience and satisfaction

Results on assessment of tourist visitation and satisfaction by respondents are presented in Table-7. On a daily basis, Port Harcourt Zoo receives visitors who in most cases always leave the eco-destination unsatisfied.

The level of tourist visitation is decreasing. Visitation in Akassa is once in a while but the tourists are always satisfied. Table-7 shows that all the respondents reported that the level of visitation to Akassa Turtle Station is increasing.

**Table-7.** Assessment of tourists' visitation and satisfaction by officials of ecotourism sites.

| Parameter | Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| Port Harcourt Zoo | | | |
| Frequency of tourists visitation | Daily | 10 | 100.0 |
| | Weekly | 0 | 0.0 |
| | Monthly | 0 | 0.0 |
| | Once in a while | 0 | 0.0 |
| If visitors are always satisfied? | Yes | 0 | 0.0 |
| | No | 10 | 100.0 |
| Assessment of visitation trend | Increasing | 0 | 0.0 |
| | Decreasing | 10 | 100.0 |
| | Static | 0 | 0.0 |
| Akassa Turtle Station | | | |
| Frequency of tourists visitation | Daily | 0 | 0.0 |
| | Weekly | 0 | 0.0 |
| | Monthly | 0 | 0.0 |
| | Once in a while | 4 | 100.0 |
| If visitors are always satisfied? | Yes | 4 | 100.0 |
| | No | 0 | 0.0 |
| Assessment of visitation trend | Increasing | 4 | 100.0 |
| | Decreasing | 0 | 0.0 |
| | Static | 0 | 0.0 |

Source: Field Survey 2010.

Table-8 presents the results of tourist's experience in Port Harcourt Zoo. About 56.0% of the respondents had a boring experience and another 20.0% had a very boring experience. Most of the tourists (86.0%) were not satisfied at the end of their visit. Also, 88.0% were not also satisfied with the services of the

management. Consequently, 52.0% of the respondents are unwilling to visit Port Harcourt Zoo again while 48.0% would like to visit the Zoo again. Majority of the respondents (94.0%) paid gate fee before they entered the zoo and about 6.0% did not pay to enter the Zoo.

**Table-8.** Assessment of tourists' experience in Port Harcourt Zoo.

| Parameter | Variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Difficulty in Site/ Location | Yes | 0 | 0.0 |
| | No | 50 | 100.0 |
| If tourist is satisfied? | Yes | 7 | 14.0 |
| | No | 43 | 86.0 |
| Rating of experience by tourists | Very exciting | 4 | 8.0 |
| | Exciting | 8 | 16.0 |
| | Boring | 28 | 56.0 |
| | Very boring | 10 | 20.0 |
| Satisfaction with management services? | Yes | 6 | 12.0 |
| | No | 44 | 88.0 |
| Rating of management services by tourists' | Very good | 0 | 0.0 |
| | Good | 3 | 6.0 |
| | Poor | 34 | 68.0 |
| | Very poor | 13 | 26.0 |
| Medium of site awareness | Friends | 36 | 72.0 |
| | Mass media | 14 | 28.0 |
| | Other | 0 | 0.0 |
| If tourist paid entrance fee? | Yes | 47 | 94.0 |
| | No | 3 | 6.0 |
| Time in Community | From birth | 30 | 60.0 |
| | For few years | 19 | 38.0 |
| | For few weeks | 1 | 2.0 |
| Will you visit again? | Yes | 24 | 48.0 |
| | No | 26 | 52.0 |

Source: Field Survey 2010.

Null hypothesis: There is no significant association between the parameters at $p > 0.05$.

Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant association between the parameters at $p < 0.05$.

**Table-9.** Summary of results on Chi- square tests of relationship among Port Harcourt tourist.

| Parameter | Calculated Chi square (χ^2) | Tabulated Chi square (χ^2) | P value | Significance | Inference |
|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|--------------|----------------------------|
| Occupation and awareness of site | 6.363 | 9.49 | 0.174 | p>0.05 | No significant association |
| Occupation and ease of site location | 0.000 | 0.00 | 0.000 | P=0 | No association |
| Educational level and awareness of site | 4.230 | 11.07 | 0.517 | p>0.05 | No significant association |
| Educational level and ease of site location | 0.000 | 0.00 | 0.000 | P=0 | No association |
| Age and satisfaction with management services | 13.699 | 11.07 | 0.018 | p<0.05 | Significant association |
| Age and rating of management services | 5.563 | 18.31 | 0.851 | p>0.05 | No significant association |
| Sex and satisfaction with management services | 3.835 | 3.84 | 0.05 | p>0.05 | No significant association |
| Sex and rating of management services | 2.277 | 5.99 | 0.320 | p>0.05 | No significant association |

Source: Field Survey 2010.

DISCUSSIONS

Tourist attractions and management strategies

The wild animals managed in captivity are the core attractions in Port Harcourt Zoo while horse and donkey riding are supporting attractions. The Zoo is managed by the Rivers State Government through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in Rivers State (Table-1). On Saturdays and Sundays, life goats are fed to the lions at about 2:00pm instead of the normal morning feeding hours, with the aim of creating attractive activities for tourists. This has been one of the most fascinating experiences for privileged tourists and also a major strategy by the management of the zoo to attract tourists. Other fascinating and attractive scenes in the eco-destination which tourists crave for include the social behaviour of the baboon, the acrobatic displays of the chimpanzee and monkeys, the colourful plumage displays by the peacocks, ostrich and other animals present at the Zoo (Table-2). Ijeomah *et al.* (2005) recorded similar fascinating attractions in Jos Wildlife Park.

An *in-situ* form of conservation is practiced at Akassa Turtle Station. The turtles are the core attraction to the site. Akassa has three species of turtles out of the seven scientifically identified species. These are: Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*), Leather back (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and Olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). Akassa nesting site has lesser species of turtle than the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park of Australia that have five species of turtles: Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), Loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*), Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Flatback turtle (*Natator depressa*) and leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*) (Great Barrier Reef Marine Park of Australia Authority,

Undated). However, Kemp's ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*) and Olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*) are inexistent in the Australian marine park. These turtles migrate long distances around the world feeding on various feed items from jelly fish to sea urchins and sea grasses, but always return to the same beach they were born on, to lay their eggs. This agrees with the work of Peter *et al.* (2003). This migratory activity of turtles happens at Akassa between September and January and attracts tourists from different places within the stated period. This is quite different from the breeding period of the turtles in Brevard country, Florida which is between May 1st and October 31st (Susman, 2010) and December in Zamboanga City, Philippines. Much work is not done in terms of management of the species as the turtles after laying their eggs cover up the nest with sand using their flippers and returns to the sea, never to see their hatchlings. The management of the Akassa Turtle Eco destination only helps to cover up the nest with more sand to prevent environmental and biological damages/losses. The community also has an annual beach party in December that attracts neighbouring villages.

What obtains in both Port Harcourt Zoo and Akassa Turtle Station is entirely different from what happens at Ikuru community as the Famous Elephant Sanctuary is not under any form of management but exists as a wilderness area. Tourists visit the site with the expectation of sighting the elephants which is the core attraction to the site. However, the elephants are always difficult to sight but tourists can still enjoy wilderness experience, and can see the signs of elephants' presence in the form of dung and foot prints (Figure-1). This is quite different from what is obtainable in Kenya as Brown and Henry (1993) reported that the viewing value of Kenya's



elephants is estimated at about US\$25-30 million a year implying that the elephants were always sighted by tourists.

Challenges in management of species at Eco-destinations

The management of Port Harcourt Zoo faces challenges in the management of species. Feeding appears to be a major challenge in most zoological gardens especially those with larger games. Providing the required quantity of meat for the carnivores and fodder for the herbivores on a daily basis is a major challenge in Port Harcourt Zoo. Similarly, Ijeomah and Aiyeloja (2007) reported that in Jos Wildlife Park, a minimum of three cows are slaughtered for the carnivores managed under captivity on a weekly basis. Most of the inmates at Port Harcourt Zoo such as baboon (*Papio anubis*), chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*) lack mates which always leads to boredom, social and psychological problems that can cause strange behaviours. The keepers complain of hostility from some of the animals during feeding. Cases of mortality have also been recorded (Table-4).

At Akassa Turtle Destination, the management faces two major challenges: water current and traps of fishermen (Table-4). The turtles sometimes get entangled in the trawlers of fishermen (Figure-2) and this could lead to stress and death of the turtle especially if they stay entangled for a long period. The management of Akassa Turtle Station therefore makes concerted efforts to ensure that the turtles are well protected during their breeding season. In the case of the Brevard country lights on houses and businesses near the beach are turned off to prevent disorientation of breeding turtles and nestlings; inlets of turtles are monitored daily; construction activities are avoided on the beach and native coastal vegetation are planted on the dune to protect habitats for nesting and hatchling sea turtles.

Level of tourist's visitation and satisfaction in selected Eco-destinations

Port Harcourt Zoo receives visitors on a daily basis but the visitors are not always satisfied (Tables 7 and 8) due to the poor condition of facilities and structures, lack of sufficient animal, dirty environment, poor living condition of available animals and lack of skilled manpower e.g. curators (Table-7). This is the cause of consistent decrease in the level of visitation to the Zoo (Table-7) and also accounts for the reason why most tourists (56.0%) always have boring experiences (Table-8). Chi square test of relationship showed there was significant association between the age of tourists and their satisfaction with the services of the management of Port Harcourt Zoo at $P < 0.05$ (Table-9). This implies that majority of the respondents (86.0%) who were not satisfied are mature, experienced and therefore, can reason rationally and assess critically and comparatively. The 14.0% who are satisfied may be children and teenagers who have not visited many conservation centres and were excited at sighting the few available animal species in the Zoo. Most of the tourists (86.0%) were not satisfied at the

end of their visit (Table-8). Satisfaction level in Akassa Turtle Destination is higher as the tourists are always willing to repeat visits. Consequently, visitation to Akassa Turtle Station is gradually increasing (Table-7). Visitation of tourists to Akassa Turtle Station is not as frequent as that of Port Harcourt Zoo because the breeding season of water turtles affects the time of tourists visitation. It is the availability of turtles that attract visitors. This is one of the major challenges faced in most ecotourism destinations where animals are managed in their natural habitats. Using such site for tourism as in the case of National Parks and Game Reserves makes tourist visitation seasonal because tourists will always visit not just only when the animals are there but when the chances of sighting the species are very high. The case of Akassa is similar to what happens in some Parks in east Africa, where the animals migrate seasonally.

Factors Militating Against Tourist Satisfaction

The factors militating against tourist visitation to Port Harcourt zoo are; lack of animals especially the endangered species and big games. The poor condition of facilities and structures and even the poor condition of the available animal species and their cages are also factors affecting tourist satisfaction at Port Harcourt Zoo (Table-3). The presence of variety of species especially big games and endangered species such as Rhinoceros, Elephant and Zebra will always attract tourists. The Zoo also lacks other side attractions.

At Akassa and Ikuru Community, accommodation is a major factor militating against tourists' satisfaction and visitation. There is only one lodging accommodation at Akassa with few rooms. If it is occupied, other tourists will find it difficult to get accommodation and it is also difficult for them to leave the site the same day due to transportation challenges. Transportation to the site is only by water. Boats depart from Akassa only in the morning as early as 7:00am and it takes about 2 hours from Yenegoa, the capital of Bayelsa State to Akassa community.

There is also accommodation problem in Ikuru town. Visitors will have to return or make necessary arrangements for accommodation otherwise, tourists will only spend few hours when they get to the eco-destination and leave the same day due to lack of accommodation. Shah and Gupta (2000) reported a similar case in Bromo Tengger Semeru Park, Indonesia where visits to the Park tend to be short, sometimes as short as two hours particularly as in organized tours from Hong Kong due to lack of accommodation. Similar result was obtained in a pilgrim centre in India, the Badrinath tourist zone, where the tourism season is very short as determined by the opening and closing time for the main temple at Badrinath (Academy for Mountain Environics, 1995). The fear of getting kidnapped and the breeding period of the turtle also affects tourist visitation to Akassa. Tourists are security conscious. The fear of militants operating within the tourism area discourages visitors from visiting the eco-destination. This agrees with Ijeomah and Adetoro (2008)



that tourists need to be communicated of their assured safety as often as a newly married wife will expect to be communicated love messages from the husband. The difficulty of sighting the elephants is another reason militating against tourist visitation to Ikuru community in Andoni. Similar challenge is faced in Cross River National Park.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Niger Delta region has unique tourism potentials which will become a major tourist attraction when properly planned and developed. The tourism sites at Akassa and Ikuru communities are under an *in-situ* form of conservation though they vary in terms of community involvement. In Akassa, the community is directly involved in the management of the turtle and this has increased the conservation level and awareness of the turtle in the community. However, at Ikuru town, the community is not involved in the management of the species and its conservation. This can lead to the migration of the elephants if this attitude continues because wildlife species are only found where favourable environmental conditions that can support them exist.

Port Harcourt Zoo is under an *ex-situ* form of conservation but is gradually becoming less popular as an ecotourism destination because visitation is gradually reducing. This is due to poor management and less attention from the Rivers State Government. The Zoo has the potential of reducing unemployment and serving as a source of revenue generation for the State if properly financed and managed.

In order to sustain and improve the tourism potentials in these ecotourism destinations which can turn out to be a major point of attraction to both local and foreign visitors, the following recommendations are made. At Port Harcourt Zoo:

- a) There should be a general overhauling of facilities and structures within the zoo.
- b) More cages and enclosures should be constructed as insufficient enclosures and cages have in many cases hindered animal procurement.
- c) More animal species especially the endangered ones and larger games like Zebra, Elephant etc. should be procured.
- d) Animal species should be provided with mates especially the gregarious ones to ease psychological stress or tension and boredom.
- e) Zoo managers should practice animal husbandry and Agro forestry to meet the food requirements for the inmates.
- f) Regular cleaning of the cages and checking of the animal species in captivity for signs of diseases and pests are also very vital.
- g) The management should keep records of tourist statistics as there was no record to review during the course of this study.

At the Famous Elephant Sanctuary in Ikuru community, a full development of the site is necessary as

it will bring about development of the area, empower the local inhabitants and satisfy both local and international tourists who crave for unique experiences. Re-orientation of the members of the community towards conservation is also necessary and this can be achieved through campaigns, rallies, focus-group discussions and formation of community based conservation organizational clubs. Basic facilities and structures for comfort and relaxation are also necessary to ensure tourists satisfaction.

Finally, the Turtle Station at Akassa in Bayelsa State requires basic facilities and structures for comfort and relaxation of tourists. Prohibition of fishing along the shores by fishermen is also necessary to give the turtles more protection. This can be achieved by local legislation enacted to stop fishing along the shores.

Generally, these sites cannot attract tourists without proper security of tourists, publicity and advertisement to both the local and international community through the internet, hand bills, radio, television, prints etc.

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