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Agricultural Tourism for Socio-Economic Development in Esie-Irepodun Area, Kwara State

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Abstract

This research attempted to assess agricultural tourism for socio-economic development in Esie-Irepodun area of Kwara State, Nigeria. It is obvious that most of rural development strategies ever introduced by successive governments in the country have failed to achieve the goal of transforming rural economy. For instance, community development, integrated rural development, mobilization, river basin development and creation of more local governments just to mention a few of them. The notion of agricultural tourism is now gaining ground all over the world as a means of boosting rural economic development. The objective of the study was to assess the facilities, training needs and future challenges of the tourism industry. The administration of questionnaire and conduct of oral interview constitute major research instrument for the study. A total of 60 samples were selected through a purposive sampling technique. In addition, focus group discussion was conducted among the members of the community in order to collect relevant data. Regarding analytical technique, descriptive statistics such as calculating the mean, averages and percentages was adopted for the study. It was revealed that there were facilities such as lodging (91.6%), visitations (71.6%), offices (78.3%), fish ponds (86.7%), poultry farm (66.6%), zoo (58.3%) and restaurant (60.0%) were available at the centre. In addition, the respondents identified areas of training needs such as environmental management with a mean score (2.75), water management (2.70), fruit conservation (2.56), nursery production (2.50) and entrepreneurial skill (2.47). The future prospects revealed that increased income with a mean score (2.83) top the list, followed by the growth of small-scale industry and better health environment have equal mean score (2.71), promotion of fresh farm products (2.66) and beautification of the environment (2.56) in that order. The constraints to establishing agricultural tourism were identified such as inaccessibility to credit facility (2.85), limited visitors (2.73), and inadequate appropriate technology to develop it (2.65). On the basis of the findings, one recommends that increased awareness should be raised towards developing agricultural tourism, creating enabling environment that facilitates accessibility to credit facilities without tears and moreover, agricultural tourism could be adopted as a rural development strategy in this country.

Keywords: Agriculture Tourism Training Development Constraints Prospects

1. Introduction

Agricultural tourism contributes sustainability to agriculture through better management of natural resources in an eco-friendly system. Agricultural tourism is an expanding sector around the world and is emerging as a growth oriented agricultural industry. The Agricultural tourism has been in existence in many parts of the world and apparently seemed to be a new area in developing countries such as Nigeria. Indeed, developing economy still has a long way to go to catch up with the leading developed economies. The goal may be distant but surely can be achieved by promoting industrial and business ventures created by imitation of agro-allied businesses.

Agricultural tourism could create awareness about rural life and knowledge about agricultural science among the general populace. It provides the best alternative for picnics and creates holiday resorts (Johnson and Beale, 2002). It provides opportunity for hands on experience for urban agriculture. It is meant for providing training to future farmers. The study area has location advantage being nearer to the National Museum that attracts different people of diverse origin both nationally and internationally. In this respect, a renowned politician of great foresight is quite resourceful and innovative such that it can commence this new agriculture concept in the study area. It is essentially the first of its kind. Therefore, keeping in view the above facts, a research project was under-taken with the cardinal objectives to assess the present status of agricultural tourism as a beautiful ground for diversifying local economy, identifying the training needs, impediments and future prospects in developing agricultural tourism.

2. Previous Studies

Agricultural tourism is the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agricultural business operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education or active involvement in the activities of the farm (Wood, 2000). Agricultural tourism, as it is defined most broadly, involves any agriculturally-based operation or activity that brings visitors to the centre. Agricultural tourism has different definitions in different parts of the world, and sometimes refers specifically to farm stays, as in Italy (Long, 1998). Elsewhere, agricultural tourism includes a wide variety of activities, including buying produce direct from a farm stand, navigating corn maize, picking fruit, feeding animals, or staying on a farm. Agricultural tourism is a form of tourism that is considered a growth industry in many parts of the world (Brown and Engle, 1992). Agricultural tourists can choose from a wide range of activities that include picking fruits and vegetables, riding horses, tasting honey, learning about wine making, or shopping in farm gift shops and farm stands for local produce. Agricultural tourism is one of the alternatives for improving the incomes and potential economic viability of small farms and rural communities (Woods, 2001). Some forms of agricultural tourism enterprises are well developed in Canada, including trade fairs and festivals. Agricultural tourism projects reinforce the need to support local growers and allow the visitor to experience activities on the farm (Long and Lane, 2000). Indeed, individual participation in planning agricultural tourism can contribute to building a successful program that enhances the community development.

Indeed, a single definition may not satisfy agricultural tourism. For example, rural tourism is an all-encompassing idea that places any tourism activity in a rural setting under the same umbrella as for fishing, hunting, eco-tours, and bird watching. Under this definition, rural tourism may not be designed to generate a supplementary income for the farmer, but may be a business venture of travel and tourism (Dann, 1996). Farm tourism can be associated directly with agricultural activity on a farm with the idea of offering products for sale that are produced as a direct result of the activity. This may include food and lodging as well as on farm activities. Farm tourism could be actually participating in the agricultural work, farm craft works, traditional cooking, or other farm related educational workshops, with tourism being a major activity.

Most definitions of agricultural tourism have a common theme that combines elements of farm life and elements of the tourism industry. Gartner and Lime (2000) stated that the cardinal objective of agricultural tourism involved having members of the public come to the farm, with the ultimate goal being to increase farm income by providing recreation and education to the visitors. Brown added that with proper planning and execution, agricultural tourism was a tool that can have a direct effect on farm income (Brown, et al 2003). There are varieties of activities and programmes that often emanate from agricultural tourism as identified by Kerstelter, et al (2001) and they include: bee farming, hunting, fishing, Agriculture related festivals, farm tours, plucking vegetables, gathering fruits, farm product marketing, farm vacations, on-farm retail markets, breakfasts, picnic areas, and farm educational programs. Regardless of the definition, it is important to understand the elements of agricultural tourism that make it more original than other types of tourism. Positive interaction between the agricultural tourism venue operator and the customer is central to the success of the enterprise.

Richard (2000) had remarked that although other definitions exist, the fact remains that tourism and entertainment related farm activities have offered a new diversification enterprise to active farm families. Carrington (1996) remarked that agricultural tourism offered seasonal employment opportunities within a community and new sources of income for farmers. In like manner, Chandler and Costello (2002) observed that agricultural tourism could be a prime direct marketing venue for farm experience and to add value to those products sold on the farm.

Long (1998) identified rural tourism as any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the localities for a more enriching tourism experience. Plog (2002) added that rural tourism is essentially an activity which took place in the countryside that might entail farm, animal, nature, and eco**-**tourisms. Contrary to conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain traits, namely it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, and it is predominantly in natural environment based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions.

3. The Scope of Study

The study area is located in Esie area of Irepodun local government, Kwara State. It lies between latitude 4º 35" North of the Equator and Longitude 4º 45" East of the Green Wich Meridian. It is bounded in the north east by Isin local government; in the west by Oyun local government and to the north, by Ifelodun local government area. It is bounded in the south by Otun area of Ekiti State. The choice of this area of study is largely attributed to one's familiarity with the culture and tradition of the people who are mostly Yorubas that traced their origins from Oduduwa in Ile-Ife. The people have a common origin, speaking Igbomina dialect and they are predominantly enterprising farmers. Igbomina people were very popular and spread over many parts of Nigeria and over-seas countries. The people are actively involved in communal self-help projects such as electrification, supply of pipe-borne water, road construction, building of schools and colleges including the agricultural tourism activity that is currently under investigation.

The edaphic character of the study area has been influenced by a combination of factors such as climate, vegetation cover, topography as well as the parent material. The commonest type of soil is the ferruginous tropical soil that often developed on crystalline acid rocks. The nature of this soil could only support the growth of subsistence food crops such as maize, beans, guinea-corn and tuberous crops such as yam, potatoes and cassava. The over-cropping on the land and removal of vegetation cover has considerable effects on rapid degradation of the soil fertility but has large hectares of river basins along which Hausas practiced 'fadama' irrigation farming particularly during the dry seasons. Along a tributary to river Oshin lies the agricultural tourism located closely to the National Museum-popularly known as the 'home of stone images' thus making the study area suitable for tourist attraction. Indeed, the study area experienced a tropical climate with distinct dry and wet seasons. The

duration, amount and intensity of rainfall vary from year to year. But generally speaking, the rainfall regime is between April and October that is, eight months. It enjoys the heaviest amount of rain in June and July, the least during the months of December and January especially when the cold, dusty and dry harmattan wind prevails over the entire region. The study area lies within the tropical guinea savanna region. The grasses are tall and rich, thus providing excellent grazing ground for animal rearing.

4. Research Method

Data were generated largely from the administration of questionnaire that served as a major research instrument for the study. Besides, oral interviews were conducted among the members of the communities as well as staff of the agricultural tourist centre. A total of 60 samples were taken from the study area by adopting a purposive sampling technique. The descriptive statistics was employed to analyse the data involving calculation of the mean, averages, and percentages. Data were presented in tabular form in order to ease assessment of the existing facilities of agricultural tourism. For this, the respondents were provided with a list of variables prepared after giving a deep thought and a detailed discussion with the experts in agricultural tourism. The respondents were asked to rate the variables on a three-point continuum as a multiple choice answer. A mean score for each variable was worked out based upon the total scores it obtained and accordingly rank orders were allotted to all the elements.

5.1. Results and Discussion

One of the cardinal objectives of this study was to examine status of the agricultural tourism in the study area and this was done through the assessment of the facilities available at the agricultural tourist centre. The idea was to ascertain whether they are available and whether they are functioning or not. It was revealed in Table 1, the responses of (91.6%) admitted that the agricultural tourist centre has accommodation facilities every time whenever they were asked for it and 8.4% of the respondents said the facility was not always available on demand.

As regards office facility on the site, majority of respondents that is, (78.3%) replied that the facility was available while (21.7%) stated the opposite. Regarding various kinds of games, (33.3%) of the respondents said that different kinds of games were available while majority said that games were not available for the visitors. Indeed, there were limited games at the centre and they include ludo, graph and chess. At least more than half of the respondents that is, (71.6%) said that visit for the various activities and operations on the farm were always available. This is true to a large extent because use to troop into the centre particularly at week-ends for relaxation and site viewing. Regarding existence of a supermarket, some (33.3%) of the respondents consented to its provision. On the issue of training school, majority of the respondents (66.7%) disagree with its provision. Indeed, there was no formal training school on the site. The majority of the respondents (91.0%) stated that there was no swimming pool on the tourism centre. Regarding availability of fish ponds, majority of the respondents (86.7%) stated that the facility was available. Indeed, about 10 earth ponds and 5 concrete ponds were in operation stocked with different fish species. On poultry farming, about (66.6%) of the respondents stated that the facility was available.

Table 1: Facilities available at Esie Agricultural Tourism Centre

Facility	Available		Not Available	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Accommodation	55	91.6	5	8.4
Offices	47	78.3	13	21.7
Games	20	33.3	40	66.7
Visits	43	71.6	17	28.4
Super-market	20	33.3	40	66.7
Training school	2	3.3	58	66.7

Table 1: Facilities available at Esie Agricultural Tourism Centre - continued

Swimming pool	5	8.3	55	91.4
Fish ponds	52	86.7	8	13.3
Poultry Farm	40	66.6	20	33.4
Zoo	35	58.3	25	41.7
Bee farming	0	0	0	0
Restaurant	36	60.0	24	40.0
Orchard	15	25.0	45	75.0
Crop farming	10	16.6	50	83.4
Animal rearing	23	38.3	37	61.7
Horse riding	0	0	0	0

Source: Author, April 2011

The poultry operation produces fresh eggs and chickens for local market within and neighbouring communities. Regarding the zoo facility, about a slight half of the respondents (58.3%) stated that the facility was available. At the site, one can see different types of animals such as lions, monkeys, python, alligator and tortoise. There was no bee farming at the agricultural tourism centre. The restaurant and bar facility were in operation as about (60%) of the respondents rightly observed. Regarding orchard facility, about (25%) of the respondents stated that there was orchard while some (75%) were on the contrary. At the site, some fruits were available such as cashew, mangoes, and pawpaw. The idea of crop cultivation at the centre seems negligible as only (16.6%) stated that raising crop was done. The crops found at the site include maize, tomatoes, garden egg, okra and spinach meant for family consumption. Animal rearing was in operation as about (38%) of the respondents stated this as part of the farm activities. Indeed, animals such as goats, cattle, and sheep were kept at the centre. There was no horse riding at the agricultural tourism centre.

5.2. Training Requirements for Agricultural Tourism

A new emerging concept for the extension workers in Nigeria is that of farmers' training courses. Indeed, this is a method which will produce the desired results only if handled skillfully. Siehl (2000) had remarked that training is directly concerned with improving people's performance with regard to economic activities. This view was share by Hollinshead (1996) and Smith (2003) that training was required for both potential and existing owners of agricultural tourism units to increase to their knowledge, skill, attitude and managerial competence for generating change leading to rapid economic growth. The farmers apply the acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities on their farms to get best results and ultimately maximize returns.

The agricultural tourism patronizing respondents in the study area were asked about their interests and needs for various training programmes organized by institutions at different locations and durations. The interests of the respondents were ranked and the result was presented in Table 2. Indeed, majority of the respondents would go in for environmental management with a mean score of (2.75), followed by water management (2.70), fruit and vegetable preservation (2.56), nursery production (2.50), entrepreneurial motivation and guidance (2.47), advertising skill acquisition (2.46) and organizational management with a mean score of (2.38) in that order.

Table 2: Training Requirements for Establishing Agricultural Tourism

Area of Training	**Total Score**	**Mean**	**Rank**
Environmental management	165	2.75	1
Water Managemtnt	162	2.70	2
Fruit and vegetable preservation	154	2.56	3
Nursery production	150	2.50	4
Entrepreneurial motivation and guidance	148	2.47	5
Advertising skill aquisition	143	2.46	6

Table 2: Training Requirements for Establishing Agricultural Tourism - continued

Organizational management	131	2.38	7
Fruit/crop techniques	125	2.08	8
Quality managenment	122	2.03	9
Technological up-grading	115	1.91	10
Quality regulation of crops	114	1.90	11
Financial management	112	1.86	12
Propagation of fruit trees	108	1.80	13
Manpower management	105	1.75	14
Marketing management	98	1.63	15
Fisheries management	95	1.58	16
Garden management	93	1.55	17
Administration and supervision techniques	84	1.40	18
Recreation activities	81	1.35	19

Source: Author, 2011

In addition, crop techniques, quality management, technological up-grading, quality regulation, and financial management with mean scores of (2.38), (2.08), (2.03), (1.91), (1.90) and (1.86) in that order respectively. The other needs required include marketing management (1.63), fisheries management (1.58), garden management (1.55), administrative techniques (1.40) and recreation activities with a mean score of (1.35).

5.3. Prospects of Agricultural Tourism

Future prospects of agricultural tourism are perceived to be bright for Nigeria in particular and developing countries in general. If the future is bleak, nobody will adopt it as a means of livelihood. The respondents were enquired about what were the prospects of agricultural tourism and their responses were presented in Table 3. An improvement in income from the agricultural tourism was the most important prospect with a mean score (2.83) and was ranked first.

Table 3: Prospects of Agricultural Tourism.

Responses	**Total Score**	**Mean**	**Rank**
Improved income from the agricultural tourism	170	2.83	1
Better health environment	163	2.71	2
Growth of small scale agro-industry	163	2.71	2
More fresh farm products	160	2.66	4
Beautification of environment	154	2.56	5
Increased satisfaction	150	2.50	6
Better infrastructure development	147	2.45	7
Desire for peace and tranquility	135	2.25	8
Respect for local culture and heritage	132	2.20	9
Better life style	120	2.0	10
Curiosity in natural environment	117	1.95	11
Diversification of agriculture	102	1.70	12
Increased awareness with agricultural tourism	93	1.55	13
Increased employment opportunity	85	1.41	14
Recreation and entertainment	81	1.35	15

Source: Author, 2011

Both improved health and growth of small scale agro-industry were ranked second with mean scores of (2.71). The provision of fresh farm products for consumer was also an important area and was ranked fourth with a mean score of (2.66).

The other important prospects of agricultural tourism which were also rated by the respondents were beautification of the environment (2.56), increased satisfaction with agricultural tourism (2.50),

better infrastructure development (2.45), desire for peace and tranquility (2.25) and respect for local culture and heritage to tourists (2.20). Table 3 further indicated the importance of better life style with a mean score of (2.0) followed by curiosity in natural environment (1.95), provides diversification in agriculture (1.70), increased awareness with agricultural tourism (1.55), employment opportunity (1.41) and improved rural recreation and entertainment was ranked least with a mean score of (1.35). On the basis of result obtained, it can be concluded that prospects of agricultural tourism as a diversified agriculture sector is very bright in future.

5.4. Constraints to Establishing Agricultural Tourism

The respondents were further inquired in detail regarding the constraints they might face in the execution of agricultural tourism centre and their perceptions were presented in Table 4.

The difficulty in accessing loan for agricultural tourism was the major constraint likely faced by the respondents with a mean score of (2.85) and was ranked first. Limitation of the number of visitors was yet another major constraint with a mean score of (2.73), followed by inability to develop appropriate with a mean score of (2.65). The fourth constraint relates to inadequate publicity with a mean score of (2.55). The constraint of insufficiency of funds for advertisement ranked fifth with a mean score of (2.45), followed by inadequacy of organizational skill in the field of Agricultural tourism with a mean score of (2.33).

Table 4: Constraints to Establishing Agricultural Tourism

Responses	Total Score	Mean	Rank
Difficulties in accessing loan	171	2.85	1
Limited number of visitors	164	2.73	2
Techniques to develop it	159	2.65	3
Inadequate publicity	153	2.55	4
Insufficient funds	147	2.45	5
Inadequate organization skill	140	2.33	6
Lack of man- power to operate activities	138	2.30	7
Absence of motivation	131	2.18	8
Non-availability of suitable location	130	2.16	9
Problem of guidance and counseling	127	2.11	10
Poor incentives from government	114	1.90	11
Inability to meet demands of different ages	110	1.83	12
Lack of cooperation from agencies	107	1.78	13
Insufficient fund	105	1.75	14
It is time consuming	98	1.63	15
Poor transportation	93	1.55	16
Inadequate storage facilities	89	1.48	17
Inadequate market incentives	84	1.40	18
Unfavourable climate	81	1.35	19

Source: Author, 2011

Other constraints identified include absence of man-power (2.30), motivation (2.18), suitable location (2.16), guidance and counseling (2.11), and poor incentives from government (1.90). There are other array of constraints identified by the respondents and range from meeting the demands of different ages, inadequate cooperation from other related agencies, poor transportation, poor storage facilities, poor market incentives to unfavourable climate with mean scores of (1.83), (1.78), (1.55), (1.48), (1.40) and (1.35) in that descending order of performance.

6. Recommendations

There is urgent need for increasing public awareness about agricultural tourism. this view was buttressed by Taylor, et al (1993) that people were more interested in how their food was being produced, meet farmers and processors by talking and interacting with them about what went into the production of farm products such as chicken, eggs, milk, cheese, vegetables, carrots and more importantly was the behaviour of some animals. For many people who visit farms, especially children, the visit marked possibly the first time they would see the source of their food, how they were produced and can easily pluck some edible fruits from the farm. Indeed, it constitutes a more relaxing centre with natural environment and its beautification.

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of the tourism relates to sourcing for adequate capital for the initial take-off of the enterprise. But this could be tackled with the present fiscal policies of the government by introducing the micro-finance banks with the mandate to make credit facilities available to the public. However, the interest rate and string attached to the loan facilities should be relaxed in order to facilitate accessibility to the needed capital. Indeed, agricultural tourism is essentially capital intensive and may not be within the reach of poor rural communities. This agricultural tourism is strongly advocated for being adopted as a potent tool for transforming rural communities. It can serve as community development strategy if our government gives it the attention it deserves.

7. Concluding Remarks

The paper has attempted to establish the fact that agricultural tourism is a lucrative venture and should be encouraged in our localities. In all the quarters where the tourism is sited such as the one jointly established by the Zimbabwe farmers in collaboration with Kwara State government located in Shongai area of Edu local government area of the state. In addition, a similar agricultural tourism was established Sabuwa local government area by Katsina State government in collaboration with Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. In both cases, the centres have emerged as 'growth centres' for the respective communities in which they are being located. Indeed, the tourist centres did not only assist communities with solutions to help diversify their economic base but it also helps in understanding the important role that farming can play in betterment of rural life. Agricultural tourism projects reinforce the need to support local growers and sources and allow the visitor to experience what it is to be part of the land. This explains the need for planning and marketing in our rural community and weighing the pros and cons of tourism. Local citizen participation is helpful and should be included in starting any kind of a tourism programme. Popular participation in planning tourism can contribute to building a successful programme that enhances the community development.

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