

THE ROLE OF ECOTOURISM IN ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH IN NIGERIA

Jude U. Kujoh¹ Anthonia L. Anakwue² Benjamin Anabaraonye³

¹University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria. Email: judekujoh123@gmail.com

²Institute of Education, University of Calabar, Nigeria. Email: anakwuelaetitia@gmail.com

³University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. Email: benjaminshines@gmail.com

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Abstract

Nigeria is renowned for vibrant cultures, diverse ecosystems, and rich history, making the nation an ideal location for ecotourism enthusiasts. Through systematic literature review of notable peer reviewed academic journals, utilizing translation tools where necessary, this study identifies the role of ecotourism in enhancing sustainable economic growth in Nigeria. Findings indicate that ecotourism, a sustainable form of travel, not only provides visitors with unforgettable experiences but also plays an important role in preserving the environment, supporting local communities, and safeguarding cultural heritage. This study further discusses how ecotourism can help preserve cultural heritage while enhancing sustainable economic growth in Nigeria. It identifies that through the adoption of ecotourism, Nigeria's valuable ecosystems can be protected and the variety of cultures honored and preserved. This study recommends more moral, technical and financial support from Nigerian government at all levels towards advancing the role of ecotourism in enhancing sustainable economic growth in Nigeria. It concludes with a clarion call for more access to green financing towards enhancing eco-tourism in Nigeria.

Keywords: Climate Resilience, Ecotourism, Education, Nigeria, Sustainable Economic Growth.

1 INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a type of sustainable tourism that aims to promote the conservation and protection of the environment while providing opportunities for tourists to appreciate the natural and cultural heritage of a destination (Enunwah, 2023). Ecotourism is a form of nature-oriented tourism intended to contribute to the conservation of the natural environment (Onnoghen, Kujoh, Unachukwu, Orji & Anabaraonye, 2025). Ecotourism goes beyond mere sightseeing; it involves a conscientious way of travelling that emphasizes sustainability and preservation. It includes discovering natural marvels, engaging with indigenous cultures, and making a beneficial contribution to the environment and local communities (Durojaiye, 2024). Nigeria, with its diverse cultures and rich natural resources, has great potential for ecotourism development. Nigeria is a country with over 250 ethnic groups, each with its language, customs, and traditions. These diverse cultures and traditions are vital components of Nigeria's heritage, and preserving them is crucial for the country's socio-cultural development. Cultural preservation is essential for maintaining the identity and uniqueness of a society. Ecotourism can play a significant role in promoting cultural preservation by creating awareness and appreciation for cultural diversity among tourists and local communities. As tourists visit and appreciate different cultures, they develop a better understanding and respect for them. This understanding can lead to increased support for the

preservation of cultural heritage(Enunwah, 2023).Ecotourism helps the people to appreciate the beauty of nature and inspire new ways of preserving the environment. Ecotourism can also aid in nature education research which has been identified as one of the ways of enhancing climate resilience in Nigeria (Onnoghen, Idika, Anabaraonye, Ewa & Hope,2024). Ecotourism is centered around empowering local communities. Through the adoption of sustainable tourism practices, ecotourists play an important role in boosting the economy of communities living in ecotourism spots. Whether it's backing local craftsmen or choosing eco-conscious accommodations, each dollar spent by tourists on ecotourism serves as a driver for beneficial transformations, fostering job prospects, and enhancing the quality of life (Durojaiye, 2024).Ecotourism can work in hand in hand with eco-musicology and eco-theology towards enhancing climate resilience in Nigeria(Onnoghen, Nwafor, Odoh, Ewa & Anabaraonye, 2024; Onnoghen, Nwafor, Orji, Odoh & Anabaraonye, 2024). The impact of climate change is being felt on Nigeria's sustainable economic growth and therefore necessitates the role of ecotourism(Onnoghen, Orji, Olisah & Anabaraonye,2024). In a world facing environmental deterioration and cultural uniformity, ecotourism stands out as a ray of hope. It presents a sustainable alternative to traditional tourism methods, which frequently result in carbon footprints and cultural disrespect. Through the adoption of ecotourism, we protect the valuable ecosystems of our planet and honour the variety of cultures that contribute to Nigeria's distinctiveness(UNWTO, 2022; Durojaiye, 2024). Eco-tourism helps to enhance quality of life and explores green entrepreneurial opportunities available to the ecotourist(Anabaraonye,2024; Anabaraonye,2025). This study vividly explores the role of ecotourism in enhancing sustainable economic growth in Nigeria.

2 METHODOLOGY

Data used for this study is derived from systematic literature review of notable peer reviewed academic journals, utilizing translation tools where necessary. The researchers gathered materials for the research but summarized the characteristics of the papers that focused more on “the role of ecotourism in enhancing sustainable economic growth in Nigeria”.

3 HOW ECOTOURISM ENHANCES SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Sustainable economic growth is development that satisfies present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves managing economic progress in a way that is in harmony with the environment and social well-being, rather than solely focusing on short-term financial gains(Pettinger,2020). Ecotourism enhances sustainable economic growth in Nigeria by generating revenue through tourism, creating jobs in local hospitality and craft industries, and diversifying the economy away from oil dependency. It also contributes to economic development by providing funds for conservation projects, which in turn preserves the natural assets that attract tourists and protect local communities from environmental degradation. Here's a detailed look:

- i) **Revenue generation:** Ecotourism creates revenue through visitor spending in hospitality, transportation, and handicraft sectors.
- ii) **Job creation:** It creates direct employment opportunities in tourism services and indirect jobs in related industries like agriculture and crafts.

- iii) **Economic diversification:** By promoting ecotourism, Nigeria can reduce its reliance on the oil sector and build a more diverse and resilient economy.
- iv) **Support for local economies:** It provides a new and sustainable income source for rural communities, particularly those with natural endowments like rivers, mountains, and rich biodiversity.
- v) **Wildlife protection:** Ecotourism acts as a deterrent to poaching and habitat destruction, as tourists in protected areas help monitor and protect wildlife.
- vi) **Conservation funding:** Revenue generated from ecotourism can be reinvested into conservation initiatives, such as anti-poaching programs and habitat restoration.
- vii) **Sustainable resource management:** It promotes the sustainable use of natural resources by creating a direct financial incentive for their preservation.
- viii) **Environmental education:** It fosters environmental awareness among both tourists and local communities, promoting a culture of conservation.
- ix) **Cultural preservation:** Ecotourism can promote the appreciation and preservation of Nigeria's diverse cultural heritage by creating a space for cultural exchange and understanding.
- x) **Community empowerment:** It can empower local communities by involving them in tourism development and ensuring they benefit from the presence of ecotourism projects.

4. CHALLENGES TO ECOTOURISM AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION IN NIGERIA

Despite Nigeria's rich cultural and natural heritage, the development of ecotourism has been slow due to various challenges. These challenges include inadequate infrastructure, poor governance, insecurity, and insufficient funding. Additionally, the lack of awareness and appreciation for cultural diversity among Nigerians has contributed to the loss of cultural heritage. To address these challenges, there needs to be increased investment in infrastructure, governance, and security (Enunwah, 2023). This investment will not only help develop ecotourism but will also promote sustainable development. Let us explore the significance of ecotourism in Nigeria and why it is more important now than ever. Nigeria offers a diverse range of ecotourism spots, from the bustling streets of Lagos to the tranquil scenery of Badagry and beyond, all waiting to be explored. Nigeria's natural wonders, ranging from majestic waterfalls to dense rainforests, are not only visually stunning but also serve as crucial ecosystems brimming with diverse life forms. Ecotourism serves as a means to safeguard these habitats by fostering an understanding of their ecological significance and encouraging sustainable tourism practices. Whether exploring the green forests of Cross River National Park or admiring the magnificence of Erin-Ijesha Waterfalls, each ecotourist assumes the role of a guardian of Nigeria's invaluable natural legacy (Durojaiye, 2024). Nigeria's ecotourism industry, despite its vast potential, is hindered by various obstacles, such as insufficient infrastructure, environmental damage, and socio-political unrest. Nevertheless, with cooperation among the government, private sector, and local communities, these challenges can be overcome, paving the way for the industry to flourish. As we find ourselves on the brink of a new age, the significance of ecotourism in Nigeria is paramount. It goes beyond being just a recreational pursuit; it is a deliberate decision to protect the natural beauty of our planet, honor our cultural legacy, and support our local communities. Embracing ecotourism means embarking on a path of exploration, sustainability, and harmony—a path that offers to enhance our existence and protect Nigeria's riches for the future.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) There is great need for awareness creation across communities, cities, campuses and companies in Nigeria on the role of ecotourism in enhancing sustainable economic growth in Nigeria.
- ii) Technical, moral and financial support from the government of Nigeria is also vital to boost the benefits of ecotourism in Nigeria.
- iii) Green financing from multilateral organizations such as the World Bank Group will help to advance the role of ecotourism in enhancing sustainable economic growth in Nigeria (Anabaraonye, Ezuma, Emone, Olisah & Ewa, 2023).
- iv) Relevant policies and laws should be enacted by the government of Nigeria towards enhancing the role of ecotourism in enhancing sustainable economic growth in Nigeria.
- v) Adequate investment in infrastructure, governance, and security is pivotal in the development of ecotourism in Nigeria.

6 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Ecotourism can provide several benefits to Nigeria, including economic, social, and environmental benefits. It can create employment opportunities for local communities, promote the preservation of natural resources, increase revenue for the government, and thereby promote sustainable development. By promoting ecotourism, Nigeria can also promote sustainable development and reduce the negative impact of tourism on the environment.

AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

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