



Wildlife for Sustainable Development

Nigerian Journal of Wildlife Management

Nig. J. of Wildl. Mgt., 2021, 5(2): 1 - 7

<https://wildlifesocietyng.org/ojs/index.php/wildlifesocietyng-journal/index>

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ISSN 2735-9298 (PRINT) ISSN 2735-928x (ONLINE)

Perception of the Benefits of Nature-based Tourism: A Study of Dawaki Mountain-Hiking, Abuja Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The tourism sector contributes to the socio-economic benefits of nations and the well-being of individuals through alleviation of rural poverty and enhanced quality of life. The study focused on 'Dawaki Mountain-Hiking' in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria, as a catalyst for rural poverty alleviation. The study adopted interviews and a structured questionnaire to collect data. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. The study found that nature-based tourism is seen as fun, a catalyst for poverty alleviation, while mountain-hiking enhances good health and quality of life. Nature-based tourism is dependent on natural resources and can be harnessed optimally for the benefit of a nation. Therefore, developing countries like Nigeria should look into the potential benefits of nature-based tourism in addition to biodiversity benefits.

Keywords: Nature-based tourism, mountain hiking, perception, poverty alleviation,

INTRODUCTION

Rural areas occupy significant areas in the development of nations, and rural tourism is regarded as a whole scheme for revitalizing the economy of any country (Cao, Xie, Liu, & Liu, 2016; Mbina, 2015). UNWTO (2017), and Strydom, Mangope, and Henama (2018) report that tourism has become the primary source of economic growth, employment, earnings, and foreign exchange, and considered by developing countries as the principal instrument for development, growth, and poverty alleviation which benefits cut across industries. In recent years, natural areas in tourism management have become a preferred recreation area for people looking for an escape from busy routine lives, especially in commercial cities where traffic is an issue. Thus, tourists nowadays seek nature-based tourism destinations to experience a serene environment. Hence, unattractive destinations have become attraction centers among tourists nowadays like snow, spa, lake, and monuments

(Cappucci *et al.*, 2015). Nature-based tourism refers to all tourism experiences that cover wild or natural environments. Also, it refers to a relatively undisturbed natural environment that formed the primary attraction. It includes consumptive adventurous and non-consumptive contemplative activities inclusive of ecotourism (Buckley, 2010). These are bird watching, photography, stargazing, camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, and visiting parks. Nature-based tourists are concerned with experiential diversity on natural and cultural resources.

One of the nature-based tourism is 'mountain hiking.' Hiking has been described as one of the most significant segments within nature-based tourism (Mason *et al.*, 2013). Hiking is defined as 'walking,' 'trekking,' 'rambling,' 'strolling,' and 'bushwalking' (Nordbo, Engilbertsson, & Vale, 2014; Dunlap & Heffernan, 1975). In mountain regions like Abuja, Nigeria, hiking is usually seen as the most important recreational activity, providing revenues for the local people. Hence,

rural tourism destinations are on the increase in facilitating nature-based experience in addition to the promotion of good health and well-being (Smith and Puczko, 2014). Hiking is influenced by social, environmental, and managerial factors that vary over time. Nordbø and Prebensen (2015) found that little research has been conducted on hiking from the customers' point of view. Besides, previous research indicates a lack of information on the diversity of hikers and the changes related to hiking preferences and rural revenues.

Mountain regions and protected areas like national parks are considered the most important recreational activity in tourism, providing revenues to the local communities (Mayer, 2014). It is, therefore, observed that rural tourism destinations are increasing because of their socio-economic benefits to the host communities (Smith & Puczko, 2014). For instance, Ween and Abram (2012) found that physical activities during vacations are becoming more and more popular. Thus, several rural communities promote nature-based tourism to attract tourists. Undertaking a walk through the countryside for pleasure; was developed in the 18th century in Europe. The idea came in the awakening of the Romantic Movement. This idea changed attitudes to landscape and nature. Before then, those that walked or hiked were regarded as people with poverty. It is a time known as vagrancy (homelessness). Today, hiking in tourism management is an appreciative recreational activity compared to hunting and fishing, wasteful activities. Also, Nordbø and Prebensen (2015) found that 'family togetherness,' 'appreciating natural resources and health,' 'escaping from everyday routine,' and 'adventure and friendship' served as the critical factors for hiking. Chen, Prebensen, Chen, and Kim (2013) found that various nature-based motivations include physical and mind-related benefits. Thus, it is observed that hiking does facilitate not only physical benefits but also mental benefits. On this premise, Cetin and Sevik (2016) found that nature-based tourism has potential as a recreation area for health tourism. Furthermore, Hrnčiarová *et al.* (2018) note that mountain areas, especially as part of National Parks or listed in UNESCO World Heritage Sites, are increasingly becoming popular for hiking, trekking, climbing, and other forms of recreation (Apollo, 2017). Furthermore, Davies (2018) states that hiking is a universal tourist activity,

encompassing the full range of recreational participation, which entails short and long-distance walking. While, Probstl-Haider, Lund-Durlacher, and Antonschmidt (2018) opined that mountain hiking plays an essential role in the portfolio of leisure and tourism activities, thus known in the growing parlance of activities as the second and third stage of rural tourism (Lane & Kastenholz, 2015).

Lai, Hsu, and Wearing (2016) found that in the context of leisure, recreation, and tourism, mountains are more than physical or geographic entities; they are focal points in many regions and represent diverse aesthetic and wilderness qualities that are appreciated, glorified and conquered. Therefore, they are described as sacred places of cultural and spiritual importance, symbolizing the collective identity of a specific geographical location. This study examines mountain-hiking as an instrument of rural poverty alleviation in Dawaki, Abuja.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

Dawaki (Figure 1 and Plate 1) is a suburb northwest of Nigeria's Capital City, Abuja. It is under the administration of the Bwari Area Council (BAC), one of the 6 area councils in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Dawaki sits near Gwarinpa and Katampe to the east. In contrast, Kubwa forms the boundary of the district to the west. Karsana is positioned to the South. The Murtala Mohammed Expressway passes by the neighborhood, leading directly to The Central Area in one direction and the Abuja-Kaduna Highway in the other. Dawaki is a suburb of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), located to the North-West of Nigeria's Capital City, Abuja. Dawaki sits near Gwarinpa and Katampe to the East, while Kubwa forms the district's boundary to the west, and Karsana is positioned to the South. It has leveled plane lands. The indigenous people are Gbagi, who are predominately farmers. Some civil servants reside in Dawaki because of its proximity to Federal Capital Territory. It has become increasingly popular due to the district's affordability and its excellent location outside Abuja city. Although mainly residential, business activities are expanding in and around the area. Many amenities are only minutes away, and the

close community gives this district a sense of security.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study adopted an observational rapid field survey procedure as Malgosia, Asmelash, and Micheal (2013) recommended. The target population was the youths and adults who visited the study site over three weeks. Data were

obtained using interviews and a structured questionnaire and was administered to 120 respondents randomly selected. The discussion centered on nature-based tourism as an instrument of alleviating poverty, enhancing rural development, and improving quality of life. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages and frequencies).



Figure 1: The Google map of the Study Area



Plate 2: Plateau of the Dawaki Mountain

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The majority (55%) of the respondents were male, and the dominant (90.00%) age bracket was between 11 and 40

years which is considered a young age. The respondent's marital status shows that 60.8% were married, 30.8% single, 5% widow, and 3.3% divorced. Also, their educational status shows that

45.8% had primary education, 26.7% had non-formal education, and 18.3% had secondary school education, while only 9.2% had tertiary education. This study revealed that 45.8% of the respondents were Muslim, 42.5% were Christians,

and 11.7% were traditionalists. Furthermore, 24.2%) of the respondents were into trading, while artisans, students, farmers, applicants, and civil servants constituted 18.3%, 18.3%, 15%, 15%, and 9.2% of the respondents, respectively.

Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

Title	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Sex		
Male	66	55.0
Female	54	45.0
Age		
11–20	25	20.8
21–30	42	35.0
31–40	23	19.2
41–50	14	11.7
51–60	14	11.7
61+	2	1.7
Marital status		
Single	37	30.8
Married	73	60.8
Divorced	4	3.3
Widow	6	5.0
Education		
Non-formal education	32	26.7
Primary education	55	45.8
Secondary education	22	18.3
Tertiary education	11	9.2
Religion		
Christianity	51	42.5
Islam	55	45.8
Traditional worshippers	14	11.6
Occupation		
Farmers	18	15.0
Civil servants	11	9.2
Trader/business	29	24.1
Artisans	22	18.3
Students	22	18.3
Applicant (job-seeking graduates)	18	15.0

Table 2 shows the respondents' responses to some benefits of nature-based tourism in the study area. It reveals that 85.0% of the respondents thought that nature-based tourism is a tool to alleviate poverty, 81.7% indicated that mountain hiking

could enhance rural development. In comparison, 95% of the respondents agreed that nature-based tourism such as hiking improved their quality of life. Similarly, 78.3% saw nature-based tourism as fun, enhancing mental health in the study area.

Table 2: Respondents' perceptions of benefits of nature-based tourism

Variables	SA	A	U	D
Nature-based tourism alleviate poverty	62.5%	22.5%	9.2%)	5.8%
Mountain hiking enhanced rural development	52.5%	29.2%	10.0%	8.3%
Nature-based activities such as mountain hiking enhanced quality of life	87.5%	7.5%	4.2%	0.8%
Nature-based tourism is seen as fun and enhances mental health.	55.8%	22.5%	5.8%)	15.8%

DISCUSSION

The respondents' socio-economic characteristics, which show that most of the respondents were male, are consistent with the sex ratio of Nigeria's population of 1.06 males to one female (CIA, 2014). The dominant age bracket of the respondents agrees with the report of NMEC (2008) that the predominant age group in Nigeria falls between ages 15 and 64 years. It also agrees with Oladokun *et al.* (2014) in their study regarding the protection of Osun-Osogbo Grove for ecotourism development. It is also in tandem with the age group observed by Gana (2018) on rural tourism as a tool for rural development. However, the educational status of this study exceeds the estimated 59.6% interviewer indicated by NLS (2010). This result shows that most respondents perceived that nature-based tourism is beneficial. Respondents' religions align with the findings of Oladokun *et al.* (2014) and Gana 2018 in similar work where more Muslim respondents were recorded than Christian. Most respondents believed that nature-based tourism served as a catalyst for poverty alleviation based on their understanding of some parks in Abuja as they offer significant livelihood benefits to the local communities. An increase in livelihoods for local communities leads households to conserve and protect the environment in the study area actively. Thus, ecotourism has a positive contribution to local communities and the environment.

Most of the tourists found in 'Dawaki Mountain' are predominately the youths, and their motivation for visiting the mountain was for fun. However, these visiting tourists enhance the social and economic development of the rural area where they go to catch fun. The respondents revealed that nature tourism has a positive impact on human health. The study showed that participating in mountain hiking is motivated by many factors, including enhancing the quality of life. This observation corroborates the findings by Davies

(2018) that hiking is inspired by various degrees of factors ranging from social to cultural dimensions of places and health tourism. Cetin *et al.* (2016) also reported that mountain hiking enhances physical and mental well-being. Hence, people should be encouraged to participate in mountain hiking for mental well-being purposes and socio-economic benefits.

CONCLUSION

Nature-based tourism is a natural resource that can enhance mass tourism for human benefit. Therefore, developing nations like Nigeria should look into the potential benefits of biodiversity to the rural communities where they are located. It is imperative because tourism earns foreign exchange, creates employment, and enhances mental well-being, hence, nature-based tourism should not be left untapped by the government and potential investors.

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