



Wildlife for Sustainable Development

Nigerian Journal of Wildlife Management

Nig. J. of Wildl. Mgt., 2020, 4(2): 38 - 54

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

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

Potentials for Sustainable Tourism Development in Andoni and Opobo/ Nkoro Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the potentials for sustainable tourism development in Andoni and Opobo/ Nkoro local government areas in River state. Data were collected through questionnaire, observation and in-depth interview. A set of questionnaire was administered to household respondents in Ikuru (40), Ilotumbi (19), Oyorokotor (64), Epellema (20), Opobo town (263) and Queens's town (40) in proportion to population size. Total of 446 respondents were sampled. Data collected were subjected to descriptive analysis. Festivals (89.47%), Islands (82.05%); fishing (81.03%) and wild animals (80.22%) were the major tourist attractions in the study area. In Opobo, ancient land marks and relics of ancient instrument of warfare for defense of ancient kingdoms and chiefdoms, such as King Jaja's monument (100%), and canon (100%) amongst others are still preserved. Tourist attractions in the area are underutilized and can be harnessed for sustainable tourism development. The government should establish tourist centers in Opobo to preserve the cultural heritage in the area.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, environmental resources, economic empowerment, rural development, culture

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a very unique sector that influences other social and economic activities that contribute positively to man's development. With tourism many aspects of man's occupation and environment (accommodation and business, catering, transportation, education, religion and telecommunication etc.) can be vibrant and marketable. Many countries have discovered the importance of tourism in sustaining economic growth and development and proceeded to adopt tourism

as not just a means for revenue generation (Ijeomah, 2007) but as a sector that can foster sustained growth and development. According to World Tourism Organization (WTO), one out of ten jobs worldwide depends on tourism, and international tourism arrivals reached 1.5 billion in 2019 (UNWTO, 2019). Tourism has grown to become the major component of economic strategies for development (Williams and Show, 1991) being a valuable strategy for creating jobs and sustaining economic growth and development in many

countries. Most countries in Africa have been consistent in tourism development and investment by identifying and developing tourist destinations with good tourist attractions and infrastructural facilities. Tourist attractions, whether natural or man-made bring about visitation, thus offer services that can enhance tourist experiences and satisfactions in a destination. Effective management of these attractions can improve the condition of eco-destinations to provide benefits such as economic empowerment, employment opportunities, wildlife conservation, preservation of local cultures, value addition to local products, and foreign exchange earnings, thus bringing about sustainable tourism development. Sustainable tourism development attempts to make low impact on the environment and local culture while enhancing the conservation of wildlife resources and generate income and employment opportunities for the local people (UNWTO, 2021).

Misinterpretation on the value and use of tourist attractions in an eco-destination can affect its maintenance and sustainable utilization. In the absence of proper management of tourist attractions and infrastructural facilities, eco-destinations can be dilapidated; which limits the development of sustainable tourism in the area. Absence of tourist attractions in an eco-destination can affect tourist satisfaction; reduce tourists' period of stay, level of visitation and spending. Poor infrastructural facilities constitute a serious barrier to sustainable tourism development in tourist destinations in Nigeria (Ashikodi, 2011). Poorly maintained roads, seaports, airport facilities, railways; lack of portable water; poor electricity supply etc. hinder tourist impetus to visit tourist destinations in Nigeria in spite the marketing efforts put in place.

The deplorable states of tourist attractions, infrastructural facilities etc. are strategic competitive disadvantages because they

discourage tourists from visiting eco-destinations in Nigeria. Put in another way, the conditions make tourists to seek for experiences in other countries thereby reducing the patronage of eco-destinations in Nigeria. Research has also shown that prevalence of armed smuggling, kidnappings and bomb blast in recent times also makes it difficult for tourists to patronize tourist destinations. However, the prospects and challenges of sustainable tourism development in some ancient kingdoms of the Niger delta are yet to be documented. Knowledge of the attractions and their respective awareness level and popularity among both host community members and potential tourists is sacrosanct in predicting the visitation share an eco-destination gets from the competitive tourism market. It therefore becomes imperative to study the sustainable tourism development potentials of Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro, being coastal areas that are culturally inclined, with histories of ancient kingdoms and chiefdoms of global attention as regards to colonization and the slave trade in Nigeria. The objectives of the study are to 1) identify and assess the awareness of potential tourist attractions in the study area, 2) determine the prospects of sustainable tourism development in the study area, 3) identify the challenges of sustainable tourism development in the study area, and 4) recommend ways of improving sustainable tourism in the study area

METHODOLOGY

The Study Area

The study area is Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Areas in River State (Figure 1). Andoni local government area lies between Latitude 4°26' 40" N and 04° 35' 00" N and longitude 7° 16' 30" N and 7° 33' 00" N (Richard and Chima, 2016). It covers an area of 233Km² and has a population of over 217,924 (at the 2006 census) (NPC, 2006). It's headquarter is located at Ngo town. Towns and villages in Andoni are situated on four

Queens town and Epellema etc. It is located on 4°30'41"N and 7°32'24"E. It covers a land area of 130km² and has a population of over 152,833 (at the 2006 census) (NPC, 2006). Its council headquarters situated at Opobo main town. Communities in Opobo especially Queen's town has boundaries with Andoni communities. People from these communities are culturally inclined and have fishing as their major occupation.



size 10) in Opobo (5,259), Oyorokotor (1,281), Ikuru (874), Queens town (804), Epellema (403) and Ilotumbi (371) were estimated. Five percent of the estimated number of households in Opobo (263), Oyorokotor (64), Ikuru town (40), Queens town (40), Epellema (20) and Ilotumbi (19) were sampled. Thus a total of Four hundred and forty six households were sampled in the six communities (Figure 1). Household was used as a unit of data collection because it is a basic economic unit.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data used for this study were collected through administration of questionnaire (to household representatives in the selected communities). This was complemented with observation of areas with potential tourist attraction, and in-depth interview of four members of each community who have spent at least ten years in the study area and are therefore very aware of the environment as regards to tourism. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics (Percentage, frequency counts, tables and chats).

RESULTS

Results on tourist attractions in order of popularity are presented from Table 1 to 4. Table 1 shows that most respondents in Oyorokotor indicated fishing (81.03%) and monument (79.00%) as popular tourist attractions. Island (82.05%), wild animals (77.05%) and festivals (77.05%) were indicated as the major tourist attractions in Ikuru town, while festival (89.47%) top the list of attractions in Ilotumbi. In the case of

Opobo/Nkoro local government area (Table 2), wild animal (80.22%), Island (79.84%), King Jaja's monuments (79.84%) and festivals (78.32%) were listed by most respondents as the top tourist attractions in Opobo main town while festivals (100%), Island (100%), creek/beach (97.05%), wildlife species (70.00%) and fishing (67.05%) take the lead of tourist attractions in both Queens town and Epellema (Table 2). This shows that Opobo, Queen's town and Epellema are rich in natural and cultural tourist attractions. As presented in Table 3, Nwamtam (100%) is a popular and commonly practiced cultural festival in Andoni followed by Ekekpe (85.09%), Egwu-eni (78.94%) and Ekparu (65.00%). This shows that Nwamtam cultural festival is a common cultural festival played in all communities in Andoni in addition to the different cultural festivals indigenous to each community. Nwamtam (95.00%), Boat regatta (85.93%) and fongu (69.96%) topped the list of cultural festivals indicated by respondents in Opobo LGA (Table 4). This shows that communities in Opobo have a common history and origin.

Table 1: Awareness of tourist attractions in Andoni Local Government Area

S/N	Community	Tourist attraction	Frequency	Percentage
1	Oyorokotor	Fishing	52	81.03
		Monuments	51	79.00
		Forest vegetation	48	75.00
		Marriage occasion	48	75.00
		Wild animals	46	71.09
		Fishing port	45	70.03
		Masquerade	44	68.08
		Festivals	43	67.02
		Island	40	62.05
		Creek/Beach	33	51.06
		Cawries	24	37.05
		Mangrove swamp	22	34.04
		Ancient buildings	22	34.00
		Ancient currency	16	25.00
		War drum	9	14.01
		Coronation	7	10.09

2	Ikuru	Island	33	82.05
		Wild animal	31	77.05
		Festival	31	77.05
		Trade	22	55.00
		Marriage occasion	22	55.00
		Forest vegetation	21	52.05
		Ikuru palace	21	52.05
		Ancient gongs	19	47.05
		Masquerade	19	47.05
		1st Anglican church in Andoni	17	42.05
		Monuments	16	40.00
		Fishing	16	40.00
		War drum	14	35.00
		Creek/beach	14	35.00
		Mangrove swamp	12	30.00
		Fishing port	6	15.00
		Ancient building	5	12.05
3	Ilotumbi	Festivals	17	89.47
		Marriage occasions	16	84.21
		Island	15	78.94
		War drum	14	73.68
		Fishing port	14	73.68
		Ancient building	14	73.68
		Mangrove swamp	13	68.42
		Wild animals	12	63.15
		Masquerade	12	63.15
		Trade	9	47.36
		Creek/beach	7	36.84
		Monuments	7	36.84
		Fishing	5	26.31
		Forest vegetation	5	26.31
		Ancient currency	2	10.52
		Ancient gongs	2	10.52
		Cawries	1	5.26

Source: Field survey, 2018

Table 2: Awareness of tourist attractions in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area

S/N	Community	Tourist attraction	Frequency	Percentage
1	Opobo main town	Wild animals	211	80.22
		Island	210	79.84
		King jaja monuments	210	79.84
		Festival	206	78.32
		Marriage occasions	180	68.00
		Trade	167	63.49
		War canoe	146	55.51
		King jaja grave	141	53.61
		Manilla tree	131	49.08
		Mangrove swamp	123	46.76
		Ancient bell	121	46.00
		Creek and beach	113	42.96
		Fishing	82	31.17
		Ancient building	79	30.03
		Monuments of past heroes	69	26.23
		Gigi	67	25.47
		Canon	66	25.09

2	Queens town	Remains of old king jaja palace	64	24.33
		War drum	41	13.68
		Nipa palm	27	10.26
		Ancient pot	25	9.05
		King jaja new palace	24	9.12
		Ancient gong	22	8.36
		Ancient tank	21	7.98
		Mgbede(tieing of wrapper)	16	6.08
		Cawries	8	3.04
		City gate	6	2.28
		Fishing port	5	1.09
		Festival	40	100
		Island	40	100
		Creek/beach	39	97.05
		Wildlife species	28	70.00
		Fishing	27	67.05
		Ancient building	26	65.00
		War drum	26	65.00
		Marriage occasions	23	57.05
		Trade	22	55.00
		Monuments of past heroes	22	55.00
		Forest	20	50.00
		Ancient bell	19	47.05
		Fishing port	15	37.05
		War canoe	8	20.00
		Mangrove	7	17.05
		Canon	3	7.05
3	Epellema	Cawries	3	7.05
		Festival	40	100
		Island	40	100
		Creek/beach	39	97.05
		Wildlife species	28	70.00
		Fishing	27	67.05
		Ancient building	26	65.00
		War drum	26	65.00
		Marriage occasions	23	57.05
		Trade	22	55.00
		Monuments of past heroes	22	55.00
		Forest	20	50.00
		Ancient bell	19	47.05
		Fishing port	15	37.05
		War canoe	8	20.00
		Mangrove	7	17.05
		Canon	3	7.05
		Cawries	3	7.05

Source: Field survey, 2018

Table 3: Cultural festivals in Andoni Local Government Area in order of awareness

S/N	Community	Cultural festival	Frequency	Percentage
1	Oyorokotor	Nwantam	59	92.02
		Ukekpe	55	85.09
		Efit-ukpoo	33	51.06
		Afala	3	4.07
		Agaba	2	3.01
		Ukah	2	3.01
		Akamiete	2	3.01
2	Ikuru	Nwantam	39	97.05
		Ekparu	26	65.00
		Egbelegbe	25	62.05
		Ukekpe	13	32.05
		Age grade	6	15.00
		Efit-ukpoo	6	15.00
		Afala	3	7.05
		Boat regatta	2	5.00
		Egwu-eni	2	5.00
3	Ilotumbi	Nwantam	19	100
		Egwu-eni	15	78.94
		Awaji-Ilotumbi	10	52.63
		Owu	2	10.52
		Ukekpe	2	10.52

Source: Field survey, 2018.

Table 4: Cultural festivals in Opobo/Nkoro local government area in order of awareness

S/N	Community	Cultural festivals	Frequency	Percentage
1	Opobo main town	Nwantam	250	95.00
		Boat regatta	226	85.93
		Fongu	184	69.96
		Jeki-alali	174	66.15
		Owu-ogbo cultural festival	119	45.25
		Masquerade display	103	39.16
		Iria marriage	94	35.74
		Mgbede(tieing of wrapper)	6	2.28
2	Queens town	Nwantam	39	97.05
		Boat regatta	21	52.05
		Fongu	17	42.05
		Owu-ogbo	13	32.05
		Age grade	7	17.05
		Asenti	1	2.05
3	Epellema	Nwantam	20	100
		Boat regatta	20	100
		Ogolo-nwantam	9	45.00
		Owu-ogbo	8	40.00
		Okonko and osukpe	7	35.00
		Masquerade	2	10.00

Source: Field survey, 2018

Results on challenges of tourism development in the study area were identified as difficulty in accessing the area in Queens town (87.05%), Epellema (82.60%), Opobo main town (70.52%) and Ilotumbi (58.62%).

Community crisis was indicated in Oyorokotor (57.08%) and Ikuru town (25.49%). This shows that insecurity is a major challenge in Andoni unlike in Opobo LGA (Table 5).

Table 5: Challenges of tourism development in the study area

S/N	Community	challenges to tourism development	Frequency	Percentage
1	Opobo main town	Accessibility issue	189	70.52
		None	38	14.17
		Weather condition	26	9.70
		Kidnapping	8	2.98
		Pirate	6	2.24
		Restiveness	1	0.37
	Total			100
2	Oyorokotor	Community crisis	37	57.08
		Restiveness	31	48.04
		Kidnapping	25	39.01
		Pirate	25	39.01
		Accessibility issue	18	28.01
		Cultism	8	12.05
	Weather condition	5	7.08	
Total			100	
3	Ikuru	Restiveness	25	49.02
		Community crisis	13	25.49
		Kidnapping	7	13.72
	Accessibility issue	6	11.76	
Total			100	
4	Queens	Accessibility	35	87.05
		Kidnapping	3	7.05
		None	2	5.00
Total			100	
5	Epellema	Accessibility	19	82..60
		Kidnapping	2	8.69
		Restiveness	2	8.69
Total			100	
6	Ilotumbi	Accessibility issue	17	58.62
		Community crisis	7	24.13
		Restiveness	2	6.89
		Pirate	1	3.44
		Weather condition	1	3.44
		Cultism	1	3.44
	Total			100

Source: Field survey, 2018

Results on the indicated ways of improving tourism in the study area were establishment of tourist center in Ilotumbi (57.89%), Ikuru (40.47%) and Opobo (36.70%), while in

Epellema (57.14%), Queen's town (43.07%) and Oyorokotor (29.54%), construction of road was mostly indicated as the way of improving tourism (Table 6).

Table 6: Ways of improving sustainable tourism in the study area

S/N	Community	ways of improving sustainable tourism	Frequency	Percentage
1	Opobo main town	Establish tourist center	127	36.70
		Completion of road under construction	56	16.18
		Establishment of industries and financial institution	46	13.29
		Construct good roads	37	10.69
		Improve existing tourist attraction	31	8.95
		Build museum	25	7.22
		Government intervention	9	2.60
		Development of existing Atlantic beach	7	2.02
		Reduce cost of living	6	1.73
		Create employment	2	0.57
2	Oyorokotor	Construct good roads	26	29.54
		Establish tourist center	18	20.45
		Government intervention	18	20.45
		Develop the community	17	19.31
		Political stability	4	4.54
		Tackle security challenge	4	4.54
		Create employment	1	1.13
		Total		100
3	Ikuru town	Establish tourist center	17	40.47
		Tackle security issue	8	19.04
		Develop the existing beach	8	19.04
		Construct good roads	5	11.90
		Government intervention	3	7.14
		Employment	1	2.38
		Total		100
4	Queens town	Construct good roads	28	43.07
		Establishment of tourist center	22	33.84
		Establishment of industries and financial institution	11	16.92
		Government intervention	4	6.15
		Total		100
5	Epellema	Construct good road	20	57.14
		Establish tourist centers	9	25.71
		Establish protected areas	3	8.57
		Electricity	3	8.57
		Total		100
6	Ilotumbi	Establish tourist centers	11	57.89
		Construct good roads	8	42.1
	Total			100

Source: Field survey, 2018.

DISCUSSION

The major tourist attraction in Opobo Local Government Area (LGA) is wild animals. Wild animals like Crocodile (*Crocodylus sp*), Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) and Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) are seen once in a while in the natural environment. Viewing of these animals interests tourists. Dung of Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) could easily be

sited in some communities and that brings some level of satisfaction to tourists but most tourists desire to view elephant. The presence of the species is most times dictated by flies and its foot prints. These wild animals were seen on regular basis many years ago especially the large aquatic organisms like Crocodile (*Crocodylus sp*) and Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibious*). Hippopotamus

could be seen by indigenes and tourists feeding on crops in farms close to the river side. Many tourists who visit Opobo main town during this period enjoyed viewing these animals in the natural environment while enjoying the cool breeze from the island. Presently, the wild animal seen regularly is the monkey. The high value placed on observing big games by tourists is evidenced and agrees with the report of Ijeomah and Duke (2016) that numerous tourists visit Finima Nature Park purposely to view the remains of Whale brought out by water waves from the Atlantic Ocean. This also corroborates the findings of Eltringham (1984) that wildlife is the major attraction in many eco destinations in Africa. Tourists enjoy watching big games (in their natural environment) including primate species because of their noise, agility and acrobatic displays as observed by Ijeomah (2012) in Jos Wildlife Park. In Queen's town and Epellema festivals are the main attractions- elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) is hardly observed in this community. Opobo/Nkoro LGA is rich in cultural festivals that attract tourists from within and outside Nigeria. Festivals in Opobo/Nkoro LGA are unique, interesting and educating to tourists and the local inhabitants. Festivals in Opobo/Nkoro LGA are celebrated during festive periods which usually are in the months of December, January, August and September. This shows that the communities have a time table for display of various attractions packaged in the form of events. The most cherished festival that attracts visitors globally is the Nwantam, which has a unique costume and cultural display. Festivals give tourists the opportunity to access many tourist attractions like cultural artifacts and historic heritages of the study area (such as King Jaja's monument and monument of past heroes). These artifacts and monuments that have influence on the national and cultural heritage sites are well protected and opened only during festive periods.

Festivals as tourist attractions in these areas have also influenced the development of tourist infrastructures like hotels and guests houses (of different standards) to satisfy the desires of various classes of visitors. The presence of these infrastructures has created employment for the youths in the community. This agrees with Cudny (2013) that festival gives access to tourist products that satisfies tourist needs. Similarly, the Argungun fishing festival has popularized the host community and local government area (Ijeomah, 2007). Island is a major tourist attraction in Ikuru town. The site is off the Atlantic Ocean and close to the rainforest in the community which has boundary with Queen's town in Opobo. It is fondly referred to as Atlantic beach which respondents perceived as the longest white sand beach in West Africa. Island attracts tourists from far and near. Many tourists visit Ikuru town every year to enjoy the serene beauty, cool breeze, sun bath, boat tour, boat regatta and night party that takes place at the beach. The Island is a habitat for large aquatic organisms like the whales, hippopotamus, crocodile and even the African elephant which sometimes comes out around the beach. This is similar to the report of Ijeomah and Emelue (2009) that the Pandam Lake inhabits hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibious*) as evidenced by numerous and obvious footprints in front of the lake. Interaction with respondents revealed that, the island (Atlantic beach) attracted a large number of tourists in July, 2017, who visited to view the remains of Whale, a rare species that was washed ashore the beach on the 6th July, 2017.

Fishing is the major attraction in Oyorokotor community. This is because of the large fishing settlement in the community which respondents perceive to be the largest fishing port in West Africa. This fishing settlement has large inflow of visitors on daily basis. People visit the fishing settlement for different reasons such as observing the landing sites of fish, different types of nets and fishing

techniques. Some visit to view water body and take pictures, while others visit the areas for buying and selling of fishes and other sea foods. The presence of this fishing settlement in Oyorokotor has created a lot of employment opportunities for different people such as the marine transporters and traders. This corroborates the findings of Ijeomah (2007) that fishing is the major tourist attraction in Arugungun during the popular fishing festival in the area which has become recognized by the UNESCO. Some tourists are attracted and fascinated by different artifacts and monuments in the eco-destinations. Some of the instruments and artifacts show traditional means of warfare, communication, entertainment, transportation; ways of recreation; punitive measures and styles of sanctions; symbols of judgment; traditional ways of honour and compensation, attributes and peculiarities of kingdoms and chiefdoms, organization and strengths of communities before civilization in the various communities. These artifacts confirm what many tourists have read and heard about communities in the study area especially Opobo. The Canon as an ancient firearm was used in fighting war. It was used to defend the Opobo people against their enemies and external aggressors. It is found in the town square, King Jaja's palace and in compounds of chiefs who were known to be warriors. In the ancient era, war was usually fought on water as the people lived mostly on island. The Canon was therefore placed in the front and back of the war canoe. War canoe was built in such a way that it can accommodate all the warriors and also maintain stability on water. The presences of Canon and war canoe are indicators that Opobo is an ancient kingdom that fought wars. Manilla tree is a cultural artifact that was given to the people of Opobo by the Europeans during their independence. It signifies freedom and wealth. This implies that King Jaja and Opobo people were set free from the Europeans (after colonization) and

thus expected to flourish in riches and wealth. The Manilla also serves as the symbol of authority that announces the arrival of the king in any place (palace, gathering or events) in Opobo kingdom. This is synonymous with the mace of the national Assembly and the traditional mace used by the Ibos.

War canoe houses are autonomous houses. It is only accorded to the houses which were involved during the Ibani war. There are a total of 67 war canoe houses with each having an Alagbo (Chief) and all the 67 Alagbo's make up the Alapu (Council of Chiefs) in Opobo kingdom with the king as the Amayanabo of Opobo kingdom.

The remains of king Jaja of Opobo ancient palace in King Jaja's compound, shows the people's value for culture and historic heritage. Similarly, Ijeomah *et al.* (2015) observed that most households in Oguta community preserve ancestral homes as ancient land marks and as relics to remember their history. The presence of King Jaja's monument and monuments of past heroes interests tourists and give insights about the history and culture of the people. Preservation of these cultural artifacts and historic heritage enhances continuous tourism - a tourist visiting the destination for the first time derives satisfaction and will want to visit again knowing that these tourist attractions will always be there. Similarly, the remains of Ezeawa, the traditional ruler of Awa who was killed on the throne for refusing to vacate the throne and migrate with His subjects to another community when Oguta invaded His abode is still intact in Oguta as a tourist attraction (Ijeomah *et al.*, 2015). These monuments also show that the study area just like many communities in Africa had great leaders. The curiosities aroused by King Jaja's monument, and historical narrations given by experienced tour guides always brings a lot of satisfaction to numerous tourists

The ancient palace hall of the King Jaja of Opobo called Gula is a storey building built

with mahogany wood. The pillars, decking and beam were all built with non-polished wood over 100 years ago. The building portrays indigenous skills and crafts - local traditional technology in building. Observing King Jaja of Opobo's palace fascinates tourists as they commend the ancient organization of his kingdom. Similar fame of wisdom and skills manifested in organization of the palace of Solomon attracted many tourists including the famous Queen of Sheba (Bible, 2004; Ijeomah *et al.*, 2005). Gigi is a traditional boat specially decorated for use only during important events such as chieftaincy coronation or in honour of an illustrious son or personalities. Young boys wear different attires paddle and perform some display on the river.

The study area is endowed with unique and colourful festivals that interest different types of tourists. Some cultural festivals ranked by respondents in Opobo and Andoni LGAs are similar in all the communities. This shows that the communities have similar history and are therefore culturally related.

Nwantam, the most cherished festival by respondents is common in the study area. It is normally celebrated from 25th of December to 1st of January. Nwantam festival is a very significant festival to any Opobo person. This is because it is celebrated to mark the establishment of Opobo kingdom in Opobo land, an event which took place on the 1st January 1870. Before the commencement of the Nwantam cultural display, members of the dance group known as Ntuma in Queens town and Mkpa in Opobo main town, go to the cemetery and sleep there for seven days to appease the spirit of the ancestors of the town (i.e. Ndi Itchie) and fortify themselves with power. And as part of the processes of fortification, members of the Nwantam masquerade abhor food prepared by a woman but rather feed on only cooked or roasted yam, corn or plantain prepared by themselves. In Opobo, Nwantam masquerade is different

from others as it is the only masquerade that displays on the top of a roof without its heels touching the ground. It is believed that Nwantam masquerade festival brings good omen and grants protection to the town as it performs. In Andoni, Nwantam does not display on the roof but has its own unique cultural display. Other cultural festivals like Ukepke performed in Asarama, Oyorokotor and Ngo town on the 3rd of January and Ekparu (which is celebrated by Ikuru town on the 2nd of January every year), display on the top of a roof. This brings a lot of excitement to visitors especially children who normally watch with a lot of concentration. While the masquerade is displaying on the roof or is about to jump down, 'spiritually powerful' men from other visiting communities throw raw eggs and other types of charms on the masquerade as a way of testing his strength or his ability to withstand charms. This cultural display has been incorporated into a competition that attracts an award during Nwantam festival. The competition attracts a lot of tourists. Similar competition is performed among masquerades during the famous Ikeji festival in Arondizogu of Ideator North local government area, Imo state. However, in the case of Ikeji, with the aid of charm a goat is tied to a tree with a fragile thread, any masquerade that is able to untie and go home with the animal in the presence of other charm- carrying masquerades is termed the most powerful (Ijeomah *et al.*, 2009; personal communication).

Efit-Ukpoo is another cultural festival but celebrated mainly at night. Its display starts from 10pm and last for three nights. Efit-Ukpoo is a kind of occult group owned by the ancient fathers. Before it displays, the group stays in the bush for three (3) days to perform rituals to fortify themselves. It is less cherished by tourists due to changes in religious beliefs and the time it is performed. Egbelegbe cultural festival is common in the study area. It comprises different masquerades

such as the male, female and daughter (Ada). The Egbelegbe male has one face while the Egbelegbe female has two faces. Ada Egbelegbe masquerade has a camp and puts on ear ring. It is the biggest masquerade and cultural festival in Ikuru town. It is celebrated every two years unlike Nwantam and other cultural festival that hold every year. This cultural festival starts two weeks after Nwantam and Ekparu cultural festival and lasts for 14 days. During its display, women are not allowed to be outside.

Boat regatta is a cultural festival that is held every 31st December in Opobo LGA. The boat used is fondly called Gigi. Boat regatta is an ancient practice in Opobo kingdom. During this period, chiefs in Opobo normally use it to visit their settlement in Ndoki and Akwa Ibom state. These settlements may include fishing ports, palm plantation and their markets for traders. Over time boat regatta has been adopted as a tradition. Presently, boat regatta has been incorporated as a competition in which each regatta boat has its own team with the team members all dressed in beautiful costumes and the boat well decorated. This festival attracts tourists from within and outside the country. This agrees with the report of Ijeomah *et al* (2015) in Oguta, a riverine community in Imo state where boat regatta is practiced.

Fongu festival is one of the festivals that is celebrated in Opobo kingdom between August and September every year in honour of water spirits that migrate between August and September to celebrate on land. Respondents believe that Fongu festival is a declaration and a ritual to appease the water spirits. During the period of the festival, the Fongu cultural group members make sacrifices in the river banks, while the sacrifice is on-going, no non Fongu group member is allowed at the river bank and no speed boat is permitted to anchor at the jetty to avoid disturbing the process of sacrifice. At this time, the sea becomes obviously very rough with unassuming

increase in wave which the community believes is an indication that the spirits have accepted their sacrifice and therefore return home to celebrate. Most respondents believe that the Fongu festival prevents boats from capsizing or sinking and also promotes high harvest of fish during difficult seasons. Similarly Ijeomah *et al.*(2009) observed that during Akwu festival in Dikenafai community of Imo state, only members of Urashi cult are allowed to enter the Urashi River destination when sacrifices are taking place. Many tourists like listening to the tales of Fongu but dislike witnessing it.

Owu-ogbo festival is a festival that is coordinated by the Owu-ogbo society. Owu-ogbo is a central committee that is in charge of all cultural matters in Opobo community. This society was empowered by King Jaja and chiefs (who are also members of the Owu-ogbo society) to discipline citizens of the community who do not conform to cultural rules. This could be the reason the kingdom is relatively very peaceful and void of insecurity. This practice is in line with the principles of ecotourism (Ceballos - Lascrain, 1992). It monitors to ensure that cultures are preserved. This festival involves the participation of the entire masquerade dance group associated with the Owu-ogbo dance club. All the masquerades in the Owu-ogbo are drawn from different families by members of the compound who are in Owu-ogbo club. These masquerades participate in the festival that lasts for a maximum of 2 weeks. Each masquerade in the Owu-ogbo dance club takes the shape of a specific animal such as birds, hippopotamus, fish etc. During the festival, all masquerades appear from their places of seclusion and dance into the streets or open field to specific rhythm of the drums. The drum is played according to the type of animal the mask represents. In most cases the fish masquerade dances first followed by other different masquerades. Dancing of the fish masquerade before others can be attributed to

the fact that the environment is riverine community with abundance of fish. At the end of the two weeks of cultural display, the Owu-Mgbila declares the festival closed by cutting the Akassa (fish rack).

Weather condition can be a serious challenge to tourists visiting Island destinations especially during raining season. Nigeria has long period of rainfall and an increase in rainfall can affect the water level of Islands, thus making it difficult for speed boats to operate. It also causes flooding and makes the environment to be unpleasant for tourists. The wind also affects the movements of speed boats. Weather condition can affect transportation by water, hence affecting tourist's time of visitation to coastal destinations including beaches. This agrees with the report of Zangi (2005).

In communities like Opobo, Queen's town, Ilotumbi and Epellema, accessibility is the major challenge to tourism development. The means of access to these communities is mainly by water. Respondents who reside in these communities are used to water as their only means of transportation. However, they consider accessibility as a challenge to tourists who are afraid of water. Tourists with this kind of mind set would not want to visit these areas, rather will prefer destinations that are accessible by road. Despite these challenges the level of tourist visitation is high in these communities especially during festive period. Having water as the only means of transportation affects the rate at which people visit Queen's town and Epellema. The low rate of visitation adversely affects availability of speed boat. People outside Queens town and Epellema board speed boat to these areas through Akwa-Ibom state (Ikot-Ekpene) or Opobo main town. According to respondents, getting passengers outside market days and none festive periods or non-occasion is not easy. This makes speed boat going to Queen's town and Epellema to be very scarce and thus making transportation to these areas very

expensive. Majority of the respondents at Queen's town and Epellema emphasized that apart from the market days and festivals, they access the communities by speed boat only on chatter which is about twelve thousand naira (₦12,000:00) to and fro. Availability of good road networks in addition to the water ways can enhance easy access to coastal tourist destination and reduce the cost of visitation. This agrees with the work of Omisorie and Akande (2009).

Operation of sea pirate is one of the security challenges that affect the growth of tourism in the study area. Operations of pirates affect marine transportation, fishing and trading activities and make the environment unsafe for tourism to thrive. Sea pirates instill fear on marine operators and fishermen. The fear of being shot, robbed and thrown into the sea can affect sailing and tourist's decision to operate in a particular coastal area. The absence of marine boat operators in a particular route can as well affect tourism operation in that area. This could be the reason why the fishing settlement and other tourists' activities are not functional in Oyorokotor. This agrees with Ijeomah *et al.*, (2014) that coastal tourism can thrive in destinations where marine transportation and other activities are functional. Sea pirates can also affect the financial economy of the fishermen, traders, marine operators and the host communities. This confirms previous study by Ochia (2013) who concluded that anxiety and fear resulting from the activities of sea pirates affects the financial economy of the fishing enterprises and maritime operations.

Tourism cannot thrive where there is crisis. The issue of restiveness and community crisis is well pronounced in Andoni L.G.A unlike in Opobo/Nkoro L.G.A. Community crises and restiveness of youths, cult clashes and kidnapping affect the rate of tourists visitation in the study area. Awareness of different activities of restive youths on social media and radio in Ikuru, Oyorokotor and Asarama

scares and discourages visitation of both tourists and indigenes who reside outside the communities. Consequently, many indigenes of these communities have relocated to other parts of Rivers state considered to be peaceful. Other indigenes residing in Port-Harcourt city no longer visit their home town. Most of the communities are therefore filled with old men, women and children who have no place to stay in the city. This agrees with WTO, (2003) that insecurity affects tourist perception, choice of visitation and creates negative image among potential visitors. Ijeomah (2017) gave a similar report that many eco-destinations in Nigeria are faced with some forms of insecurity. These challenges can also be the reason for lack of development in Andoni as most of the infrastructures like roads have been abandoned by the Rivers state government; financial institutions are also unavailable. More so, the largest asset located in Oyorokotor community, the fishing port has been shut down due to cult clashes. This has affected respondents' source of livelihood which is fishing. Chukwuemeka and Vincent (2010) obtained a similar result. Due to crisis of leadership most communities in the Local government area have more than one traditional ruler. Each of the communities is fighting over the position of the community head and ownership of the area especially the largest fishing settlement which has been destroyed. Through oral interview respondents from Ilotumbi and Asarama are of the view that community crises have divided their communities into different segments with different chiefs and supporters. This implies that a tourist visiting this community for the first time might be directed to a wrong chief or ruler based on who he first approaches for direction.

CONCLUSION

Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) is a potential major tourist attraction in Andoni and Opobo. Other attractions include Islands, rich cultural

festivals and cultural historic heritage found in these areas. Tourists who visit these areas during festive period to witness the cultural festivals will gain more satisfaction from game viewing and sighting cultural artifacts and historic heritage. Other activities like Atlantic beach party, boat cruising, sun bathing can also be enjoyed by tourists who visit these potential tourist destinations. These activities can prolong tourist stay, motivate continuous visit to these destinations and create a good image that attract other tourists to visit the destinations. Preservation, protection and maintenance of the cultural festivals and heritage while improving the socio-economic status of the host communities and maintaining a healthy environment can enhance sustainable tourism development.

The study recommended that government should establish protected areas in Andoni local government area especially in Ikuru town to preserve the Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) in the area. This will enhance game viewing and create job opportunities for the youths. Government should establish other tourist centers like museum in Opobo to preserve the cultural heritage in the area. This can as well expand the socio economic prestige of the host communities and generate revenue for the state. Government should intervene in the community crises and youth restiveness in Andoni Local Government Area to bring about peace in the area. This can help to speed up developmental projects, improve business activities, attract international investors and enhance the inflow of tourist visit to the area.

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