POTENTIALS AND BENEFITS OF RESORT AREA DEVELOPMENT IN AGULU ORUMBA LAKE REGION IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract - A resort area is a complex tourism destination which takes care of almost all the needs of a tourist so that he does not look elsewhere to satisfy any of them again. These include accommodation, feeding, attraction, sports, communication, purchases, worship etc. A lake is a potential tourism resource and a locus of tourism development. Though a resort could be located anywhere, it makes better tourism sense to locate it near a lake or other fascinating natural features. Most natural resources, particularly lakes, in Anambra State and Nigeria generally have not been gainfully harnessed. With numerous lakes that dot the landscape of the state, it is quite surprising that none has been fully developed as a tourist resort destination in spite of their attractive and unique tourism potential. It is partly because of the absence of standard resort destination that many fun-seekers and holiday-makers from the state and its neighborhood often travel abroad for holiday. Developing a mega-tourist resort will hopefully fill this recreational vacuum, boost the local economy and add value to our ecosystem. The general objective of this research was to explore the prospects of developing a mega lake tourist destination in Anambra State. Specifically, the objectives were to examine the prospects of developing a regional lake resort in Anambra State. The research was guided by four research questions that align with the above objectives.

Key words: Area, Development, Resort, SWOT Tourism,

I. INTRODUCTION

To study a lake promises to be a very exciting academic adventure. There are several potential tourism destinations in Anambra State for future tourism development. Lake resource is one of them. These lakes have one or more water-filled depressions, but differ from each other in terms of their genesis, history, morphology, location, settlement structure, local culture, tourism traditions etc. In spite of their regional and in particular, local importance as tourism destinations, these lakes are still relatively unstructured both conceptually and functionally. It will be interesting to look at the way some Anambra State lakes destinations ultimately profile themselves; what functional wholes they form, their connection to the physical and spatial or cultural factors that are the prime determinants of their development. Such a survey makes it possible to assess the future development potential of lakes in terms of requirements of sustainable tourism and what it portends for the local people, the government, the environment and the private sector all in the spirit of Public Private Partnership. That is exactly what this research has done.

II. METHODOLOGY

Ethnographic methods were used to gather data and these included focus group discussion and in-depth interview. Documentary sources of information were also adopted to build data. Five lakes were selected for the study, namely – Agulu, Amaokpala, Omogho, Nanka and Ndikelionwu Lakes. Because of their nearness to one another, strategic locations and other favourable environmental factors, they were grouped into a regional tourist resort referred to as Agulu-Orumba Lake Resort Catchment Zone (AOLRCZ) for the purpose of this investigation. Sixty key informants were selected among knowledgeable opinion leaders, civil servants, students and academicians for the in-depth interview using purposive sampling method. Five focus group sessions were held within and outside the two local governments covered comprising discussants from town unions, civil servants and opinion leaders. Data collected were recorded in tapes and video, pictures and field notes. Data generated were analyzed qualitatively using SWOT analysis. SWOT means strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Tourism potentials in the development area

(i) The New Yam festival is a very important festival in Agulu and Amaokpala. It appears to be the only festival that has survived christianity with greater prestige and acceptance. Apparently, it has become a major festival in Igboland except that each community has its own date for the ceremony. The date for its celebration is enshrined in the constitution of Agulu Town and is observed like a Sunday as amounts to violation of the constitution for anyone to engage in any business enterprises within the town on that date. The festival was celebrated low keyed two weeks back at various locations before the grand finale. Flag off stage is at Afor market on the second Saturday in August each year by the traditional Prime Minister. He takes some yam with some of the council members from other villages and dance troup to a village square where he performs a ritual to mark the end of the planting season. After this, new yam could be sold in Afor market. At the expiration of the

ritual, all retire to the traditional prime minister's residence for entertainment. It is a taboo to sell or buy new yam before this ceremony. New Yam festival in Agulu is observed by both Christians and non-christians alike. Because of the usual mass return that greets the festival, many social functions and meetings were fixed within the period. This festival ranks with other major cerebrations like Christmas and Easter, and every Agulu person, rich or poor looked forward to it and hoped to witness it. Many families organise thanksgiving the following Sunday in their various churches to thank God for the gift of life.

A PROFILE OF TOURISM POTENTIALS IN AGULU ORUMBA LAKE RESORT CATCHMENT ZONE (AOLRCZ)

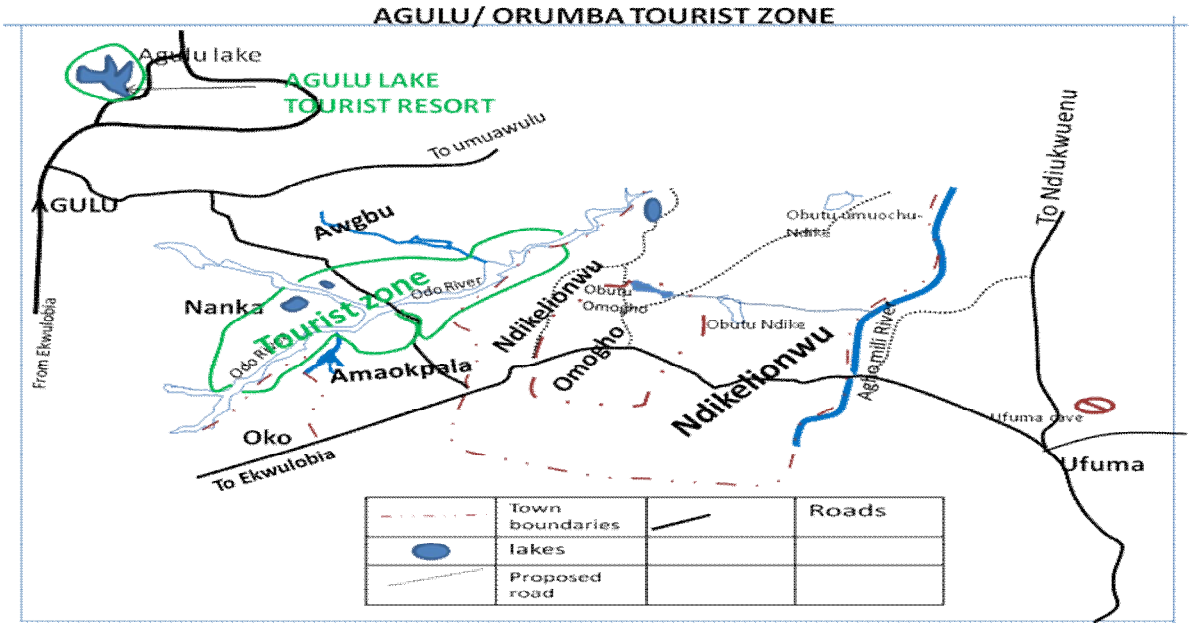


Fig. 1 Map of Agulu-Orumba Lake Resort Catchment Zone (AOLRCZ)

(ii)Ufuma cave

One cave in this region is Ufuma also known as Ogba Nnehi located in Ozegu village. Ufuma cave has a long history and just about one kilometer from Ufuma junction and another kilometer off the highway. The cave has a small running spring inside it. According to Denis Nwosu, a 102 year old chief priest of Nnehi deity, the cave is never worshipped though owned by the deity. The forest in which it is located is a shrine. It is visited only on Eke or Afor market days. This cave is in a terrible state of neglect. It has not even been listed as a tourist site in the Anambra State tourism inventory. The government at least can clear the cave and put a good access road in place. The spring near the cave is known as Iyiocha, the source is the Ogba which is said to be one of the most potable water fountains in the town. It is the family of Denis Nwosu that oversees both the forest where Ufuma cave is situated and the shrine that is attached to it.



Fig. 2 Ufuma cave (Ogba Nnehi), a potential tourist attraction

Going to the cave take about 25 minutes from main road through a thick virgin forest. One first of all descends into a deep valley known as 'Ukukoro Nnehi' which literally means the hollow of the Nnehi cave. The cave hangs on the other side of the valley. It is a rock cave with a sand covered entrance. Two tunnels are at the front of the cave, one to the left and the other to the right. One is bigger than the other. According to Denis Nwosu, the cave is as old as the village itself, and it chooses who looks after it in any generation. The left tunnel is for the lion and the other for other animals. Hunting is not allowed around the cave and a lot of wild animals abound such as lion, antelope, porcupine, monkeys etc. He claimed that various villages in the town used to come to the cave to assume the nature of any of the dangerous wild animals and go hunting to far places. They come back to put off the talisman before going home to enjoy the meat.

Agulu Lake (Ezu)

Geoelectric investigations show that the Agulu Lake is fed by groundwater contained in a silty sand unit of the Nanka sand. This enables the lake to maintain a near constant water level at all seasons (Onu, 2012). The lake is the source of the Idemili river. It occupies an area of 45 hectares (Ogbukagu, 1986). It also has an average depth of about 20m (Onu, 2012; Ogbukagu, 1986). According to oral information from indigenes, Agulu Lake, like Iyiocha Lake had a mysterious beginning. It was said to have visited one Oye Ugbene from Umuowelle village in form of a human being and requested for a piece of land on which to settle. He was mischievously offered an evil forest which he gladly accepted. Another day, the stranger visited again, and was offered kola nut as a sign of welcome. But while Oye Ugbene was still waiting for his wife for a wash-hand bowel, the visitor quietly touched his long heavy grey beard and washed his hand with water coming out from there. This very act terrified the host who began to contemplate that the guest might prove to become a dangerous neighbor. At their next meeting a heavy pool of water had developed on that land. When Oye Ugbene was still dismayed at what he saw, the bearded stranger went ahead and worked out a solid covenant with his benefactor. He promised that the lake will never harm or drown any member of his family or village. Also, he assured that no dangerous animal in the lake especially crocodile will ever harm any of them. He, however, prohibited anybody from killing the crocodile. This was a covenant between the stranger, the family of Oye Ugbene and his village, Umuowelle and all who would use the lake.

SWOT Analysis: strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
The lakes are many and near to one another forming a lake region	Lack of tourism awareness among the indigenes	A lot of undeveloped table lands for the facilities	Erosion menace threatens the two ends of the resort zone.
Beautiful natural location with serene and favourable climate.	Unsteady power supply and poor infrastructure	The resort is an opportunity for massive sport development in the state.	Indiscriminate clearing of shrines/groves and bush burning
Cheap labour, friendly and peaceful population	Government indifference to tourism development and poor policy implementation	Improving the standard of infrastructure in the state	General encroachment on the lands and unsustainable development challenges
A thick population of hardworking and industrious indigenes.	Too many myths and superstitions surrounding the lakes	Big businesses will boom and small supportive businesses will also thrive.	Foreign domination of business and imposition of western monopoly
Allied tourist attractions such as natural/cultural sites/festivals and caves.	Kidnapping and general insecurity in the state	Enhanced source of livelihood for the local communities	Kidnapping, political instability and reputational crisis of some politicians.
Strategic location to state capital and gateway to other states.	Uncontrolled rural urban migration	Redistribution of wealth and boost for rural development	Western globalization and relegation of local culture.

Table I

III. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

This chapter examined the data generated during the course of the field work from different sources. These data were presented, discussed, analyzed and put into perspective in light of the research questions. The details of the events and activities observed in the field were also given. All these were evaluated and presented below. It is from all these that some generalizations were made and conclusions drawn.

What is presented here is the data as found in situ in the study area. Even though economic considerations always drive tourism, it is crucial to bring into the purview other related areas that have serious influence on human life and development in the long run. These include geographical elements, social and cultural factors as well as natural and religious peculiarities. All these will form the bulk of the data so found and presented hereunder.

As envisaged, Agulu Orumba Lake Resort Catchment Zone (AOLRCZ) is an interesting natural tourist destination. It has all it takes to be an international tourist zone. These include local festivals, wrestling bouts, caves, beaches, erosions sites, cultural sites, traditional museums, local histories, agro-tourism etc. In this time of ecotourism when tourists are no longer impressed by exotic structures and continental dishes but the unique features and natural attractions, AOLRCZ will attract many tourists and investors. Not only that, the tourists will be given an unbeatable satisfaction for both their money and their taste, the investors will recover their capital in a record time.

The five selected lakes form a unique tourist resource and a regional lake destination.

These are:

(i) Ezu Agulu Lake
(ii) Iyiocha Lake Amaokpala
(iii) Ndikelionwu Lakes
(iv) Obutu Omogho
(v) Atama Lake Nanka

The individual lakes form a whole in terms of service structure. This lake region has a different implication for both the tourist and service providers. For the former, it is a functional whole in terms of transport and services beyond the lake as a physical structure. For the service providers, it is a development more challenges than other resorts, and demanding a higher tourism experience (Ryhanen, 2001). It will be very fascinating to see how all the lakes are built into one functional whole, forming a connection between the destination activities and the surrounding physical and cultural factors. This approach will provide an easier developmental feasibility and value-added advantage in the light of sustainable development.

The New Yam festival is a very important festival in Agulu and Amaokpala. It appears to be the only festival that has survived christianity with greater prestige and acceptance. Apparently, it has become a major festival in Igboland except that each community has its own date for the ceremony. The date for its celebration is enshrined in the constitution of Agulu Town and is observed like a Sunday as amounts to violation of the constitution for anyone to engage in any business enterprises within the town on that date. The festival was celebrated low keyed two weeks back at various locations before the grand finale. Flag off stage is at Afor market on the second Saturday in August each year by the traditional Prime Minister. He takes some yam with some of the council members from other villages and dance troup to a village square where he performs a ritual to mark the end of the planting season. After this, new yam could be sold in Afor market. At the expiration of the ritual, all retire to the traditional prime minister's residence for entertainment. It is a taboo to sell or buy new yam before this ceremony.

New Yam festival in Agulu is observed by both Christians and non-christians alike. Because of the usual mass return that greets the festival, many social functions and meetings were fixed within the period. This festival ranks with other major cerebrations like Christmas and Easter, and every Agulu person, rich or poor looked forward to it and hoped to witness it. Many families organise thanksgiving the following Sunday in their various churches to thank God for the gift of life.

IV. RESULTS

All the tourism resources in the zone were clinically assessed and appropriately studied and integrated. The research revealed sound prospects of setting up a mega-resort in the State given the positive socio-cultural indices. These include New Yam Festival that cut across the region, strategic location of the lakes, proximity to state capital, Awka, gateway advantage to nearby states, three surrounding airports within sixty kilometers distance, good road networks etc. The communities were willing to embrace the infrastructural development for the purpose. The research also indicated multiple socio-economic benefits waiting for the people such as more employment opportunities, more cash flow and stimulate local economy, treated water supply, steady energy supply, stadium, golf course, Shoprite etc. There are numerous cultural and natural sites and festivals to stimulate the resort and prosper it namely Ufuma Cave, Odinani Museum, Nri, Igbo-Ukwu Museum, site of Biafran Airport, Uga, Idemili and Ududonka Shrines (all in Agulu), 'Mysterious Odo River', Idemili Cultural Ofala, Ajani Shrine (Amaokpala) among others. Going by the research, it was revealed that the Private Public Partnership (PPP) is the positive way forward if the project will succeed enough. This is because the government may not provide all the financial power and operational efficiency required. Banks, professional bodies, churches and NGOs are potential partners. Anambra

State being well-endowed in lake resources can establish an international standard lake resort to serve both local and international tourists. In developing this resort tourism framework of Anambra State, Agulu-Orumba Lake Resorts Catchment Zone (AOLRCZ) has been proposed as a tourist zone. There are challenges but they are surmountable. The benefits have been weighed and found to worth the investment. The time to start is now. The first phase has begun with the on-going Agulu lake hotel resort. The development may continue in phases until the envisaged scope and magnitude are attained.

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