

The Challenges of Public-Private Partnership and the Development of Tourism in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *Public-private partnership is a recent phenomenon in the business of development in the State. Today, the term is used in government/private intervention in areas like health, transport, road construction, and tourism development. In Cross River State, the private involvement of the First Bank, Silver Bird, Dangote Group and Global Telecommunication Network like the Mobile Telecommunication Network in promoting tourism development is considerably great. With their contributions, tourism development especially carnival activities continue to flourish in the state due to the enabling environment provided by the private organizations. This study obtained information from the respondents through the survey research method utilizing both oral and secondary surveys of data collection. The analysis of data through a content review shows that much is still desired as the State is full to fully explore its tourism potentials. The study calls for more private sector involvement in promoting and marketing the tourism potentials of the State.*

Keywords: *public-private partnership, development, tourism, Cross River State*

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I. Introduction

The oil boom experience of the seventies and early eighties in the state created the impression that the government alone can fund socio-economic development projects in the state without the support of the private sector. Irbijaro (2010) stated that “the recent global economic recession which many nations including Nigeria witnessed with severe hardship changed this trend and brought new ideas which culminated in public-private partnership (PPP) as a new paradigm of development in the country”. As an engine for development, PPP serves as a potential means to actualize the expectations of the government and provide the citizens with development which they have yearned for since independence. Thus both the government and the private sector can partner under a legal framework provided by the state to achieve shared goals (Baker, 2010).

The term PPP means “a participatory, inclusive and continuous consultative process which is strengthened by business and social ethos” (Works Magazine, 2008). It also implies a continuous collaboration between the public and private sector which systematically focuses on achieving sustainable development goals, especially at the grassroots for common good. The process involves combining different initiatives to achieve a comprehensive development plan to accomplish socio-economic development which is capable of improving the conditions of the people, especially the poor. This engine of development attracts foreign and local investors and can expand the economic base if a state. It also serves a catalyst for growth and a litmus test for a visionary government. This economic formula has been adopted in recent times by many. These industrial nations are Germany, USA, India, China, Brazil, Qatar, Canada, and Japan (Baker, 2000). There are several funding options opened to projects which ordinarily should have been the sole responsibility of the government to provide. Some of the available funding options in PPP are built, own, Operate as well as transfer (B.O.O.T), joint venture, and participation. Other options are equity, franchising, and leasing.

In Cross River State, PPP as a sector-focused programme can handle major infrastructure project in the area of health, education, agriculture, transport, and tourism. But of significant consideration due to the need to expand the economic base of the state is the PPP involvement in the development of the tourism industry in Cross River State. Unfortunately, since the year of 2004 when tourism attracted the attention of the government, not much has been achieved in the development of the tourism industry. According to Basse and Ndiyo (2017), “annually, the government spends a huge sum of money to host artists and engage in carnival entertainment without a corresponding value in terms of improvement in what goes on in the tourism industry”. It is therefore against this background that this study is conducted to investigate the problems and suggest the way forward.

Prelude to Tourism in Cross River State

Tourism is a recent phenomenon which gained currency since the civilian administration of Governor Donald Duke. The state consists of pockets of ethnic groups which lay claim to diverse cultural and traditional dances based on different political history and patterns of migration. At the Northern Senatorial District, the following traditional dances exist Ugrinya, Abakpa, Akata, Agaba, Iwali (queen), Igbilli, Ikpaticama, Ikwum, Ekpatuma, Ayakaya, and Anyatom, etc. In the Central Senatorial District, the following traditional and cultural dances exist Etangala, Ebun, Ukwa, Obin, Kepu, Ekeledi, Okombu, Igban, Okombo, Udighede, Kokoma, and Usangama, etc. In the Southern Senatorial District, the following are the existing traditional and cultural dances: Ebiabu, Ekpe Masquerade, Ekombi, Abang, etc. All this cultural and traditional heritage of the different segments of the state never received government attention until in 2003 when the government decided to harmonize the various interests by setting up a committee that can bring reforms and boost the cultural values of the local people. The committee visited the Caribbean Islands especially areas like Trinidad and Tobago, Costa Rica, Barbados, etc. The recommendations of the committee crystallized into the carnival activities and the Obudu Mountain Race. The carnival activities were divided into children carnival, cultural carnival involving cultural dances from the local governments and the “carnival proper” which is the grand finale often broken into segments with beautiful costumes.

Recently, a new dimension involving power bike (motorcycle) was introduced which added more colors to the occasion. Carnival celebration is an annual event that takes place only in December. This is usually a dry season to give room for outdoor activities. It is usually full of fun and entertainment for tourists. During this period, the city of Calabar usually experiences a high influx of tourists coming to watch these activities. Major streets are always colorfully designed and the serenity of the environment keeps one at home.

Apart, from Calabar carnival, other tourism destinations include Obudu for sightseeing and entertainment of what is described as Obudu mountain race. This activity is thrilling on a mountainous plane where the environment draws you close to nature. Tourists get attracted to visiting other destinations like Mary Slessor Tomb, Ebom OX-Bow Lake, Marina Resort and Agbokum Water Fall and witness the famous Leboku yam festival which is usually in August. During these festive periods, business activities in Calabar, Obudu and the environs usually experience a high rate of return. Hotel accommodation is often too costly due to pressure as a result of a large number of tourists coming to the area for entertainment and site seeing.

Anam and Eteng (2018) opined that “the government plays the role of providing security and an enabling environment to ensure a hitch-free occasion”. In most cases, since tourism is mostly a private sector driven activity, the government enters into partnership to promote sustainable tourism development. The government has in time passed formed a partnership with such private sectors like Dangote Group and the First Bank PLC. These private groups provided funds that could have been the responsibility of the state government.

However, this option of entering into a partnership with the private sector was not to be taken as a tactical way of abdicating its role. This was deliberate to enable the state government to utilize its limited resources for other essential areas like health, transport, education, water, and repairs of road. His situation created a shared responsibility between the government and the private sector in Cross River State. The State as one of the states in Nigeria was predominantly known as an oil-producing state. Unfortunately, this naturally endowed state with abundant natural resources suddenly became a non oil-producing state due to the political maneuvering of the ruling class in seceding the part of the state called Bakassi (where oil is found) to the Republic of Cameroon under the GTA.

The challenges of tourism development in Cross River State

No doubt, tourism has significantly transformed Cross River State. However, the sector is faced with several challenges as indicated below,

- i. The problem of funding of the tourism sector: Establishment of facilities and infrastructure such as roads, hospitals, hotels, potable water, electricity, airports, etc., in and around tourism sites have been inadequate in Nigeria and Cross River State in particular as a result of meager resources often voted for tourism development.
- ii. Fast dilapidating of tourism facilities in the State. For example, facilities in the Obudu Ranch in Obudu L. G. A., Bebi Airstrip in Obanliku L. G. A.; Tinapa Business/Holiday Resort, etc are getting dilapidated.
- iii. Low advertisement of tourism facilities to the international communities. This limits the level of usage and patronage. Inadequacy of efficient publicity to keep both national and international tourists informed of existing tourist destinations, keep prospective tourists away.
- iv. Most jobs in the tourism industry are seasonal and most also poorly remunerated. Most times, after major tourism events like the carnival, the industry will lay off staff until another major event. This is a peculiar problem in Cross River State, where tourism experts move to other areas in search of better-paid jobs. This affects the development of the sector.

v. The insecurity of life and property also affects the influx of tourist in the State. With the increasing level of kidnapping, news of border wars, criminality and so on, the potentials of the sector is limited as most activities that should enhance the sector are taken elsewhere.

Public-private partnership and the development of tourism in Cross River State: the way forward

Drawing from the problems and limitations of the tourism sector listed above, in some ways, the private sector can play a key role in developing the potentials of the sector in the state.

i. Developing infrastructural facilities such as hotels, roads, in the state. Tourism is driven by infrastructure and equipment around tourism sites. The private sector can contribute significantly to enhancing basic infrastructural facilities to meet international standards. This will promote local and international interest in the sector.

ii. Funding of the tourism sector should not be left in the hands of the government alone. Most private organizations, like companies and banks, can sponsor research, events and promote tourism activities in the state. This is done to expand existing tourism activities and create new once in the state.

iii. The private sector can also take up the training of manpower in the tourism sector to enhance their capacity to international standard. Backed up with good remuneration of personnel working in the tourism industry, training for capacity building in the tourism sector will engender better service delivery within the sector

iv. Government and other stakeholders should ensure the safety of lives and property in the state. Effort should also be directed at improving the safety of the tourism sites by periodically spraying the environs to help attenuate the problem of tropical diseases such as malaria, etc. a safe state is required for effective tourism development in Cross River State.

II. Conclusion

The paper examined the role of the private sector in tourism development in Cross River State. The contributions of the tourism sector to the development of the State and national economy at large cannot be underestimated. The sector has contributed to the revenue base of the state, employment generation, growth in small and medium enterprises, infrastructural development, especially in local areas, improved social and cultural ties and reduction independence. However, the paper identified that the sector is faced with several challenges which limit its potentials in contributing to the economy of the state. The private sector is seen as a major player in the sector must achieve its desired full potential. The study, therefore, recommends the need for more private sector involvement in promoting the tourism potentials of the state.

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