

Article

Towards Inclusive Tourism Development: Unpacking Community Engagement in Nigeria's Ecotourism Landscape

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Abstract

This study investigates the critical role of community involvement and stakeholders' collaboration (CI&SC) in sustainable tourism planning and development (TPD) within emerging economies, specifically focusing on Owerre-Ezukala, Nigeria. Drawing on qualitative methods, the research explores the challenges and opportunities associated with CI&SC, highlighting significant issues such as community internal rifts, funding deficiencies, government engagement, elite domination, and exaggerated expectations. These findings challenge and complement previous literature, suggesting that while CI&SC in Nigeria faces notable obstacles; many issues are surmountable with proactive government interest in tourism development. The study emphasizes the necessity for an emic understanding of the socio-cultural and economic contexts affecting community engagement in TPD. By elucidating the dynamics between host communities and governmental stakeholders, this research aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, tourism practitioners, and scholars. The findings not only contribute to the theoretical discourse on sustainable tourism in developing nations but also serve as a comparative framework for similar regions striving for effective collaboration and community involvement in tourism initiatives. Further empirical research is recommended to enhance our understanding and implementation of CI&SC strategies for sustainable tourism development in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: *Community Involvement, Stakeholders Collaboration, Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Planning and Development, Ecotourism, Emerging Economies*

Introduction

The significance of community involvement and stakeholders' collaboration (CI&SC) in sustainable tourism planning and development (TPD) is increasingly recognized in scholarly discourse. Collaborative efforts among various stakeholders are essential for effective tourism development, especially in ecotourism, where local knowledge and community needs play a critical role (Kishan & Buddhi, 2023; Wondirad et al., 2020). This collaboration is crucial for pooling resources, harnessing local expertise, and facilitating community participation, particularly given the substantial impacts of tourism on host communities (Tosun, 2000; Mitchell & Reid, 2001).

Despite the theoretical support for CI&SC, many developing nations, including Nigeria, face significant challenges in implementing these collaborative frameworks. The need for empirical research that explores these complexities has become increasingly urgent, particularly in the context of tourism's potential to diversify economies reliant on oil revenues (Okonkwo & Odum, 2010; Odum, 2020). The tourism sector in Nigeria is confronted with various socio-political and economic obstacles, including elite capture, inadequate funding, and insufficient government interest in community-led initiatives (Adu-Ampong, 2014; Enemuo & Onuma, 2016; Ololo et al., 2018). Moreover, studies indicate that, despite advocacy

for stakeholder collaboration, community involvement in TPD remains marginal in many developing contexts, highlighting a gap between theoretical aspirations and practical applications (Fyall & Garrod, 2004; McComb et al., 2016).

The heterogeneous attitudes of residents toward tourism further underscore the importance of collaboration as a strategy to mitigate negative consequences associated with tourism development (Bengi & Gülşen, 2012; Li, 2004). Thus, CI&SC emerges as a prerequisite for the success of TPD. Advocacy for such collaboration has been prominent in West Africa, with notable instances in Ghana (Adu-Ampong, 2014) and southeastern Nigeria, where government-community interactions are essential for sustainable tourism development (Enemuo & Onuma, 2016; Odum, 2017; Ololo et al., 2018).

Despite the recognized benefits of collaborative practices, significant challenges persist, particularly in Nigeria. The absence of empirical evidence regarding stakeholder collaboration exacerbates these issues, making it difficult to assess the efficacy of existing frameworks (Fyall & Garrod, 2004, as cited in McComb et al., 2016). While theoretical frameworks suggest that collaboration and community involvement in TPD are feasible within developing contexts, their practical implementation faces considerable obstacles rooted in the unique political, legal, administrative, and economic structures of these nations, Nigeria included (Tosun, 2000).

This study investigated the dynamics of community involvement and collaboration among tourism stakeholders—primarily host communities and government—within the context of TPD in Nigeria, specifically focusing on Owerre-Ezukala as a case study. The choice of these stakeholders is pivotal: the government acts as the primary actor and financier of tourism programs (Odum, 2020), while host communities are directly affected by tourism activities, experiencing both positive and negative impacts (Hardy et al., 2002; Simmons, 1994, as cited in McComb et al., 2016). Ignoring the needs and insights of host communities can lead to the degradation of natural resources essential for sustaining ecotourism attractions.

Rationale for this study

Collaboration has been flaunted to be of immense benefit to TPD (Mitchell & Reid, 2001), likewise, community involvement (Li & Hunter, 2015), but this seems to have achieved limited success in developing nations, including Nigeria. Why? Moreover, the dearth of literature on the challenges of stakeholders' collaboration and community involvement in TPD in West African countries like Nigeria is a study worthy of academic exploration. Tourism has been pointed out as an 'economic-messiah', an alternative source of income for Nigeria's oil-dependent economy (Okonkwo & Odum, 2010).

Furthermore, some of the literature on collaboration and community involvement in TPD has pointed out some limitations in developing nations (Tosun, 2000), but such studies are theoretical. Empirical studies seem necessary to understand these challenges from the socio-cultural and socio-economic milieu in which they exist.

This holds a lot of value in understanding challenges affecting community involvement and stakeholders' collaboration in TPD from an emic perspective, instead of some over-generalized variables in the literature that may be of limited value in some destinations in West Africa.

Moreover, a study of this nature is likely to highlight the ways to make collaboration and community involvement effective for sustainable TPD in Nigeria, because, tourism development in the nation has been sluggish and inconsistent (Esu, 2015; Odum, 2020), and tourism development in the study area is pinned at the exploratory stage, such the stage is an opportunity for effective collaboration and community involvement (Odum, 2020). Besides, collaboration between the host community and the destination seems to be a way for STDs in developing nations (Muganda, 2009; Nsizwazikhona & Nduduzo, 2017).

The benefits of a study of this nature to academia, tourism professionals, and policymakers cannot be overemphasized. Conversely, using an example from West Africa, where tourism destinations appear invisible in the global tourism map, this study might be relevant to other destinations having related challenges. While its value for comparative purposes with similar studies from developed regions of the world cannot be overemphasized. The result of this study will be relevant in enhancing stakeholders' collaboration and community involvement in developing nations.

Owerre-Ezukala

Owerre-Ezukala community is made up of eight (8) villages, listed in order of seniority as follows: Okpoghota, Okpu, Ihie, Iyiafor, Ishi-afor, Ogwu-ada, Lete, and Mkputu. It is one of the communities in the Orumba South Local Government Area (OSLGA) of Anambra State in Nigeria. Anambra State lies between Longitudes 6°35'E-7°30'E and Latitude 5°40'N-6°48'N. The state is bounded by Delta State in the West, Imo State in the South, Enugu State in the East, and Kogi State in the North, with twenty-one (21) Local Government Areas (LGAs) (Odum, 2017). There are numerous tourist attractions in the state, such as forests, streams, lakes, cultural festivals, caves, and waterfalls. One of the caves is located in the Owerre-Ezukala community.

The development of Owerre-Ezukala cave and waterfall (hereinafter referred to as OCW) has been the interest of the present traditional ruler, His Royal Highness, Igwe Thomas Onyeama Ogbonna, since he was elected Igwe in 2004. Although there is a Board of Trustees for the development of OCW and it is headed by the son of the former Igwe (Late Chief T.N. Mmadu) from Iyi-afor village. All their efforts have gained the attention of the present administration in Anambra State, which led to the state government putting up some structures (see figures 1&2) in the destination and commissioned on 15th December 2018.



Figure 1. Conveniences, changing rooms, sit-outs, etc.

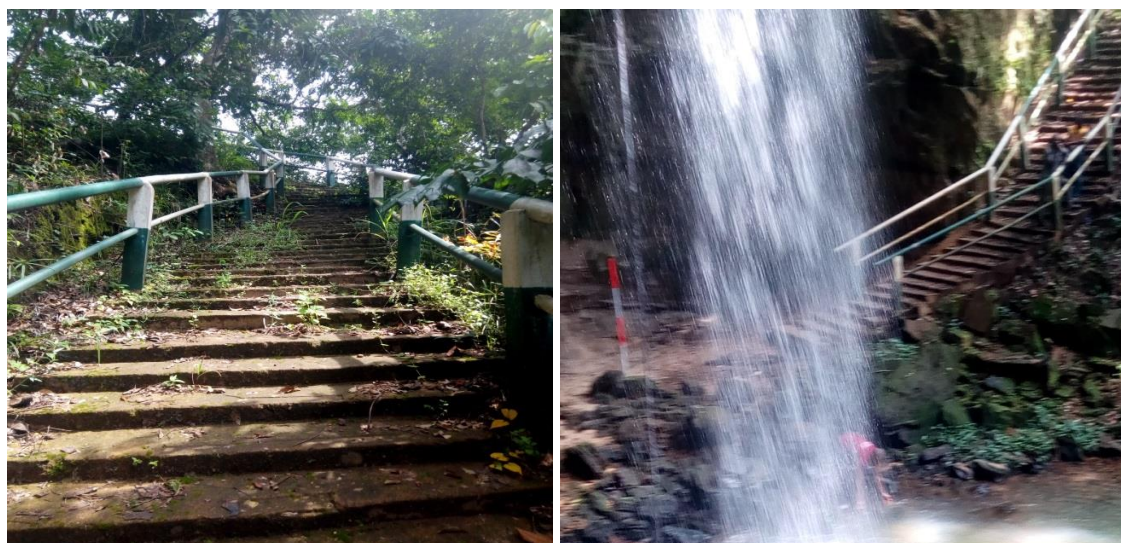


Figure 2a & b: Staircase with handrail leading to OCW.

Literature Review

Community- the word community is derived from the Latin word *communitas*, which refers to the spirit of community, or an unstructured community in which people are equal (Beeton, 2006:4 cited in Odum, 2011). It is a term used to define residents within a geographical boundary, along 'local zone, and the ethnicity of its residents or the resources or industry established in the area' (Chaskin et al, 2001; Mancini et al, 2003 as cited in Fariborz, et al., 2010, p. 156). Mattessich and Monsey opined that "a people who live within a geographically defined area and who have social and psychological ties with each other and with the place where they live" (Mattessich & Monsey, 2004 as cited in Fariborz et al, 2010, p. 156).

Community is construed here to mean a unit of people who are either ethnically the same or diverse, living in a well-defined geographic location with a sense of oneness and shared beliefs. Tourism activities take place in a community (usually termed destination) and such a community receives the impact of tourism, either positive or negative, which is why community involvement in TPD has been of interest to the present study. Involving or collaborating with host communities has been of immense advantage to TPD (Tosun, 2000; Jamal & Getz, 1995), but TPD studies are limited in emerging economies like Nigeria; this necessitated this study.

Collaboration, to some extent, means allowing host communities to participate in decision-making concerning tourism. And participation in tourism varies; there are models by different authors, such as Pretty (1995) proposed a typology of community participation, namely: manipulative, passive participation, participation by consultation, participation for material incentives, functional participation, interactive participation, and self-mobilization. Arnstein (1971) proposed the following: non-participation [manipulation & therapy], degrees of citizen tokenism [informing, consultation, & placation], and degrees of citizen power [partnership, delegated power & citizen control]. Tosun (1999) proposed the following-coercive, participation, induced participation, and spontaneous participation.

The afore-written models of community participation in TPD help to understand types of participation and their implications, although a detailed analysis of each model is beyond the scope of this study, a detailed comparative description of the model has been carried out (Muganda, 2009). Meanwhile, a synthesis of these models was done by Tosun (1999), and typologies of community participation help in comprehending community participation by 'distinguishing various forms of community participation from each other' (Tosun, 1999, p. 121), as each type of participation has implications in TPD. The study adopts Tosun's community participation model (spontaneous, induced & coercive) for details, see Tosun (1999), *Towards a typology of community participation in the tourism development process*. Akhmad et al. (2014) summarized the characteristics of the model as follows, *Spontaneous participation* is when the host community engages in tourism development voluntarily and based on the community's ideas and motivations. *Induced participation* is where the host community merely suggests ideas for tourism development, with tourism authorities ultimately responsible for final decisions. *Coercive participation* refers to a situation where tourism development is ostensibly to meet the needs of destination residents but, in reality, is for the benefit of external stakeholders such as statutory authorities, tourists, or tour operators (pp. 801-802).

What Tosun and others have provided, therefore, can serve as a guide, which may not apply strictly in the real sense, but for easy comprehension of community involvement. This makes community involvement in TPD essential for STD.

Collaboration

Collaboration among stakeholders stems from stakeholder theory, a concept credited to Freeman in 1984, who worked on the first original work at Stanford Research Institute in 1963. Although the theory has been applied in many subjects, including tourism (Graci, 2013 as cited in McComb et al, 2016), the World Summit in Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 discussed and validated the need for partnership and collaboration as key factors for sustainable development (Okazaki, 2008).

Collaboration occurs when the problem is complex and a single organization cannot solve it on its own. It "is a process in which those parties with a stake in the problem actively seek a mutually

determined solution”, with stakeholders retaining their independence in decision making despite agreeing to abide by shared rules among collaborating parties (Gray, 1989: xviii as cited in Bramwell & Sharman, 1999, pp. 393-394).

Bramwell and Sharman gleaned from different scholars that collaboration is useful in tourism planning based on the following: circumvent cost associated in resolving conflicts within stakeholders in future; political advantageous because stakeholders are given opportunity to partake in the decision concerning them, it helps in policy coordination and enhances considerations of the impact of tourism on the economy, environment, and culture, and the outcome is sustainable tourism (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999).

Neither the government nor host communities, nor a single organization can achieve STD without hitches. Effective collaboration aids strong relationships and helps concerned stakeholders to have and utilize the required resources to accomplish their aims, which are necessary for meaningful TPD (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Ford et al., 2012). Collaboration amongst stakeholders has become imperative due to the fragmented nature of the tourism sector; it may be more beneficial to developing nations where tourism growth and development are slow, like Nigeria.

There are different types of collaboration or partnership models proposed by different scholars, such as Gray’s framework for the collaboration process, which has three phases, namely-*problem setting*- there is a problem that is agreed upon by stakeholders, which requires inputs from all concerned. Exclusion of key stakeholders may cause some conflicts during the collaboration implementation phase. *Direction setting*- here, rules and agreements are established among stakeholders; discussion among different groups to ascertain a particular line of thought and action. *Implementation*, implementation of the stakeholders' approved actions, which requires support and structure (Gray 1989; Medeiros de Araujo & Bramwell 2002; Jamal & Stronza, 2009, as cited in Graci, 2013). A similar collaboration pattern was developed by Selin and Chavez (1995), termed the *evolution of tourism partnerships* with a background in Gray’s seminal work (Graci, 2013). Selin and Chavez's model has the following stages: *Antecedents, problem-setting, direction-setting, structuring, and outcomes* (See figure 1).

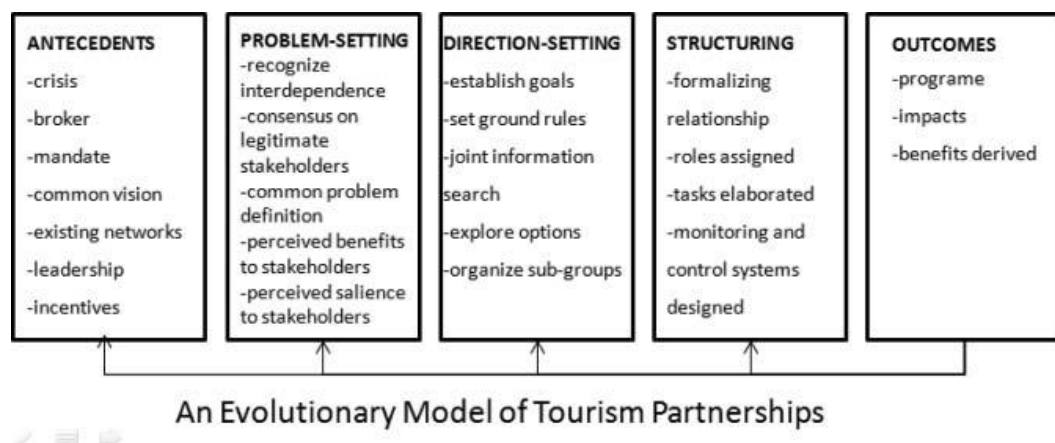


Figure 1: Tourism Partnership model. Source: Selin and Chavez 1995, p.848 as cited in Graci, 2013.

Collaboration gives opportunity for people to be involved in the decision-making process to air their views before decision making, which will make their experiences and to some extent add indigenous knowledge to the whole process of development (Bramwell & Lane, 1999; Jamal & Stronza, 1999). Collaboration among stakeholders in the project development (including tourism development) is believed to be more legal than the contentious conventional method (Hall, 1999, 2000; Ladkin & Bertramini, 2002). Stakeholders' collaboration appears to have mixed results in different destinations across the globe. It recorded positive results in the mountain of Canmore, bordering Banff National Park, Canada (Jamal & Getz, 1999), and the island of Gili Trawangan, Indonesia (Graci, 2013). Lack or limited collaboration is one of the challenges of TPD in Didima Resort and the Umhlwazini community in KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa (Nsizwazikhona & Nduduzo, 2017); in the Central region of Ghana, lack of collaboration among stakeholders (tourism institutions/organizations) has affected TPD in the region (Adu-Ampong, 2014). What then are the factors affecting stakeholders (government & community) collaboration in TPD in developing nations like Nigeria?

Stakeholder- "any person, group, or organization that is affected by the causes or consequences of an issue" (Bryson & Crosby, 1992, p. 65), and Freeman (1984, p. 46) states thus: "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives". These postulations highlight two variables-'doers' and 'receivers'. Within the tourism context stakeholders may include the following: 'government (international, national, regional, and local); government departments with links to tourism; international, national, regional and local tourism organizations; tourism developers and entrepreneurs, tourism industry operators; non-tourism business practitioners, and the community including local community groups, indigenous people's groups and residents (Saito & Ruhanen, 2017, p. 2). Within the study area, the major stakeholders to act and be affected by tourism are the host community-where OCW is located. Given this description, the major stakeholders needed for TPD are the Owerre-Ezukala community.

Related Collaborative Studies

The discussion for collaboration among tourism stakeholders for TPD has gained limited attention in the scholarship of the Global South, especially Nigeria. Most of the studies are geared towards promoting tourism attractions and values associated with tourism development (Esu, 2015; Bankole, 2013; Okonkwo & Odum, 2010; Okpoko & Okpoko, 2002), to mention but a few. Within the southeastern region of Nigeria, most of the studies have suggested partnership and collaboration among stakeholders for TPD namely: Oguta Lake tourism site in Imo State (Enemuo & Onuma, 2016); Community involvement in tourism planning and development in Anambra State: A study of selected attractions (Odum, 2011); Collaboration and sensitization as strategies for community involvement in Nigeria's event tourism development: The Abia State example (Ololo, et al, 2018), etc. The need for collaborative plans for OCW was also suggested: Itanyi et al., 2013; Odum, 2017; Odum et al., 2018; and Odum, 2020. All these studies within and outside the study area have suggested collaboration and community involvement as one of the ways

to develop the destination, but none have explored the challenges associated with community involvement and collaboration among stakeholders, such as the government and the host community. Understanding the challenges affecting community involvement and collaboration among stakeholders in TPD is germane for sustainable TPD in developing nations like Nigeria, using OCW as a case study. This is the hallmark of this research.

Methodology

The case study approach (CSA) was used in this study because it is usually selected when a researcher gains access, is interested in deeper knowledge about a case, due to limited empirical data, with likely hood to reflect on a theory or assumptions like models (Urioste-Stone, et al., 2018). "We can think about the case study methodology as a way to confirm the existence of hypothesized variables and relationships of interest, or to test aspects of a formal theory" (Urioste-Stone *et al*, 2018, p. 408). First, there is limited empirical evidence on factors affecting community involvement and collaboration among tourism stakeholders in Nigeria, especially in the eastern region. CSA enables a researcher to utilize data from different sources; the researcher is free to replicate the study in his/her environment; it explains why an innovation worked or failed (Beeton, 2005). Therefore, we adopted some models on collaboration and community participation, and some earlier theoretical literature concerning challenges of community participation in TPD, such as Tosun (2000), among other related studies.

In-depth interviews were carried out with relevant key informants in the Ministry of Culture, Entertainment and Tourism (MCET), such as the director of tourism in the state, senior, and other tourism officers in the tourism department of MCET. Within Owerrezukalla, the informants were mainly the traditional ruler (*Igwe*), the Palace secretary, youth leaders, and other members of key stakeholders mentioned by respondents. Each interview session lasts less than sixty minutes; there were occasions where other information was generated through mobile phone communication with concerned individuals due to the lockdown occasioned by COVID-19 in the study area. The study spanned from February to August 2020, including field visits. Pictorial documentation was used to capture relevant phenomena during the ground-truthing.

Literature related to issues associated with community and government involvement was used for the study, such as *Limits to community participation in the tourism development process in developing countries* (Tosun, 2000), Gray's framework on collaboration, Selin and Chavez's (1995) model of partnership, among others. These models and frameworks aided in streamlining the study.

Data were analyzed using content analysis on in-depth interviews to pigeonhole meanings from participants' responses (Sarantakos, 2005) and were presented in related themes; it is one of the ways to analyze in-depth interviews (Urioste-Stone, *et al*, 2018); and in a prose format for easy comprehension supported with related and relevant information. The data were presented thematically through emerging themes during analysis.

Results and Discussions

There are issues concerning community involvement and collaboration with the government in tourism planning and development in the study area; these results are presented thematically.

Collaboration Issues

Internal rift

The location of OCW is in Iyiafor village, and the current Igwe is from Okpoghota. The son of the late Igwe is the Chairman Board of Trustees for OCW, working independently of the Igwe of the community. The Igwe is also working assiduously for the government (Federal and State) attention and development of OCW. This has created some divisions within the community. Some respondents are of the view that, beyond the development of OCW, the late Igwe's son seems not to recognize the present Igwe as the town's traditional ruler. This has caused litigation over the traditional ruler's seat in the community. Anambra State government (ASG) has given a certificate of recognition to the present Igwe in 2016. The director of the tourism department in the Anambra State Ministry of Culture, Entertainment and Tourism admitted thus:

"There are some internal frictions within the community, especially in Iyiafor village where the cave is located; there is also some clash of interest among quarters existing in the village, but we are making efforts to resolve them."[Respondent 1].

Meanwhile, the Igwe of Owerre-Ezukala admitted that there are some issues concerning OCW, especially from Iyiafor village, he said:

"Some members of Iyiafor village connived with Prince (name withheld), son of the former Igwe, to form a Board of Trustees claiming the management of Ogbaukwu, which is wrong. The cave belongs to Owerre-Ezukala as a community" [#Respondent 8].

Another respondent from the community made the following observation about the collaboration issues -

The cave and waterfall are a natural gift from God. But the son of late Igwe from Iyiafor village has been claiming to be the chairman of the Board of Trustees for Ogbaukwu. We have Igwe, who is in charge. Igwe Ogbonna has been going to Abuja and the state government about this cave. I think because he does not recognize the Igwe, he goes wherever the Igwe is, making an effort to create problems. But some members of the village are with Igwe camp, while others are with him" [#Respondent 5].

This internal rift has affected and delayed the development of OCW and the collaboration process. ASG is making efforts toward developing OCW, but collaboration is not easy where there are community-induced internal frictions. Instead of developing OCW, the government is faced with settling the rift between different factions (the Board of Trustees, divisions within different quarters in Iyi-

afor village). This implies, a government might be interested in collaborating with the host community for tourism development (TD), but internal rifts appear to be a challenge, and such delays in collaboration and likely to discourage the government.

Moreover, the result also has made some contradictory suggestions against some earlier claims that the government shows limited interest in TD in developing nations like Nigeria (Abdulrahman et al., 2014; Esu, 2015; Odum, 2018). Rather, the evidence from the community shows that the internal divisions within the community have affected TD in the community.

Furthermore, an internal rift has been pointed out as one of the limitations for community collaboration and effective participation in TPD in developing nations (Tosun, 2000), though such internal schisms are surmountable where the government is serious in developing tourism or the community shows concerted effort for TD. Despite the divisions in the community, the state has commissioned changing rooms, conveniences, bars, and seats in the destination on 15th December 2018, see plates 1 and 2. But the need for peaceful co-existence is essential for the sustainability of other tourism developmental plans in the destination.



Plate 1: Conveniences, changing rooms, seats, etc.
Source: Authors' fieldwork 2020.

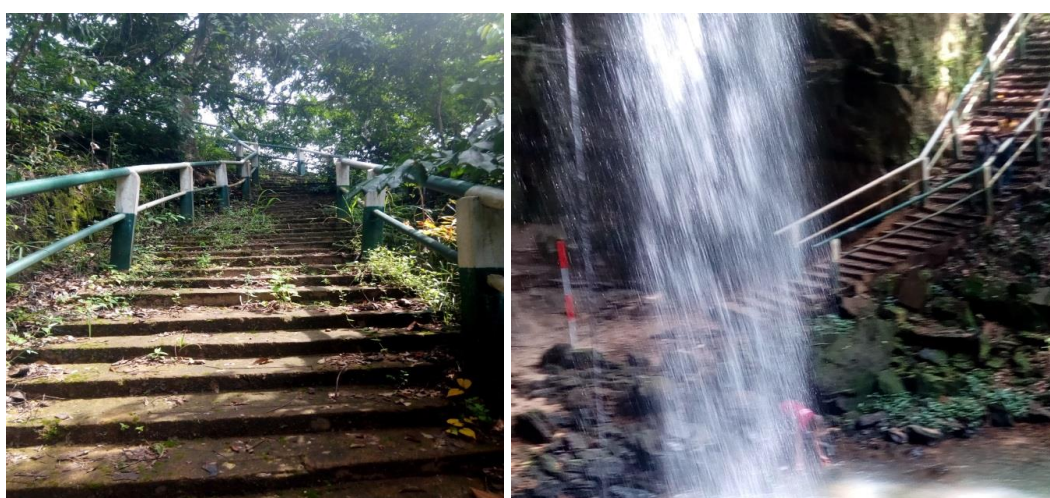


Plate 2a & b: Staircase with handrail leading to OCW.
Source: Authors' fieldwork 2020.

Conversely, this rift has given the government some elements of advantage in the collaboration process. Respondents from the community admitted that the rift exists and the government calls them for discussions and meetings; the government dictates the number of persons the community will come with, time and venue for all meetings, and finances the logistics (i.e., entertainment) for meetings at this preliminary stage of the collaboration process. To some extent, the community appears to be on the weaker end, if the assertion: "He who pays the piper, dictates the tune". Meanwhile, a united front from the community might mean much bargaining power.

Funding

Government officials and community members admitted that funding is a major challenge to collaboration and community participation. The people of Owerre-Ezukala take care of their transportation fare to and fro Awka, the capital of Anambra State, on any day the government (MCET) calls for a meeting. This has made the Igwe always select community members who can fund their travels to Awka for meetings and discussions. There are no functional vehicles for 'run-around' in the tourism department. This entails paying for transport fare for the departmental staff involved in the collaboration process when going for meetings, sight inspections, community engagement, etc., in communities with tourist attractions of which Owerre-Ezukala is of interest presently. One of the respondents explained thus:

"What the department sends as its annual budget is not what it gets at the end. This affects our funding." [Respondent 5].

Limited funding has prevented the government not to executing some of the projects, mainly structures that are meant to be in the destination.

"It is probably funding that is delaying the sinking of boreholes, setting up security guards in the site, delay in the construction of the road to the site. The fund is a major issue in the whole collaboration process." [Respondent 1].

This result tallies with some earlier studies about TD in the study area, poor funding is a major challenge (Odum, 2017; Odum, 2020), and Nigeria, to some extent (Esu, 2015); and limited funding affects community collaboration and inputs in TPD. Scholars like Tosun have argued, collaboration and community participation in TPD in many developing nations are limited by poor funding. He made the following observations: "...participatory tourism development approach is likely to require relatively more bureaucratic formalities that demand more money, organizational skills, time, and effort. As the financial and qualified human resources are scarce in many developing countries, these scarce resources will be likely directed to physical investment...financial resources needed for tourism investment are very scarce and in most cases, not readily available in developing countries (See Pearce, 1991; Long, 1991; Tosun 1998b as cited in Tosun 2000, p. 624).

Lack of funding might likely make the government seek alternative sources of funding, which might have some impact on the community and the collaborative process. It has been argued that when a community does not have enough money to

fund its tourism projects, it limits their control and nature of development (Woodley, 1993); it becomes worrisome when the community has no financial strength to invest in tourism, and the state government funding is limited. A scenario of this nature may tend to sway the collaboration discussion for tourism development in favour of financial providers, mainly the government, as seen in the study area.

Government and Elite Domination

The government seems to dominate the collaboration process. There are plans to constitute members or people who will constitute a committee for the development of OCW. The number of persons from Owerre-Ezukala will be determined by the government. The principal respondent from MCET made the following remarks-

"We will have one (1) representative from the government, two (2) from Orumba South Local Government Area, three (3) from the community, and four (4) from Iyiafor village" [Respondent 1].

Given this stance, it appears the government has already earmarked the number of persons to participate in the collaboration discussion. The number above shuts out some villages in Owerre-Ezukala given the numerical values (8) villages, vis-à-vis the number of persons to represent them. Secondly, the Igwe admitted he selects people to go with him to Awka (where the tourism department of MCET is situated) for discussions. What is/are Igwe's criteria for selecting people? Given the already existing frictions in the community, how representative is/are his choice of persons? Tosun observed as follows: "In some developing countries, there is very little democratic experience or semi-democratic experience or no prospect of an opening to freedom. In some other developing nations, although there is a formal structure of constitutional, multiparty democracy, these democratic institutions and regulations are not shared with the majority. That is to say, in these countries, democracy is limited to business elites and state elites (Tosun, 2000, p. 621). This perceived government domineering position and elitism diminish freedom in the collaborative process and may not ensure sustainability in the near future.

"I [Igwe] select the people who go to Awka, usually people who are learned enough and can sponsor their trips. They are often of the male gender (Umunwoke)" [Respondent 8]

Secondly, all the people usually selected for discussions from the community are mainly male gender, why? This raises some concerns on gender representation in tourism collaboration planning and development. Meanwhile, it is worth noting, most Igbo communities are patriarchal. This aligns with observations of Saito and Ruhamen (2017), not all stakeholders share the same level of power and influence during collaboration and decision making in TPD. Therefore, all community members do not share equal input in the current discussions and collaboration process.

Poor Knowledge of Tourism and Exaggerated Expectations

The knowledge of tourism in Owerre-Ezukala seems limited or inadequate, and to some extent tilted towards only economic gains, especially 'high-hopes' for development. Responses from both the community and officials of MCET suggest this:

"Tourism is the coming of people, and you will see more people in May, during the annual celebration of the cave. Their coming brings money to our community, and tourism during the celebration is good. If the government finishes the road construction and builds hotels, our people will be working there" [Respondent 18].

"The community thinks that tourism is all about the money they are getting presently, especially the N200.00 (less than \$1)/person they collect from visitors" [Respondent, 1].

This result is in tandem with other literature on communities in developing nations having limited knowledge of tourism, which affects their collaboration and involvement in TD (Nsizwazikhona & Nduduzo, 2017; Tosun, 2000). With limited knowledge, their inputs and contributions are limited; moreover, knowledge of 'tourism-baggage' is blurred, with attendant consequences in the near future when other negative tourism tendencies might surface. Scholars like Tosun (2000), Jamal and Getz (1995) have argued for the need to empower communities for effective participation in TPD. Although it is essential to state here that the process of empowering communities to comprehend what tourism is all about is limited in emerging economies like Nigeria, except there are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to do so, but such is lacking in the study area and in Nigeria.

Bureaucratic Bottleneck and Jealousy

Planning for TD involves different stakeholders on the side of the government, for instance, developing OCW, which is at the preliminary level, requires the expertise of the Anambra State Ministry of Environment (ME), the Ministry of Lands (ML), the Ministry of Economic Planning (MEP), among others. Getting the attention of these ministries seems not to be easy, as shown by the following responses:

"Bureaucracy is part of the challenges affecting collaboration for tourism development. Preparing a budget and getting approval takes a lot of processes. It is time-consuming, and most time your proposal will be written 'keep in view' within the ministry (MCET). A budget from the ministry will go through different processes, but the first screening of the budget is from the ministry's permanent secretary. The permanent secretary gives the first approval before it goes to the Ministry of Economic Planning, after which you wait to defend it in the State House of Assembly (House of Representatives) before you can get the money from the government to work. These protocols sometimes yield no result(s)". [# Respondent 10].

"It is not easy getting the attention of related ministries for effective collaboration. We need to survey and map out the perimeter of the cave and waterfall environment so that we can pay compensation to people involved; this needs to be done by the

Ministry of Lands, and correspondence for such might take months” [#Respondent 6].

It appears that collaboration efforts and tourism development plans might be delayed from the MCET due to the powers and interests of the permanent secretary. The permanent secretary may have no interest in a project, and that limits the development of such a destination. Moreover, internal rancor or the interest of other tourism-related ministries might mar tourism collaboration initiatives.

The above scenarios have also been recorded in other West African countries such as Ghana, where the lack of cooperation among tourism-related ministries is limited in Ghana’s Central region (Adu-Ampong, 2014). This seems to be a common phenomenon among developing nations (emerging economies) (Tosun, 2000).

Time and Cost

The data from Owerre-Ezukala suggests that time is of the essence in community involvement in TPD. Most of the people involved in community involvement meetings sacrifice their daily routine(s) to attend meetings and discussions about TPD, especially the traditional ruler of the community who has been championing the cause. Some of the respondents put it succinctly:

“Any day Igwe calls me for a meeting concerning Ogbaukwu(OCW), it means I will forfeit all I have for that day and attend the meeting because we want it to be developed.” [Respondent, 11].

“There are days I will not go to work in order to attend meetings concerning Ogbaukwu, either in the palace or Awka” [Respondent, 13].

“I am the traditional ruler; if I don’t give all my attention towards developing this cave, how do I call on community members? They know how much time I have sacrificed for OCW development, most time; they do not hesitate when I call them” [#Respondent 8]

Time is essential in community participation, and it also comes with a cost. While the government caters to the needs of the staff of MCET, the community members foot their bills. This issue of time and cost affects community involvement and resonates with the ideas of Tosun, where he argued thus: “...the biggest challenge for the poor in many local tourist destinations in the developing world appears to be mere survival, which occupies all the time and consumes their energy. Hence, participating in the TDP, which demands time and energy, may be a luxury that the host communities cannot afford (Tosun, 2000, p. 625). Similarly, collaboration or involvement involves regular meetings with various interest groups, and this can constitute a challenge to collaboration (Medeiros de Araujo & Bramwell, 2002) in TPD, especially in developing nations, where time and energy are geared towards sustenance, and this affects who participates in TPD.

Discussion

Issues associated with community involvement and collaboration between stakeholders are determined by the social configurations of a community and the existing socio-political milieu of society. Funding affects collaboration and community participation in TPD. It subtly dictates who participates in TPD in the host community, as seen in Owerre-Ezukala, and limits the level of government activities, where the government budget for tourism seems limited due to other developmental projects seeking funding. Limited funding appears to be a major challenge to tourism development in Nigeria. This aligns with the earlier submission of Odum, "tourism may thrive in Nigeria in the near future when the government develops the infrastructural needs of the people. Presently, the meager resources from the federal government and internally generated revenues are used in paying civil servants; providing tarred roads, hospitals, electricity, academic institutions, agro-allied companies, which are currently inadequate in the region" (Odum, 2020, p. 81), of which Anambra is among. This portends that developing nations grappling with developmental infrastructure may have limited funds to engage in TP and its fund-driven collaboration processes. Besides, community involvement and collaboration are time-consuming and cost a lot of money, as the data suggests. These variables affect who gets involved in TPD; this affirms the submissions of Graci (2013), who argued that time affects participation in collaborative processes.

Similarly, poor collaboration among relevant ministries is an issue in the collaboration process. Getting other ministries to collaborate for TPD seems weak and inconsistent; this delays the execution of TPD plans. This appears to be a common challenge in developing nations, as a similar scenario was recorded in the central region of Ghana (Adu-Ampong, 2014). Getting stakeholders, especially concerned government ministries, to share the idea of TD plans might enhance collaboration; this is similar to what obtains in Cusco, Peru (Ladkin & Bertramini, 2002). This seems limited in the study area and aligns with previous studies in Indonesia and in Mexico (Akmad et al, 2014; Jamal & Camargo, 2014).

Beyond time and money, host community participation in TPD is sometimes based on limited knowledge of tourism (Nsizwazikhona & Nduduzo, 2017). This has a way of affecting their participation and involvement, and this has made tourism scholars argue for the empowerment of communities for effective and efficient participation and collaboration in TPD (Tosun, 2000; Jamal & Getz, 1995). Conversely, without proper empowerment in host communities, the issue of government and elite domination during participation and collaboration processes may persist in developing nations like Nigeria, using the destination as a reference point. Social configurations have placed some community members in a privileged position, and they exercise some element of authority in communities. For example, some kings (traditional rulers') decisions are not questioned, and when certain tourism decisions are to be made, kings are consulted first, as seen in Owerre-Ezukala.

Furthermore, it seems that community participation in a patriarchal society like Nigeria may trigger the issue of gender imbalance. It appears most of the participants from the community are males. Although scholars like Saito and

Ruhanen (2017) argued that not all stakeholders share the same level of power and influence during the partnership. The study intends to highlight the exclusion of female gender needs to be a source of concern, inasmuch as community participation and collaboration are at an early stage. This is important because the tourism impact is not gender specified.

Using Gray's framework, collaboration in the study area appears to be in the *problem setting* phase, similar to Selin and Chavez's model of partnership first stage, *antecedents*. This means that the existing partnership among stakeholders (community and government), as shown in the study area, seems to be at the preliminary stage and yielding positive results, as seen in discussions going on between the two. This contradicts the earlier assertions by scholars like Li (2004) and Tosun (2000) of the non-involvement of communities in TPD in developing nations. Instead, the study shows the government's frantic efforts in engaging and partnering with the host community to develop OCW despite the schism in the community. Moreover, the discussions on how to share proceeds from the destinations are part of collaborative meetings, this was attested by all the respondents. This implies the partnership is heading to *problem problem-setting* stage according to Selin and Chavez's (1995) model of tourism partnership.

The results tally with the previous study in the community, showing that tourism is at an exploratory stage (Odum, 2020). A vital stage for community involvement; this allows adequate planning at early stage by ensuring community participation and collaboration (Odum, 2020), to facilitate and "empower local people to keep control over tourism development before local destinations become more popular and attractive for large capital owner" (Tosun, 2000, p. 627) who are likely to dictate tourism pace in the host community, which may not align with the expectations of the locals.

Owerre-Ezukala falls within spontaneous participation; such participation ensures the sustainability of TPD, and Tosun (2000) argued that it is an ideal type of participation. This may not be unconnected with synergy and hopes shared between the host community and government towards TD. And to some extent, the government's interest in developing tourism. It is worth noting, the interest of a government affects TPD in Nigeria (Odum, 2020); such interest may either be positive or negative for community involvement and stakeholders' collaboration in TPD in different destinations. Using Owerre-Ezukala as a case study, the government interest seems positive, and this may have affected the development of OCW despite all the aforementioned challenges.

One feature of this study's results is that it contradicts earlier postulations where scholars like Esu (2015), Odum (2020) bemoan the government of showing limited attention to TPD in Nigeria. Instead, the existing socio-political atmosphere in some communities may likely affect government interest in TPD. All participants agreed that the internal rift within Owerre-Ezukala has affected government interest in TPD. By implication, community internal conflict(s) affected participation and collaboration between the government and communities. Governments may not want to get involved in a community's internal issues to avoid taking sides and

jeopardizing an incumbent political interest. Moreover, the government seems to be the sole developer of tourism in Anambra State (Odum, 2020); therefore, any community without peace limits its collaboration with the government, the key stakeholder in TPD in developing nations.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the critical importance of community involvement and stakeholder collaboration (CI&SC) in sustainable tourism planning and development (TPD) within Owerre-Ezukala, Nigeria, and explores its implications for emerging economies. Despite encountering significant challenges—such as internal community conflicts, limited funding, inadequate governmental engagement, elite domination, and gender imbalances—the findings indicate that many of these obstacles can be addressed through proactive strategies and strategic partnerships.

A pivotal theme that emerged from this research is the necessity for an emic understanding of the socio-cultural and economic contexts that influence community engagement. Tailored approaches to TPD are essential for fostering effective collaboration among stakeholders. Although the existing challenges are prominent, there is a burgeoning interest from the government that could facilitate tourism development if effectively harnessed.

Crucially, this study illustrates that community engagement transcends theoretical ideals; it is a practical necessity for achieving sustainable tourism outcomes. Establishing frameworks that promote active and equitable participation from all stakeholders—especially marginalized voices like women—significantly enhances the potential for successful tourism initiatives.

Moreover, the research highlights that collaboration among tourism stakeholders enriches community involvement and participation in TPD. While community collaboration with the government is often hampered by internal rifts, bureaucratic bottlenecks, exaggerated expectations, and a lack of knowledge about tourism, evidence from the study reveals that collaboration between the government and the host community is attainable and can enhance community participation.

The findings also lend empirical support to Tosun's model of community participation, demonstrating high levels of spontaneous involvement and providing a counterpoint to Tosun's assertion regarding community non-involvement in TPD. This study contributes valuable insights into community engagement and stakeholder collaboration in West Africa, suggesting that while challenges exist, they are surmountable depending on the socio-political context of the host community and the government's commitment to tourism.

Future research is recommended to delve deeper into the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in enhancing CI&SC in developing nations. Such exploration could provide further understanding and practical strategies for implementing

effective community-centric tourism initiatives, paving the way for a more inclusive and sustainable tourism future in Nigeria and beyond.

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