

Article

Unwana Golden Sand Beach: Unveiling the Potential of Underdeveloped Coastal Tourism in Southeastern Nigeria

Ogechi Ivy Anyanwu¹, Nneoma Grace Ololo², Johnson Ezenwa Arua³

University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State

¹ ivy.anyanwu@unn.edu.ng, ² nneoma.ololo@unn.edu.ng, ³ johnson.arua@unn.edu.ng

Correspondence: johnson.arua@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

Despite the potential of beach tourism to foster social activities and economic growth, its impact on local communities in developing regions remains underexplored. This paper utilizes Unwana Golden Sand Beach (UGSB) as a case study to investigate beach tourism development and its implications for the residents of the Unwana community in Ebonyi State, Southeastern Nigeria. Employing qualitative research methods, this ethnographic study gathers insights from community members through face-to-face interviews, aiming to understand their perceptions of tourism and its possible impacts. Findings reveal that, while UGSB possesses significant tourism potential, it remains largely underdeveloped and has yet to affect tourism activities in the area. Additionally, the study identifies a need for active government involvement and stakeholder engagement to harness this potential sustainably. The research concludes that adhering to sustainable tourism principles could promote long-term community benefits and preserve the natural and cultural integrity of UGSB, ultimately enhancing the socio-economic welfare of the Unwana community. Overall, the paper advocates for harnessing UGSB's potential as a sustainable tourism destination while preserving the cultural and environmental integrity of the region.

Keywords: Beach tourism, community participation, sustainable development, Unwana, Ebonyi State, coastal tourism

Introduction

Beach tourism is one of the oldest and most enduring forms of leisure travel, originating from the leisure pursuits of European aristocrats in the 18th and 19th centuries who sought to explore the continent's natural and cultural landscapes, including the Swiss Alps and the coastlines of Italy, France, and Spain (Honey & Krantz, 2007). By the late 19th century, wealthy Americans began flocking to coastal destinations, particularly in Florida and along the California coast, seeking solace from harsh winters (Honey & Krantz, 2007). The rise of ocean liners during this time also marked a significant shift, facilitating luxury travel from North America to Europe and Mediterranean cruises (Honey & Krantz, 2007; Onofri & Nunes, 2013).

In contemporary times, beach tourism has garnered recognition as a vital economic driver within both advanced and emerging economies, providing numerous social and economic benefits to local communities (Orams, 2003). Activities and facilities centered around the coastal and marine environment have diversified significantly, spurred by population growth, the expansion of mass tourism, and advancements in transportation technologies (Orams, 2003). Scholars widely agree that coastal, marine, and beach tourism constitute the largest segments of the global travel and tourism industry (Honey & Krantz, 2007; Klein et al., 2004; Nwankwo, 2012; Orams, 2003; Page & Connell, 2006; William, 2011).

As coastal developments continue to rise, projections indicate that 50% of the world's coastline is at risk of development pressures, and by 2025, approximately 75% of the global population will reside within 60 kilometers of the sea (Finkl & Kruempfel, 2005). Beaches remain among the foremost tourist attractions worldwide, often evoking the alluring mental image of the "3S" paradigm: sun, sand, and sea, which is synonymous with vacation and leisure for many (Orams, 2003; Klein, 2009). Given the increasing demand for beach-based marine recreation, it becomes essential to prioritize the development of natural beaches, like Unwana Golden Sand Beach (UGSB), that are well-planned and capable of generating substantial economic benefits.

UGSB, characterized by its stunning golden sands and natural beauty, holds significant potential for coastal tourism. Despite this promise, the beach is currently underdeveloped and has not yet significantly impacted local tourism activities. The Nigerian federal government acknowledges the importance of coastal tourism in its National Tourism Policy established in 2005, which emphasizes the transformation of various beaches into tourism beachfront complexes to promote economic development (National Tourism Policy for Nigeria, 2005). However, tangible progress in implementing this policy remains limited, highlighting the urgent need for strategic stakeholder engagement in order to harness UGSB's tourism potential.

This study investigates the possibilities for planning and developing UGSB as a sustainable beach tourism destination. By employing qualitative research methods within an ethnographic framework, the research aims to capture the local community's perceptions regarding their involvement in tourism development and their willingness to embrace such initiatives. Ultimately, this paper emphasizes the critical role of community participation in the tourism development process, advocating for their active involvement as stakeholders to ensure long-term sustainability and empower the host community.

Literature Review

The study of beach, marine, or coastal areas has interested many scholars, including tourism researchers and those in other related disciplines. Klein, Araujo, Polette, Sperb, Freitas, Sprovieri, and Pinto (2009, p. 247) defined beaches "as a space between the surf zone and foredune or man-made structures, made of components and complexes of different amplitudes, formed by the influence of natural processes, as well as by human intervention and recreational activities that permanently interact in a feedback process". Gore (2007) attempted to formulate a framework for integrated coastal zone management focusing on beaches. The study used four key components, including dimensional analysis, planning, management, and monitoring, to achieve ecological sustainability and long-term commercial success of beaches and nearby coastal habitats in the British Virgin Islands (BVI). Here, legislation on beach management was scanty, while specific management plans for beaches were non-existent. The author concluded that managing beaches has to include the coastal zone and not just the strip of land above the high-water mark. The assertion is that changes in the land behind the beach and the sea in front of it can directly impact the beach. This study explored the issue of beach

management from an environmental point of view. To achieve sustainability, social and economic considerations must be considered.

Several authors have studied the preferences of tourists concerning beach tourism. Onofri and Nunes (2013) explored a comprehensive global dataset for domestic and international tourists at the country level to understand the choice of a tourist's coastal destination. The study employed about 160 coastal countries, with the USA being the most visited. The authors identified two tourist demand segments. International tourists choose their coastal destination because they strongly prefer the cultural and natural environment. On the other hand, domestic tourists prefer beach length. The international and domestic tourists were labeled in terms of their preferences as 'greens' and 'beach lovers', respectively. The authors asserted that the information about destination choices is highly significant for stimulating coastal tourism demand and identifying market-based policy instruments to finance the conservation of environmental and cultural capital hosted at the coastal community. Another study by Snider, Luo, Hill, and Herstine (2015) sought to understand tourists' perception of parking in the beach vicinity and its effect on beach visitation, which is vital in site management and marketing. The findings showed that visitors' perceptions of parking conditions did not correspond to the actual record of parking availability and did not strongly correlate with visitation patterns.

Some authors have explored the challenges of coastal tourism from a management standpoint. Davenport and Davenport (2006) highlighted the impact of leisure transportation modes on the coastal environment. Their findings revealed that despite good management practices, leisure transport has become increasingly mechanized and associated with high speed. The authors, however, suggested that effective planning, which will take cognizance of the values of ecological services and rigorous environmental legislation, should be adequately enforced. Another author, Orams (2003), argued that managing beaches in the 21st Century leaves much to be desired as some issues confront it. These issues include poor environmental quality, cost, incompatible activities, and pollution of the coastal environment from human activities on land and from the commercial use of the ocean for fishing, dumping waste, dredging, and oil supply. To ameliorate these challenges, it is essential to employ creative, dynamic, and continuous application of tailor-made management approaches that meet the needs of a specific area or community.

Community members have been considered as primary tourism stakeholders. However, tourism (even beach tourism) has not worked well in most places because some stakeholders do not involve the local people. Hence, there must be sincerity on the part of the stakeholders, which will entail involving the local people in planning and executing tourism development. Kinseng, Nasdian, Fatchiya, Mahmud, and Stanford (2018) provided an intriguing insight into the relationship between the growth of tourism, the perception of residents to tourism development, and the impacts on the local community. In their examination of 120 randomly selected residents of Pari, the authors noted that residents perceived that tourism created jobs and improved access to goods and services. They, however, noted that tourism has reduced social cohesion and decreased adherence to traditional customs. As a result, conflicts between the private sector and the residents over

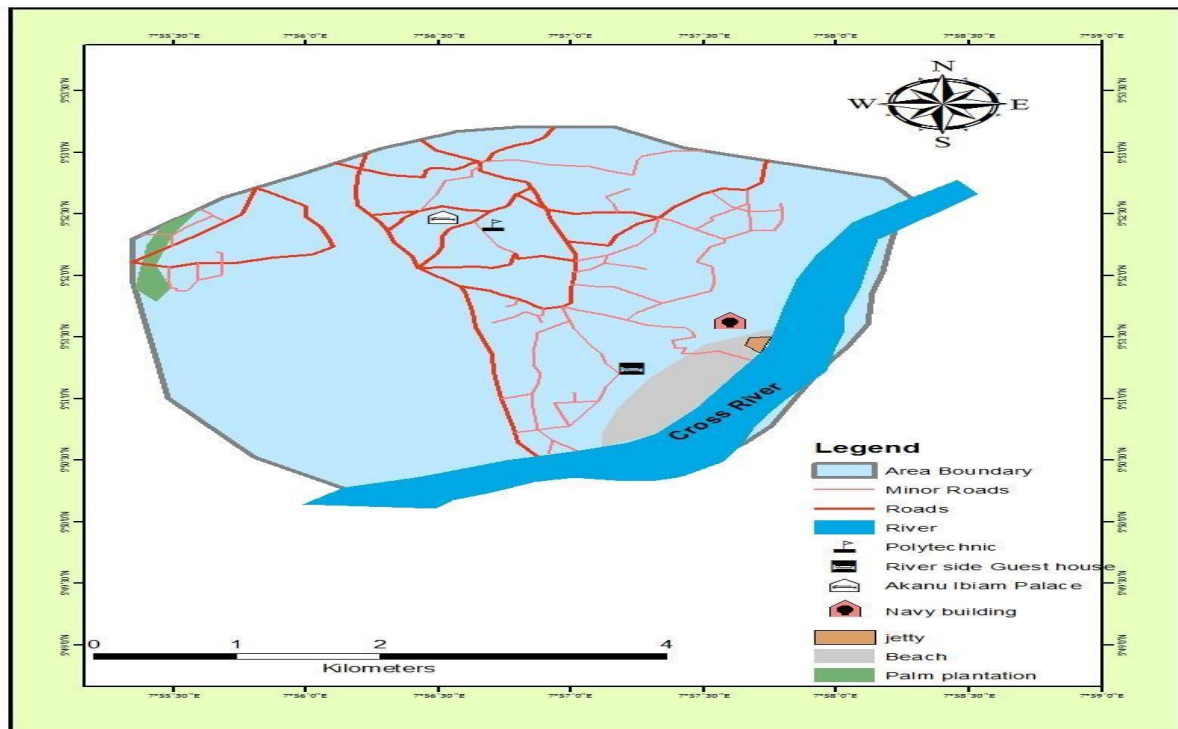
ownership and access have caused violence. In addition to the discussion about conflicts of ownership and access, there is the issue of mobilization at the grassroots level.

Simons (1994, p.99) noted that “while all scales of planning are important for tourism development, planning at the community level is vital if any region wishes to deliver tourism experience which ensures both visitor satisfaction and ongoing benefits for the residents of destination areas”. However, the road to this all-important ‘community participation’ is not as smooth as it sounds, as there are some obstacles to overcome. Given this notion, Tosun (1999) argued that despite the importance of community participation in tourism development, this approach seems to have operational, structural, and cultural limitations in many developing countries. A similar study by Bello, Lovelock, and Carr (2018, 2017) explored community participation in planning associated with ecotourism in protected areas in Malawi. Findings revealed limiting factors affecting community participation in ecotourism planning, including apathy, inadequate financial resources, inadequate information, limited education, unfair distribution of benefits, lack of trained human resources, a centralized public administration, and lack of coordination (Bello et al., 2017). Some strategies emerged as prerequisites to achieve active community participation: public awareness and education, capacity building, appropriate participation methods, involvement of appropriate local community organizations, and decentralization and coordination of relevant organizations (Bello et al., 2018).

As there is limited research on beach tourism in Nigeria, especially within the Southeastern region, this study will explore Unwana Golden Sand Beach (UGSB) to understand its current state of development and community members’ perceptions about developing it for beach tourism. The findings are expected to help understand the possible strategies for ensuring a sustained tourism industry in the study area, improving stakeholder collaboration, including community participation, and generating/promoting a positive disposition.

Background and Research Context

Unwana is one of the townships in Afikpo North Local Government Area (LGA) of Ebonyi State in Southeastern Nigeria. The 2022 population projection from the 2006 national census places the population of Afikpo North LGA at 233,300 (Ebonyi State Official Website). The Unwana community is situated on a hill. It is the hometown of the late Ezeogo, Dr. Akanu Ibiam, a prominent medical doctor in Nigeria in the 60s and also the first governor of Eastern Nigeria. The community has a land area of approximately 190 km². It is bounded on the north by Afikpo, on the west by Edda, and the east by Cross River State. Unwana is also home to the Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Afikpo (AIFPUA). The community sits 200m above sea level with coordinates 5° 51' 45¹¹ N, 7° 56' 55¹¹ E. The people of Unwana engage in farming and fishing as their primary economic activities. However, in recent years, they have diversified into other sectors, such as trading, small-scale industries, and commercial transportation. Humidity in Unwana is moderate due to its proximity to the river, while they have one vegetation belt, the freshwater swamp. Unwana is a riverine town (Climate-Data.org) with water bodies such as Ozara Lake and UGSB.



Map of Unwana showing UGSB and other landmarks within the beach.
Source: Fieldwork, 2019.

UGSB can be said to be largely untapped. In other words, the beach has not been developed, and the number of tourists cannot be ascertained. Visitation is hugely dependent on the season. The peak period starts from late November to February and part of March (dry season). During these dry months, an island in the middle of the river called sand bars appears. Sand bars are sediments deposited by the river due to several geologic conditions and are often visible when the river level is low, especially during the dry season (personal communication). The locals refer to the sand bars as 'ata'. The visitor influx to the beach is at its peak at this time, especially during Christmas, when relatives and friends take advantage of the appearance of this unique island (sand bar) to visit their relatives in Unwana. During the dry season, the fishermen move their homes made with local material of thatch and palm fronds to the sand bar in the middle of the river. They live there until the water returns around April before returning to live on the bank of the river again. Most visitors to the beach are community members, students, and civil servants. Entrance to the beach is free. Facilities available include a bath/changing room, food/beverage stalls, a security post, a parking space, a sand dump, fishermen's makeshift houses, and fish smoking area, a dockyard, a boat, and equipment for hire/rental, like the water pumping machine.

Methodology

The fieldwork for this study lasted from July and August 2019. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling technique. Most participants were male (70%), while the remaining 30% were female. Most participants were farmers, fishermen, or both who reside in the community and are indigenes. A small percentage of the participants were students. In-depth interviews were conducted

with the selected participants because they were enthusiastic about the development of the beach. Most of them were key community and business leaders. The key informant interviews, in combination with direct observation, generated important insights on the need to involve community members in decision-making concerning the development of the beach for tourism. Pictures were taken to help highlight the features and potential of the destination.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 randomly selected residents. The interviews were conducted using the local Igbo language to let participants speak in detail about the questions. Participants' responses were written directly into the question guide. The qualitative data generated from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis as one of the key approaches to qualitative data analysis (Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). The analysis comprised transcribing participants' responses, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, refining and naming the themes, and producing the report. These processes are in line with the views of Braun and Clarke (2012).

Findings

From the findings, seven themes were identified, depicting a mixture of enthusiasm, pride, fear, expectations, and hope, reflecting host community perceptions concerning the development of UGSB for tourism. The themes are optimism, mixed perceptions about developing the beach, local participation and awareness in planning, the role of government, NGOs, and other organizations, additional tourism potentials, beach cleanliness, parking and security, and revenue from the beach.

Optimism

The findings reveal that most Unwana indigenes perceive UGSB to be everything that is not negative. They believe that UGSB means economic development, innovation, business areas, the importation of goods and services, etc. As a result, they support the development of the beach for tourism as a way of contributing to community development. The optimism motivates the participants, whose comments show that they look forward to the development of beach tourism in the community. An example would be Participant 1's comment:

'This beach is an income-yielding natural tourist centre with (rich) valuable natural resources like golden sea sand, fish, etc.' In the same vein, participant 15 added: *'An average Unwana man or woman sees our beach as a place for fun, a place of hustling, more so, a link for importation of goods and services between states and countries'.*

A participant observed that:

'If the beach is developed eventually, the (Unwana) people will gain more tourists, and national and international goods and services will be made available. It will provide more income (participant 1). Participant 3 quipped: '...it will create opportunities for more self-employment and engagement. Unwana will have that revenue to develop its community.'

Mixed perceptions about developing the beach

Most participants believe that the community and their culture will remain untainted by the development of the beach for tourism. Some participants claim that developing the beach will boost their culture. To these people, they only assume that developing the beach will bring only positive impacts and benefits. However, some participants thought otherwise. They dismissed the opinion that tourism will boost their culture. They contend that their culture will be negatively affected if and when the beach is developed for tourism. Participant 8 noted:

'...when the beach is developed, Unwana will be mixed up, and some cultures will be affected to accommodate other people. Participant 1 says: 'The people's way of life (culture) could be affected negatively as the people may not perform their usual exercise (swimming, fishing) and other activities on the beach when needed and may even be made to pay before gaining entry'.

Local participation in the planning process

Most participants believe their role would primarily be to provide adequate security of life and property at the beach. Others propose that their role will be to help control the excavation of the sea sand and ensure that the proceeds are used for the development of the beach. One of the participants noted that he will participate through:

...abiding by the rules and regulations guiding the development (Respondent 4).

Perception of stakeholders' roles

There are three levels to the theme "perception of community members regarding the role of the government, NGOs, and other organizations". The first level represents those participants who acknowledge that some efforts have been made by the government towards developing the beach. To a large extent, this group appears to be the least. A participant from this group noted that the state and federal governments had, at different periods, executed different projects at the beach, which included the construction of two jetties, the tarring of the road leading to the beach, and the construction of drainage. The second level represents those who feel that the government is trying but believe that more effort is needed. In other words, the government is not doing enough. Lastly, some participants think the government is not doing/has not done anything. These participants noted promises have been made, but none have been implemented.

On the part of the NGOs and other organizations, the participants noted that there has not been any effort to assist with the development of the beach. However, they observed that the Sand Dealers Association and Loaders Association have embarked on projects like renovating the road leading to the beach by filling up potholes and clearing the drainage whenever it gets filled up. Most participants welcome assistance from the government, federal agencies, and NGOs. Some participants expressed their willingness and the need to have the government and NGOs to get involved in the planning and development of the UGSB. They explained that:

'they would want the Ebonyi State Government to get involved in the planning and development of the beach because they collect revenue from the beach' (participant 11, 7).

In supporting the view of Participant 11, participants 2 and 10 added, respectively:

'The community needs government efforts to develop the beach to attract visitors from other places to invest in their businesses'. We need help from the government because it will serve as a medium of employment for the unemployed and to train and retrain those who can handle machinery.

Two participants were, however, skeptical about the government and NGO's involvement in the planning and development of UGSB. They believe the government will collect most of the proceeds from the tourism business. Participant 9 had this to say:

We do not need the help of the government or NGO because our community survives on the beach. If any help should come from any of these parties, the proceeds will be divided, and not all will eat from it.

Additional features

Other attractions can be grouped as tangible and intangible attractions. The tangible attractions include the Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, the residence of Ezeogo (Dr) Akanu Ibiam, the Riverside Resort Guest House, the Nigerian Navy Complex, a palm plantation, and several farmlands/farming activities. The tangible attractions offer visitors a place for sightseeing.

Some participants explained that non-tangible attractions in the community include Iko masquerade, Okumkpo masquerade, and Ikeji (New yam) festivals. These various festivals take place annually between the months of August, September, and November, respectively. During the New Year festival, recreational masquerades are displayed everywhere in the community. Different dance groups also entertain community members and their visitors during the festivals.

Beach Security, cleaning, and parking

Most Participants are satisfied with the degree of security of the community and beach premises. They also affirm that they have adequate security to cater to the safety of the lives and properties of visitors. The security setup includes members of the Sand Dealers Association and the Loaders Union. Other individuals who are part of the security outfit are the age-grades of able-bodied male members of the community. A participant who is also a member of the Sand Dealers Association noted: *'Our effort to keep the beach safe is already maintained by the Sand Dealers'* (participant 4). Another participant affirmed that the security of the beach is taken care of by the age grades. The various age groups take turns amongst themselves. The age grades involved are those under sixty (60) years of age. The presence of the Nigerian Navy in the community is an added advantage to the security of life and property in the entire community. A participant believes that the presence of the Navy is enough security.

Regarding beach cleaning, the participants confirmed that the sand dealers, age grades, and community clean up the beach environment every last Saturday of the month to ensure that the beach and its surroundings are kept tidy. Another participant explained that the beach is always in use throughout the year, and the people working at the beach maintain the surroundings. He noted:

'... all around the seasons, Unwana Beach is always in use. The users, like the sand dealer's association, loaders, and boat peddlers, take care of the beach in terms of maintenance (participant 8).

As regards parking space, it was observed that the beach environment has empty land spaces. A participant who works at the beach further confirmed that the empty land spaces near the beachfront are communally owned by the Unwana community.

Revenue generation from the beach

Although there is no entrance fee for visitors who come to the beach, there is, however, revenue collected from boat owners, bike riders, stalls/shops, machine rentals, etc. Some participants claimed that the revenue is given to the elders and sand dealers only. A good number of participants concurred that the revenue is used to serve selfish interests and not for the good of the community. Revenue generation from the beach emanates from equipment rental, stall rental, revenue collection for every trip of sand, boat docking, bikes, and taxis. A participant explained that;

The government (federal and state) gets revenue from Unwana Beach. Drivers and other commuters earn a living from the beach. Unwana Beach is a source of employment (participant 1).

Most of the participants explained that the revenue is shared between the community and the government. However, few participants claimed that the revenue given to the community is insignificant. As Participant 2 noted:

'Over thirty (30) years ago, a group of persons have been collecting revenue from the beach, but they are not remitting to the community because of a lack of unity'.

Discussion

There are very interesting observations from the responses of the participants, which depict their hopeful disposition towards tourism. Regarding optimism, the participants demonstrated a willingness to develop UGSB. This is in line with the observation of Kingseng *et al* (2018, p. 1067), that "the perception of residents towards tourism development has been shown to play a significant role in the sustainability of that tourism". Furthermore, some participants described the UGSB as income-yielding, a place for fun, a place for hustling, and a link for the importation of goods. These assertions are a very welcome development given that participants who are residents of the community perceive the UGSB as a place that can immensely benefit them. It shows that the local people are willing to be part of the planning and development of the beach for tourism.

The people also believe that the UGSB has the potential to attract more visitors when it is eventually developed. This finding is significant because participation in developing the UGSB largely depends on local people's expected gain in the long run. Their belief that developing the beach will mean more tourists is also encouraging. The findings have also demonstrated that the community members' perceptions towards tourism are on a positive scale.

Mixed perceptions about developing the beach

It is a truism that the socio-cultural lives of local communities are hugely altered by the influx of tourists to a destination. It is also a fact that the proximity of the UGSB to the village is given. Kinseng et al (2018) noted that, notwithstanding the economic benefits, such as job creation and business opportunities, which may also have increased the general well-being of the local community, there have also been negative impacts. The authors referred to as 'curse', while the positive aspects they termed 'blessing'. This 'curse', according to them, has mainly been socio-cultural, such as a decline in social cohesion and mutual help among the citizens, reduced adherence to local customs, and increasing materialistic values. From the present study, it is evident that the level of tourism development in the study area is not advanced enough to make the issue of the 'curse' as referred to in the study of Kinseng et al (2018) obvious. In furtherance, the study of Kinseng et al (2018) was carried out in an advanced economy, unlike the present one, which is set in a developing economy. The people believe that their culture cannot be so affected or eroded to the extent of a decline in social cohesion. It is, however, important to address certain issues raised by some locals concerning losing free access to certain parts of the beach. The case of beaches in the Caribbean, where locals were forced to use only two beaches out of more than fifty beaches, while the rest were reserved exclusively for the use of tourists, is an example. This could lead to widespread resentment amongst the local population towards tourists, as was the case in the Caribbean (Orams 2003, p. 48).

Local participation and awareness in the planning process

The enthusiasm about the prospects of developing tourism was evident among the local people. Given this interest, creating adequate awareness is necessary. Awareness will entail educating the community members about tourism, the implications of its development, and invariably, the 'dark side' of tourism development, which is an important part of mitigating the negative impacts. This will enable the people to understand new things, including participating in the planning process and developing the beach for tourism. It is therefore important to educate the local people regarding all they need to know about beach tourism and the social, economic, and environmental implications.

Perception of stakeholders' roles.

The perception of residents of tourism development affects the growth of tourism, which invariably impacts the local community. The findings of the present study tally with those of Kinseng *et al* (2018), where the residents of Pari perceived that tourism would create jobs and improve access to goods and services. However, there appears to be a lack of coordination between the government and the community in terms of stakeholders' roles. Tosun (2000) noted that a lack of

coordination seems to be a recurrent defect in the tourism development process in most developing countries. There is a need for a definition of the roles of agencies and of the community that owns the resource. Tosun also argued that “lack of coordination may frustrate potential opportunities for the community to get involved in tourism development” (2000, p.620). This observation is by no means a popular rhetoric in the community. The ratio of participants who favour getting other stakeholders involved as against those who do not is about 20:2. The role of the government and other stakeholders in the development of UGSB cannot be ignored. The findings from the present research resonate with that of Kinseng (2018) who concurs concerning the role of the government in developing tourism destinations that the government needs to take a leading role in bringing stakeholders together to plan and deliver the kind of tourism development that has at its heart the community's welfare. Therefore, the stance of the Unwana people on the role of other stakeholders especially the government squarely resonates with that of Kinseng (2018) who stated that “for tourism to be sustainable and bring welfare to local communities, there have to be intentional proactive efforts from the government to plan and regulate tourism (2018, p. 1070).

Additional features

The presence of other attractions in Unwana aside from the beach is an added advantage to the development of UGSB. An outstanding feature and unique attribute of UGSB, apart from its unique golden sand, is the appearance of the sand bar. Other attractions are the cultural festivals, the Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, the country home of late Ezeogo Akanu Ibiam, and the hospitality outfits in the community. The presence of these attractions helps to increase the appeal of the UGSB in attracting prospective tourists or beach lovers to the community.

Beach Security, cleaning, and parking

Related to security is the issue of regulating traffic for the safety of beach users. As Cooper and McKenna (2009) observed, “There are several instances worldwide of injuries and deaths as a result of cars driving on beaches”. Although the beach is yet to be developed, it is important to be proactive on issues of the safety of lives. To enhance the quality of beach visits and promote economic activities, it is necessary to make provision for beach safety and visitor experience in terms of parking. It is important to note that in a beach close to a tertiary institution and an urban centre (Afikpo town), adequate parking space is imperative for those who wish to come to the beach with their vehicle. In retrospect, however, it was noted that there are several parcels of land around UGSB that could be developed as parking lots (this does not imply that there are no parking spaces currently).

Revenue generation from the beach

Maximizing (ecotourism) benefits that accrue to local people is one of the arguments that is advanced in support of local community participation in ecotourism (in our case, beach planning and development) planning (Bello et al., 2017; Scheyvens, 1999; Su & Wall, 2014). From the findings, there is no synergy between the various groups that operate their businesses in and around the beach. Hence, claims of unfair distribution of benefits. This may inhibit the aggrieved

community members from participating in the activities geared towards developing the beach for tourism.

Conclusion

This paper explored the potential of Unwana Golden Sand Beach (UGSB) for beach tourism, providing valuable insights that can inform stakeholders on improving sustainable tourism in the region. The findings demonstrate a significant consensus among residents regarding UGSB's unique attributes and its capacity to become a prominent destination for beach tourism. However, for UGSB to attain sustainability, it is imperative for the government to unite stakeholders and facilitate a coordinated approach in planning and delivering a robust tourism industry.

The research indicates that UGSB possesses all the essential elements for beach tourism development, including stunning natural beauty, local enthusiasm, and cultural richness. Nevertheless, appropriate measures must be implemented to cultivate this potential effectively. The study emphasizes the government's strategic role in spearheading tourism initiatives, yet it underscores that sustainability hinges on proactive and intentional collaboration among a range of stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local communities.

Community engagement is vital in the planning and development of UGSB. The findings reflect that local residents are not only willing and enthusiastic about participating in tourism but also possess a fundamental understanding of its implications. However, this potential has yet to be fully harnessed due to a lack of awareness regarding the advantages and challenges associated with tourism development. To foster community involvement, it is essential to educate residents about sustainable tourism practices, enabling them to engage meaningfully in the planning process.

This research contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge on beach tourism development within local communities, using UGSB as a case study. It highlights the importance of integrating community participation and education into tourism planning, advocating for collaborative efforts that prioritize the well-being of local populations.

In conclusion, to realize the full potential of UGSB as a sustainable tourism destination, stakeholders must intensify their efforts in harnessing the beach's resources while safeguarding the cultural and environmental integrity of the region. Further research is encouraged to explore tourism development in other communities and states within Southeastern Nigeria and beyond, paving the way for comprehensive strategies that promote inclusive and sustainable coastal tourism.

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