

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION IN NIGERIA: GRASSROOTS RESPONSES ON IMOLEBOJA ROCKSHELTER

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the developmental processes within tourism industry particularly the issues pertaining to tourist attractions in the rural areas. Special focus was given to the role of stakeholders at the local level particularly the attitudes of political functionaries at the Local Government towards development of diverse natural attractions within their domains. Imoleboja Rockshelter in Odo Owa community of Kwara State was given special attention. Qualitative method was employed in this study. 25 stakeholders within the state and the concerned Local Government areas were purposively sampled. The findings revealed that the existence of tourist attractions in the localities influenced respondents' perception of hotel and its services. Therefore the State Tourism Board should be mandated to initiate a development plan on tourism that will take into consideration most of the attractions that are located in each state of the federation.

Keywords: Rockshelter, grassroots, tourism development and promotion, local government, patronage

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) revealed that Africa is growing at a faster rate than the rest of the world in terms of tourism patronage. Worldwide international tourists' arrival in 2005 was 800 million that translates to 10 percent increase over 2004 data (Babatunde 2006). On the average, international arrivals grew by 5.5 percent. For Africa however, international arrivals grew from 8 million in 2000 to 40 million in 2005, representing 5.6 percent annual growth rate. Receipts from international tourism also increased from \$10.5 billion in 2000 to \$21.3 billion in 2005 (African Hospitality, 2006). The irony of the issue is that it did not feature amongst the beneficiaries of this growth in spite of her numerous resources.

Nigeria as a nation has much potential that could be harnessed in developing tourism industry for realization of optimum benefits embedded therein. Besides the many natural features of Nigeria, the cultural assets of the nation are of universal recognition. The richness and diversity of Nigerian culture is a manifestation of the socio-cultural differences of over 250 ethnic groups that inhabit the land for ages. These, coupled with hospitality of the over 140 million people, make Nigeria one of

the richly endowed potential tourist destinations in the globe thus putting her in vantage position to gain tremendously from the industry when taken into cognizance the rich cultural and ecological endowment of every ethnic group that is available in the country (NTDC, 2007).

Countries that are not so endowed like Nigeria occupied enviable position as beneficiaries of this growth in UNWTO report. One therefore wonders why the case has continued to remain like this in this digital age in spite of concerted efforts by nations to benefit from economic gains of tourism industry. With several well-known tourist destinations that cut across every state of the federation, and others that are not known beyond the destinations where they are located it is disturbing that the country is not making her mark in spite of her endowed resources.

From the observation of Awoseyin (2006), Nigeria as an entity does not have sufficiently developed attractions to encourage international visitors; but in the past nine years, the government at the federal and states levels have been engaging in sensitization activities for tourism development; then what becomes of the renewed vigour which the immediate civilian administration in Nigeria exerted to develop tourism industry? If with all the media activities and conferences, workshops we are still at square one then there is need to take a cursory academic look into the sector in order to appreciate factors influencing its present position. While one may not be categorical that successive government has been playing politics with development of numerous tourism potentials in the country, the study aimed at understanding of rationale behind lack luster attitude towards development of tourism potentials by the local governments who are the host and custodians of these attractions; investigate the project in the pipeline (if any) for the development of tourist potentials; evaluate the tourist flow to the site where the potentials are located and proffer possible solutions to the problems (if any) affecting development of tourist potentials in the country. To achieve meaningful results, this work has as its focus the Imoleboja Rock Shelter situated at Odo Owa Community, Kwara State.

A Rock Shelter is a shallow cave-like opening at the base of a bluff or cliff. Another term is rock house. Rock Shelters form because a rock stratum such as sandstone that is resistant to erosion and weathering has formed a cliff or bluff, but a softer stratum, more subject to erosion and weathering, lies just below the resistant stratum, and thus undercuts the cliff. This same phenomenon commonly occurs at waterfalls, and, indeed, many Rock Shelters are found under waterfalls. Rock Shelters are often important archeologically. Because Rock Shelters form natural shelters from the weather, prehistoric humans often used them as living-places, and left behind trash, tools, and other artifacts. In mountainous areas the shelters can also be important for mountaineers. In western Connecticut and eastern New York, many Rock Shelters are known by the colloquialism "leatherman caves", as they were inhabited by the Leatherman over three decades in the late 1800s (Wikipedia, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Odo Owa is one of the ancient towns in Oke Ero Local Government area of

Kwara State. They are Ekiti Ethnic grouping and share common characteristics when compared with other Ekiti people in Kwara and Ekiti States of Nigeria. The town is geographically located between latitude 8° and 9° north of the Equator and Longitude 5° and 6° East of Greenwich Meridian. It therefore falls within the tropical zone of an annual rainfall of about 75mm (NDIC, 2002). The community is situated in a crescent valley of about four kilometers East of Omu Aran along Ilorin-Kabba road. Other neighbouring towns such as Osi to the East, Erinmope Ekiti to the South, Oko and Idofin to the North, and finally Illofa to the West surround this ancient town.

The siting of the town was dictated by the interesting nature of its topography. As a valley settlement, she is surrounded by a range of low and high hills such as Uruoko, Utori and Amu. The Imoleboja is located on Amu hill. Amu area is an expanse of family land belonging to Ipekun compound in Kajola area of Odo-Owa, headed by Inarin. Imoleboja rock shelter is described as a wonderful massive rock that has been in existence for centuries. It is described as a natural architectural masterpiece. The concept of Imoleboja literarily means goddess or spirit that makes a ceiling or shelter or roof. The rock shelter was discovered by the earliest settlers several centuries ago. Because of the myth that surrounds its formation, the Ipekun people of Odo Owa worshipped this rock shelter as one of their local deities. The people believed that a goddess called 'Imole' was behind its formation that such goddess must be appeased regularly. The goddess was also believed to be very kind and that it was a lover and giver of small children. Because of this, the deity was worshipped once a year during the community's new Yam festival. In contemporary time, the effect of Christianity and Islam has discouraged most of its devotees from worshipping the unseen goddess (Imole) of the rock, hence, the reduction of the whole edifice to mere sightseeing by the local people and tourists alike.

Data for the study were gotten through the use of in-depth interviews conducted among the stakeholders in the study area. The respondents which also included the government functionaries from Oke-Ero Local Government of Kwara State as well as officials of Kwara State Government were selected through purposive sampling method. These personalities are found as capable of providing the needed information on the issue under discussion. To ensure objectivity in discussion and presentation of facts, effort was made to ensure that those included in this study comprises stakeholders who have adequate knowledge about the place and the issues which this study focuses on. These include officials of Tourism Board, the concerned Local Government council, members of traditional rulers council of the community where the Rock Shelter is situated, and those that are no longer in government services either as career officers or political appointees.

However, they are opinion leaders who are well-informed about this Rock Shelter by virtue of their educational status; professional callings are knowledgeable about the heritage and other issues bothering it. The above personalities were selected purposively because of their prominent positions in the society and community in particular. They were well suited for the study and could provide the information needed to help this study. As a result of this, the entire respondents are classified as

Key Informants who possess vital information on the subject matter of this study. The size of the sample for this study is put at 25 respondents. This size involves those identified as stakeholders and those possessing relevant information about the Imoleboja Rock Shelter at Oke Ero community in Oke Ero Local Government of Kwara State. Data generated through qualitative method were analysed through the use of Open Code software. Data generated through in-depth interviews were transcribed, sorted and reported. The qualitative findings were interpreted with necessary quotations from the interviews to support the issue being discussed. The results were expressed according to the frequency of responses gotten from each question asked.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge and Perception of Imoleboja Rock Shelter: The data generated from the respondents on their knowledge and perception of Imoleboja Rock Shelter revealed 11 responses from those who see the Rock Shelter as historic in nature and a Natural phenomenon of rock formation and one of the wonders of God. To others the Imoleboja Rock Shelter is one of the tourist potentials in Kwara State (5 entries), it could be compared with Olumo rock in Ogun State (5 entries), it is a mighty slab of rocks/architectural masterpiece (7 entries). In another instance 4 of the respondents believe that the perspectives on Imoleboja Rock Shelter differ according to different people in terms of historical background. It was revealed that the Rock Shelter has main hall that can occupy 50 - 100 people (4 entries), that the place could be used as a resting place because of its cool environment (3 entries). It was further revealed that the Rock Shelter consists of chambers (duplex in structure) (5 entries), it was a security apparatus for the people in good old days (5 entries). Others' perceptions were based on the present day realities of the Rock shelter as being appropriate for mountaineering, picnic and relaxation (3 responses); It was also seen as an ecological sites in Kwara State (3 entries); a beautiful tourist centre/Good tourist attraction (6 entries), while another 4 entries saw it as a mystical site. The traditional ruler of this community revealed further that:

Imoleboja Rock Shelter is very historical. My great grandfather migrated from Ilesha to this place in 1055AD met the rock there as it is today. The Rock Shelter is a massive wonderful rock. It has a pot inside the cave with a cup on its top made of stone. It is a beautiful place. A boar was living there before, but due to human activities and visitation was driven away. The shrine there is a sign of traditional worship at the site.

In the words of another Key Informant:

The Rock Shelter at Odo Owa is one of the ecological sites in Kwara State. It is a place that can be described as one of the wonders created on earth by God; we have a chamber like a shelter where a meeting can be held. It is a place where the Government of Kwara State is seriously interested in developing.

Making his own contribution, the Atunluto of Odo Owa said:

The Rock Shelter came to prominence due to the activities of the Youths that came into prominence between 1988 and 1993. It was mentioned at a meeting. It was presented as a mystical site. To me as a Scientist, I see it as a natural

occurrence. To others, they had mystical and social attachments to the place. I was the one who told Chief Oluwole, the then General Manager of Kwara State Tourism Board of the existence of the Rock shelter, which prompted him to visit the site, and declare it a potential tourist centre in Odo Owa.

The General Manager of Kwara State Tourism Board declared that:

The Imoleboja Rock Shelter is a natural phenomenon of rock formation. It is located somewhere at the outskirts of Odo Owa. It consists of a mighty slab of rocks placed upon the ones underneath it. People have described it by various adjectives, for instance, an architect who visited that place described it as a duplex, because the rock consists of a large hall at the base, which could serve as a general sitting room, and with the slab that goes up where you find other chambers like a kind of structures we refer to as duplex structures.

Stressing further, the General Manager said:

The history of the Rock Shelter is seen in different perspectives by various people; some see it and inform visitors of various happenings in the past about the rock. While some will say that the 'Imoleboja' means the god has built a house.

From the perspective of the Secretary, Kwara State Tourism Board:

Imoleboja Rock Shelter at Odo Owa is a massive rock formation, more or less an architectural masterpiece. It can be described as a wonder in Odo Owa. On getting there is a big hall that can accommodate at least 100 people at once, which can be used as a reception or as a resting place. This is because the inside is very cool. The place is very fascinating because very few of such rock formations are found in Nigeria, except Olumo Rock in Abeokuta. So it has remained a wonder in Odo Owa town, and very good tourist attraction; we are promoting it in Kwara State.

Activities at the Site then and Now: Talking about activities that used to take place in the old days, it was revealed that the place served as abode for the early settlers in the town (4 entries), then, it was not as open as it is nowadays (3 entries). In another instance it was revealed that there exists conflicting version of its uses (4 entries). The according to a group of respondents, it served as resting place and shelter for farmers against scorching sun (2 entries). The remaining responses on the earliest uses of the Rock Shelter include: hideout for protesting ladies about counterpart with pregnancy before marriage (4 entries), owners of land around the area use to hold schedule meetings in the area (5 entries), it was an abode for the maidens who were being initiated into womanhood (1 entry), place of exile for girls with premarital affairs and pregnancy (10 entries). Highlighting on this, the General Manager of Kwara State Tourism Board revealed thus:

.....we have conflicting version of the uses of the rock. To some, it was a hideout for protesting maidens of the village against their counterparts who got pregnant before marriage. Sacrifices have to be offered before the protesting maidens come back to the village. Another version said, the girl that had premarital affairs and got pregnant in the process and exiled to the rock had to offer sacrifice before such could be admitted back to the village.

It was revealed that it served as a security edifice and shelter for the community during wars and communities strife (9 entries), a sacred place and site for religious activities hence the planting of Peregun tree at the entrance (6 entries). According to Jagunmolu of Odo Owa community:

In the ancient time, the rock was used for refuge during wars and hideout for exiled maidens who had premarital sex and got pregnant before wedding. Archaeological evidence at the site proved that people lived there before the present generation.

Similarly, the Assistant Director, Research, Planning, Statistics and Physical Development, Kwara State Tourism Board has this to say:

.....people attached custom and tradition to it. It was first recognized as a security edifice, where there was any confusion, or a war, people can run there for safety and secured. It was also used for imprison the maidens who got pregnant before marriage. This was a punitive custody for such offenders.

A respondent revealed his not being versed in the history of the site (1 entry), another respondent revealed that custom and traditional practices are being attached to the place (1 entry), while another was of the opinion that Christianity and Islam has affected custom and tradition attached to it (1 entry). On the current usage of the site, it was revealed by the respondents that the place is being used as camp site for Youth Corp members (2 entries), place of excursion for the people engaging in sight-seeing, holidaying and for relaxation (6 entries). It is now a place of wonder where you will not lack enjoyment and fun (2 entries) and tourist attraction site for the people from far and near (9 entries). A respondent noted that if the place is developed could attract financial benefits to the State and Local Governments. According to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Tourism:

.....now it is a tourist attraction site, which people go to see the wonderful architectural design God has planted there. People also go for picnics during festivals.

In the words of the Assistant Director, Research, Planning, Statistics and Physical Development, Kwara State Tourism Board:

People now visit the place for sightseeing and Relaxation. The Students go to the top to relax and catch their fun. Even NYSC go there for camping. If developed it could attract financial benefits to the state and Local Government Council.

Developmental Efforts by Kwara State Tourism Board since 1995: It was acknowledged that the supports being received from Kwara State Government over the development of Imoleboja Rock Shelter since 2003 have been encouraging. The supports were noted as being in form of improved budgetary allocation from the State Government for the development of the site (2 entries), fencing of the site was already embarked upon by the Board through the support of the State government (5 entries); the Board is reaching out by ensuring provision of social amenities to woo investors (1 entry), attempt at attracting investors was also through the placement of the site on the Internet for global awareness (1 entry). It was also revealed that the Board has presented memo to the Governor on the development of the site and has been approved (1 entry); which is Political will on the part of this political dispensation (1 entry); and that the full scale development on the site will commence in 2009 through Public Private Partnership (5 entries). The efforts of Kwara State Tourism Board towards developing the site since 1995 according to the General Manager include:

.....the call for the development of the Rock Shelter became persistent to the point that since the Local Government was not ready to do anything, the Tourism Board eventually took the challenge and has to take the call to the State Government before the advent of the present administration (2003 to date).

State Government Involvement: 2003 to Date: The efforts of the present Political administration on the need to develop Imoleboja Rock Shelter was noted as positive hence the Governor's acknowledgement of the need for its development (4 entries), this also accounted for budgetary allocation for the development of the attraction (4 entries). It was revealed that Tourism was at zero level before May 29, 2003 (1 entry); as sign of the commitment on this project, the data also revealed that there was clearing of the site, survey and acquisition of the land plus fencing to ward off encroachment (7 entries). Pacification of warring communities of the disputed lands upon which the Rock Shelter was located by the administration was another effort noted (4 entries).

Other findings of this study on efforts of the present administration in the state over the fate of the Rock Shelter include: Governor's pronouncement that his second term will be for Tourism development (1 entry); appointment of Special Assistant on Tourism (2 entries), appointment of Consultants/Engineers who have visited various tourist spots in the state for necessary action/feasibility study (11 entries); six attractions were penciled down for development in the ongoing projects in the state (3 entries); promise by the Governor to transform Tourism Board offices plus development of attractions and festivals (1 entry); invitation of foreign investors (who held meetings with officials in the Ministry of Environment and Tourism) by the Governor (2 entries); so also the revelation that the Governor is providing enabling environment for foreign investors (tarring of roads and construction of dam on Eremi stream (1 entry). The Vice Chairman, Oke Ero Local Government Council revealed that:

.....the Governor of Kwara State is working towards the development of the Rock Shelter. He has sent a group of Engineers to come and see it, and they admire it. They have submitted their report and study to him and we believe he will do something about it by making the place habitable for foreigners and the local clientele.

The Honourable Commissioner for Environment and Tourism also declared:

If not because of this Government, tourism would have remained zero level in the state. In the last two decades, nobody has said anything about tourism. Nobody has done anything about tourism. Nobody has earmarked a kobo for development of tourism. As of now, the Governor has done so well by inviting foreign investors to develop tourism. In 2009, he has requested us to put some fund in the budget for its development.

The Special Assistant to the Governor on Tourism also noted that:

.....my office, the Ministry (of Environment and Tourism) and Tourism Board are actually working together. We've come up with a blue print for the development of tourism. We have actually identified six tourist attractions and sites that cut across the three Senatorial districts of the State, which have been earmarked for some level of development, to attract the private sector. If government should take it solely it would not be sustainable, and Imoleboja Rock Shelter is one of the sites earmarked for this development.

Contributing in her own capacity, the Director, Hotel and Tourism, Ministry of Environment and Tourism revealed that:

When the crisis on the land was settled, the Governor was able to allocate some fund to fence the site to prevent encroachment on the land. At least 40% of the fence has been done by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. Secondly, of recent, a Consultant was engaged to carry out feasibility studies of some attraction sites in the State which includes Imoleboja Rock Shelter. The report is out and has been sent to the Governor.

Federal Government Activities since the Visit of the Director General from Abuja:

The data from this study revealed that the then Director General from the Ministry of Commerce and Tourism who visited the state and the site of this attraction in 1995 gave some recommendations on how the prospect of the attraction could be turned around; this include preparation of working document on the site to be forwarded to Abuja with costing. It was shown that the work on this was stalled due to non provision of fund by the then Ekiti Local Government Council (3 entries). The position of the Director General on the development of this project was revealed as being a tripartite project that should involve all tiers of government in the country, but efforts should start from the Local Government level before Federal Government can come in (1 entry). The Secretary, Kwara State Tourism revealed that:

The Director General, Federal Ministry of Commerce and Tourism, Alhaji Tukur Mani was at the Rock Shelter in September 1996. He believed that the attraction was a wonder in that town and he enlightened the community that the development of tourism is a tripartite issue between the Local, State and Federal Governments. He tried to appeal to them to start from somewhere, then let the Federal Ministry of Commerce and Tourism know what has been done at Local and State levels, and the Federal Government will lend its support.

The General Manager, Kwara State Tourism Board added that:

The Director General recommended a working document that should be forwarded to Abuja with costing, but the Local Government that was to provide the fund for the documents was not forthcoming.

Facts and Issues behind Failure for Physical Development on Imoleboja Rock Shelter:

The general information about physical development of Imoleboja Rock Shelter has always reflected the successive administration's indifference to the issue. Most often the problem is always poor funding or non-provision of the needed funding to effect physical development. On this note, effort was made to understand the tourist inflow to the site of this Rock Shelter in order to know whether none or poor patronage informs the poor commitment of the Local Government administration towards development of the attraction. Inquiry was also made to assess the tourists inflow to the site in the last ten years; examine the projects in pipeline as laid down by Oke Ero Local Government Council; know the readiness of the Local Government Council to Execute the Projects; and the reason why there has been poor or no commitment towards development of this attraction by the Local Government, which is the closest organ of government and under jurisdiction the attraction is located. The information generated are as follows:

Evaluation of Tourists Flow to the Site in the last Ten Years: It was revealed that there exist no records of visitors arrival to the site of the attraction in the last ten years, where such data existed, it skeletal in nature so there existed no definite statistics on tourism flow (6 entries). Another group of respondents revealed that it is only official of Tourism Board that could give such information (3 entries). A respondent however affirmed that there has always been regular volume of visitors to the place (1 entry). The respondent from Tourism Board revealed that at least 20 or 30 tourists at minimum rate are packaged to 3 sites in the Local Government Area every month by Board (1 entry), that there are others that go there without passing through Tourism Board (3 entries); it was also shown that during dry season, there always up to 50 students visitation to the place (1 entry). In November, December we have foreigners and Travel writers (1). One respondent revealed that only students on excursion are the occasional visitors (1 entry), while the paramount ruler of the community affirmed the existence of record of visitors to the site (3 entries). The General Manager, Kwara State Tourism Board submitted that:

We don't have records of visitor arrivals at the Rock Shelter. What we can say is that the Rock Shelter has been receiving regular volume of visitors. We've done a kind of package that we have identified that placed as an axis. The component of that axis is Esie Museum, the Rock Shelter, and the Indigenous Black soap industrial site. There are antiquities in the palace of Olota. We have about 20 to 30 visitors at minimum that are packaged through our office. Others go there through other means without passing through the Board. By the time the development comes, we shall have proper record of visitors to the site as a database for planning, marketing and research hers use.

The Secretary, Kwara State Tourism Board also said:

We don't have records, but they have in their own end, because they have a competent Tourist officer who keeps this record. Many tourists go there without passing through us and this is why we don't have statistics of the tourist flow.

Assistant Director, Research, Planning, Statistics and Physical Development, Kwara State Tourism Board was of opinion that:

Between 2 to 3 months in dry season, we do have up to 50 students, pupils, in November, December, January; foreigners also do visit, including Travel writers. However we do not keep records of visitor's inflow to the site.

The Tourist Guide to Odo Owa Community revealed that:

We have records of visitors to the Rock Shelter and other sites in the town at the palace of His Royal Highness Olota of Odo Owa.

In the words of Manager, Marketing and Promotion, Kwara State Tourism Board:

We have a skeletal record of the visitors to the Rock Shelter. The problem we have is that some people go to the site without informing us. Our record is not comprehensive because we have just started recording it.

Oke Ero Local Government Council has been failing to carry out any physical development on the site due to the inability of successive administration in the Council to see the project as a priority (3 entries). Another segment believed the failure was based on the fact that various administrations always come to power with different vision and focus (1 entry). Others see the failure as being a result of lack of fund and interest in tourism industry (5 entries); disputes between two communities over the

ownership of the place (1 entry); Local Government Council is only interested in projects that will bring in quick money; embarking on it may not bring their immediate dividend during their tenure (1 entry); the project is capital intensive which the Local Government alone cannot shoulder (2 entries); the Local Government lacks initiative and not innovative (1 entry) and misplacement of priority by the Local Government administration on the projects to be invested on (1 entry). According to the General Manager, Kwara State Tourism Board:

Oke Ero Local Government Council did not see it as their priority. People came to position with different visions and focus. Despite these we spoke to the successive administration at the Council, they were not forthcoming.

Projects in Pipeline by Oke Ero Local Government Council: The responses on whether Oke Ero Local Government has any project in pipeline for the development of Imoleboja Rock Shelter revealed that the Local Government Council did not see it as a priority (1 entry); lack of continuity on projects by different administration whereby successive ones come to power with different vision and focus accounts for absence of concrete project in the pipeline for the site (1 entry). Another respondent revealed that the Local Government don't always have any project in the pipeline due to low initiative except gingered by the State government (1 entry); it was also shown that Tourism Board has not been able to penetrate Oke Ero Local Government Council since inception of the present administration in the Local Government (1 entry).

Erection of gate at the entrance to the site of the attraction with landscaping was noted as one of the projects embarked upon by the Local Government (1 entry), while the projects in the pipeline include fencing of the site, clearing of the surroundings, building of offices and accommodation facility as well as provision of staff to manage the attraction (1 entry). A respondent noted that feasibility studies are being carried out on the site, but did not indicate the tier of government that involved in it. There was also a respondent who said he was not aware of any project in pipeline for the development of the site. The honourable Vice Chairman Oke Ero Local Government elaborated on the projects in pipeline towards development of Imoleboja Rock Shelter as follow:

The projects in pipeline for the Rock Shelter are: fencing, clearing the surroundings, building office and accommodation facilities, staffing the site.

The Tourism Officer for the Local Government also revealed that:

No monumental development of the site by the Local Government Council. The Local Government has put in 2009 budget the putting a gate to the site and landscaping.

In the words of Secretary, Kwara State Tourism Board:

They don't have because Oke Ero Local Government when it comes to area of Tourism development it appears the initiative is very low, except they are being gingered by the State Government. Since the inception of the present administration in Oke Ero Local Government Council, the State Tourism Board has not been able to penetrate Oke Ero Local Government Council; we have draw out itinerary of visitations, but what they said was that the Chairman was not around. The Secretary was not around either. When we got there, we sold the idea to them, nothing has been happening from their ends.

Readiness of Oke Ero Local Government Council to Execute the Projects: On the readiness of Oke Ero Local Government Council to execute project (if any) in pipeline for the attraction, a respondent noted that the Council did not see such as a priority (1 entry); A member of the executive council of the Local Government revealed that the Council will start the clearing and fumigation of the place very soon (1 entry), and that the Chairman is always ready to execute projects that has bearing with the people (2 entries). The Tourism Officer of the Local Government declared that as soon as the financial situation is favourable, we will swing to the site for action.

Imoleboja Rock Shelter and its Development over Time: Inference into the data collected revealed that virtually every respondent agreed to the fact that there is lack of physical development on Imoleboja Rock Shelter at Odo Owa in Oke Ero Local Government area of Kwara State. Various reasons were revealed as responsible for this, out which 7 respondents mentioned lack of awareness on the part of the Local Government on the importance of this attraction/site; some were of the views that by Local Government Council was not forthcoming in terms of funding (7 entries); dispute on the part of Ilofffa and Odo Owa communities on the ownership of the attraction was also noted as forestalling government commitment towards the development of this attraction (11 entries); lack of continuity in governance also attracted 4 entries. In the words of the Manager, Marketing and Promotion, Kwara State Tourism Board:

There is lack of awareness of the importance of this attraction site for financial benefits. Secondly, the Local Government cannot wait for tourism development because of its long gestation. Therefore they see Tourism development is a waste of time, and believe tourism cannot be solely handled by a tier of government. The Local Government Chairmen are not even interested because they have more pressing issues than tourism. There was also a conflict of the land by Odo Owa and Ilofffa communities. The Government came in, and declared it to Odo Owa. The State government made them to understand it is interested in its development and promotion which the two communities will eventually benefit from.

It was also revealed that the place where the attraction is located is being fenced and some infrastructures provided to enhance the visitation to the place (2 entries); the officials from Tourism Board and Ministry revealed current move at wooing investors towards development of the place (2 entries). To another segment of the respondents, little signs of development only surfaced after the state government intervention on the project (2 entries); it was also revealed that controversies ensued between two warring communities of Ilofffa and Odo Owa over the naming of the attraction (4 entries). In this case, the Assistant Director, Research, Planning, Statistics and Physical Development revealed that:

The land dispute between Odo Owa and Ilofffa communities hindered the development of Rock shelter for a short time.....it came to a stage that the Ilofffa community wanted the naming of the Rock shelter after the two communities.

The Secretary, Kwara State Tourism Board gave elaborate information on the dispute over the land on which the Rock Shelter is located thus:

It is true that the place has been known for a long to Kwara State Tourism Board, but at the initial stage, the problem of acquisition emanated the problem of land dispute especially between Odo Owa and Ilofffa communities. Before the

Government could settle it, it took a long time, except of the recent when the Ministry and Government had to intervene. The intervention involved the Honourable Commissioner for Environment and Tourism, the Ministry of Local Government. They had to go there with the two paramount rulers of the two towns, and there they agreed that the place belongs to Odo Owa community. So, the problem of land dispute has been a major hindrance in the area of development. Otherwise, it would have been developed before now.

Development of attraction of this magnitude to another set of respondents will surely take long time before the dividends could materialized, and this to them will never be in the interest of the administrators at the Local Government level who are always interested in project that has capability of quick returns (2 entries), almost in agreement with this, lack of political will on the part of Local Government Council was also noted as responsible for this (3 entries). Stressing further on the contribution of the Local Government Council in the area towards lack of physical development on the site of the attraction, the Secretary further revealed that:

The nonchalant attitude of the host Local Government Chairman also contributed. We recalled that in the 1990s, a Chairman was expected to release some money for some preliminary works but the money was not released. Subsequent Chairmen were visited by Kwara State Tourism Board, but due to the nonchalant attitude, nothing has happened there physically.

A respondent perceived the reason for lack of physical development on this site since 1995 from security angle. According to him, lack of security in the place for visitors and workers makes it unpopular (1 entry). Invitation of official from Federal Ministry of Commerce and Tourism for inspection of the attraction was at the instance of the Local Government and Tourism Board (1 entry). It was shown that the State Tourism Board is the only agency that has been trying its best on this tourist attraction through regular package tour to the area (3 entries). Data equally revealed that Local Government efforts on the attraction at the time when the Odo Owa community was under Ekiti Local Government Council did not yield results (1 entry); that the attraction only received best attention at the period when Technical Adviser on Tourism was appointed for Ekiti Local Government (3 entries). Going down the memory lane, the General Manager, Kwara State Tourism Board noted that:

The Tourism Board did a lot of championing of the course of development of the Rock Shelter because an official of the then Federal Ministry of Commerce and Tourism, Abuja was invited to Kwara State. He was taken to the Rock Shelter. He was marveled with what he saw, and specifically requested for a working paper to be forwarded to Abuja, so that the Federal Government could in partnership with the State and the Local Governments; with the view of developing the site. The then Ekiti LGA was approached with this request, and despite several efforts, nothing was realized. One would say that, the response was not encouraging from the then Ekiti Local Government.

Oke Ero Local Government's activities on Imoleboja Rock Shelter so far has been for its officials to be on ground whenever members of State Tourism Board are on visitation to this site (1 entry). Another perspective on the activities of the Local Government towards development of the attraction is that the project is beyond the capacity of the Local Government (1 entry), that the best option is to develop the site

through involvement of private investors since it is capital intensive (1 entry). Lately, the efforts of Oke Ero Local Government Council on this attraction is limited to clearing of site of the rock and fumigate it when visitors are to be brought there for free movement (5 entries); that no meaningful development has been coming from Oke Ero Local Government area (4 entries).

However the presence of the Tourism Officer in the Local Government, and the Tourist Guide for the Odo Owa Community who have being mandated to take care of the surrounding of this attraction was acknowledged as another visible contribution from the Local Government (1 entry); so also the Local Government efforts of inviting the State government to come and settle the disputes between Ilofffa and Odo Owa communities over the ownership of this tourist attraction (2 entries). A respondent said he was not aware of any Local Government activity over the place (1 entry). Unimpressive attitudes of the Local Government(s) so far towards the development of this attraction was attributed to financial handicapped on the part of the Local Government Council (3 entries). Further comment from the General Manager, Kwara State Tourism Board summarized the whole issue in this regard. In his words:

The various administrations at the Local Government Councils had been approached by the Tourism Board at various times, drawing their attention on the need to develop the site and ways to develop it. The best they have done is to clear the site when visitors are to be brought to the site. No concrete development has been done beyond that.

Another revelation on this is that:

The quality of Politicians contesting for elective positions at the Local Government level is very poor, and most of them do not have clear-cut blueprint on tourism activities. Many of them are position by accident, many are stooge of political godfathers, while some are there based on the wish of the Party officials at the State level. A scenario of this nature has been producing people that are not committed to their duties, people that know next-to-nothing about how to be accountable to the people at the grassroots and how to turn the fortune of their constituency around for positive living.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has succeeded in addressing its set objectives. The rate of patronage for instance has been encouraging in spite of the state of this attraction, which is rated as still 'undeveloped'. This state of 'undeveloped' was occasioned according to the respondents by ownership tussle over the ownership of the site where this attraction is located by the two communities that surrounded it. However the State Government through the supervising ministry and the State Tourism Board have not been relenting in their efforts towards developing this attraction in spite of this conflict. The efforts and activities of the hosting Local Government over time were also highlighted. The current plans of the Local Government towards giving this attraction a face-lift were also enumerated. The effect of financial constraints occasioned by insufficient federal allocation was not left out as part of the problems affecting the development of this tourist attraction.

Apart from all these, the respondents revealed that investment in tourism is not an effort that brings about short-term dividends. That the Politicians at the Local Government level always see this as unpalatable since such investment may come to fruition during their tenure of office. The perceived fear that other people will claim the glory of such investment in the long run always deters them from it. It was equally revealed that most of the Politicians that come to power at the Local Government level do not always have clear-cut blueprint on tourism development and promotion. That majority of them are always in office by circumstance that is beyond conventional explanation. On this note, the issue of tourism is always a matter of lip-service to them when they eventually clinch the power.

The followings are suggested as possible ways of solving the highlighted problems confronting the development of the Imoleboja Rock Shelter: the development of the site should be inward motivated, mutual understanding among the people within the area to enhance enabling environment for the development of the site, Local Government Council should try to understand the benefits to be gained from the attractions when developed so as to arouse their interest towards making it a priority, fund should be released for its development from 2009 budget, there should be campaign for awareness (in terms of marketing) so as to help improve patronage of more visitors to the site; there should be regular sensitization to intimate the people at the grassroots with the value of what they have in their domain.

Others clamoured for Community involvement where everybody is a stakeholder in initiation and execution of development project of the site. Suggestions offered also include adoption of Public Private Partnership arrangement to enhance promotion of the site to the outside world. Other suggestions come in form of advice on one part and observation on the other; these are: Government has a role to place in it/provision of basic infrastructure; Activities of the site should be placed on the Internet; the Local Government should be carried along in its development due to the location of this tourist attraction which is in the rural areas; Federal Government has bigger roles to play in it due to the resources involved in it; there should be enabling legislation to facilitate and encourage private involvement and that with peace accord between two warring communities, government should hastening up by swinging into action for the development of this tourist attraction.

The State Tourism Board should be mandated to initiate a Development Plan on tourism that will take into consideration most of the attractions that are located in each state of federation. The Board should have ad-hoc committees (whose members should consist of Private individuals and Opinion leaders with track records of enviable achievements and integrity. The ad-hoc committee will have implementation of this Development Plan as their priorities. Each of these Committees should be based at every Local Government area of the States of the Federation. For meaningful results, membership of Political parties should not used as yardstick for inclusion in such ad-hoc Committees, and necessary backings should be given to them so that they can easily raise funds from the public, private and corporate organizations.

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