

Heritage Conservation: A Prerequisite for Sustainable Tourism Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Tourism essentially entails the travel from one's normal place of residence to another location, mainly for the purposes of sight-seeing, relaxation and enjoyment. The main considerations for tourism, therefore, include: the tourists, travel to, destination and tourist experience as well as the desire to see and experience something new, something different, something exciting and fulfilling; and to engage in activity(s) that provide variety, safety and the desire for repeat visits, among other things. All these considerations form what can be referred to as tourist attractions or attributes and they accrue from the heritage of the host community or location. For any tourist facility or activity to be sustainable, proper consideration must be given to the conservation of the heritage resources. This paper evaluates Nigeria's Heritage Endowments: those attributes which were inherited from our past and passed down to succeeding generations, including: our arts, culture, customs and natural resources of fauna and flora; and underscores the need to conserve and preserve them for sustainable tourism development in Nigeria.

Key Words: Heritage Conservation, Destination, Sustainable Tourism Development.

Introduction

Unlike other African countries, especially the East and the Southern African nations, tourism in Nigeria, started rather lately, with some foreigners visiting a few places of interest while on business or diplomatic trips. There were no organized tours to Nigeria as such. Currently, however, a new trend evolving as Nigeria is witnessing an influx of foreigners to the country to participate in activities like the famous yearly Calabar, Rivers State, Lagos and Abuja carnivals, as well the Oshun Festivals, among others. There is, therefore, the need to move from the passive stance of just knowing that there are few places of interest which foreigners may or may not wish to visit to a more proactive approach in managing our tourist resources.

As a country, Nigeria cannot afford to develop her economy, especially the tourism sector, in isolation of what is happening globally. Nigeria needs to strategize and develop tourism in a way that will not only attract the much needed foreign exchange, but also lay a solid foundation for sustainability in this all-important sector of our economy. This, therefore, calls for more innovative, proactive and purposeful development of the tourism sector.

Of late tourism has, indeed, become a popular, global and economically rewarding leisure activity. In 2010 alone, there were over 940 million international tourist arrivals worldwide, with a growth of 6.6% as compared to the 2009 figures (UNWTO Report, 2009). The same Report says that international tourism receipts grew to US \$919 billion or Euro 693 billion in 2010, corresponding to an increase in real terms of 4.7%. According to Francesco Frangialli (Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organization:

“The rapid growth of the modern tourism industry and the phenomenal increase in international tourist arrivals, worldwide, has made the tourism industry one of the most important industries of the world, particularly in economic terms. One of the most valuable characteristics of the industry is that while it has grown in numbers, it has also grown in variety of destinations as there has been a continued geographical spread of tourism to all parts of the world which has made it possible for many countries, especially developing countries, to develop tourism as a viable tool for socio-economic development”.

The gains of tourism of tourism cut across all sectors of the economy. People are known to benefit from ancillary businesses to tourism. According to the World Tourism Commission on Africa (2002), Tourism is a catalyst for sustainable and reliable development in Africa.

Background Information

Nigeria, generally referred to as the ‘Giant of Africa’, due to her large population and economy, is the most populated country in Africa and the 7th most populated in the world (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, 2014). With our rich, diverse cultural and natural heritage, Nigeria has all it takes to harness her resources to make her a sustainable tourism destination in the world. As the people of Nigeria are many and diverse so are their cultures. The Nigerian culture is shaped by Nigeria’s multiple ethnic groups. According to Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia (2014) Nigeria has well over 370 ethnic groups, speaking over 521 languages.

On the other hand, from the natural resources view point, Nigeria spans six major ecological or vegetation zones, namely:

- i. Coastal Vegetation Zone;
- ii. Tropical Rainforest Zone;
- iii. Derived Savanna Zone;
- iv. Savanna Zone;
- v. Desert; and
- vi. Wetlands.

Representative portions of some of these ecological areas are managed under one system or the other, generally referred to as 'Protected Areas'. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) defines a protected area as "an area of land/or sea especially dedicated to the protection of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means" (IUCN, 2000). Protected Area management in Nigeria falls under five major categories: i. Forest Reserves; ii. Game Reserves;

- iii. Game Sanctuaries, iv. Strict Nature Reserves; and
- v. National Parks; each with specific management objectives.

Nigeria is a Federation with three levels of government, namely Federal, State and Local Government. Each level of government is supposed to be responsible for the protection and management of one or more of these areas, with the Federal Government being vested with the control and management of National Parks as enshrined in the exclusive list of its constitution. Currently, Nigeria has Eight National Parks located in these major ecological zones of the country. These are:

Table 1: A List of Existing National Parks in Nigeria

S/NO	Name of Park	Location	Size	Vegetation Zone
1	Chad Basin National Park	Borno State	2,258km ²	Savannah-woodland
2	Cross River National Park	Cross River State	4,000km ²	Tropical Rainforest
3	Gashaka Gumti National Park	Taraba State	6,700km ²	Tropical Rainforest
4	Kainji National Park	Kwara/Niger State	5,340km ²	Savannah-woodland
5	Kamuku National Park	Kaduna State	1,120km ²	Savannah-woodland
6	Okomu National Park	Edo State	1,082km ²	Tropical Rainforest
7	Old Oyo National Park	Oyo State	2,512km ²	Savannah-woodland

8	*Yankari National Park	Bauchi State	2,244km ²	Savannah-woodland
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(Source: Nigeria National Park Service, 2010)

*Yankari, the oldest conservation area in Nigeria, was once a Game Reserve owned and managed by the Bauchi State Government. At the request of the Bauchi State Government, the status was upgraded to a National Park and the management taken over by the Federal Government but currently, the Park has been returned back to Bauchi State and the status reverted back to a Game Reserve.

“The mission of the Nigeria National Park Service is to protect, manage and regulate the use of these unique ecosystems designated as National Parks by such means and measures to preserve and conserve Nigeria’s heritage, both natural and cultural, tangible and intangible, particularly the fauna and flora, the habitats they live in, and the unique scenery they afford and to provide human benefits and enjoyment in such Manner and by such Means, so that these resources are left Unimpaired for Generations to come” (Nigeria Nat. Parks, 2000).

From the foregoing, it can be seen that apart from Forest Reserves, National Parks and other Protected Areas are set aside primarily for natural heritage preservation and for none-consumptive uses like tourism. The objectives sound right.

This, notwithstanding, there is a visible dearth in our capacity to manage our natural environment in this country (Areola, 1987) and (Enabor, 1997). Although we have agencies of government that are saddled with the responsibility of ameliorating and mainstreaming our environment into our everyday life and living, both at the federal and state levels, their performance has not been outstanding. Experience has also shown that the capacity of managers of such agencies is generally deficient, technically. Their level of commitment also appears to be much less than is required to tackle the issues at stake. There is a general nonchalant attitude and ignorance of environmental issues exhibited by most Nigerians, even the educated ones. As a result of all these, most of our environmental laws and regulations are flouted without official sanctions.

Stakeholders’ awareness and involvement in conservation initiatives, especially at the grassroots and policy making levels is paramount in this regard. Rural Communities depend directly on the resources of the

environment for their livelihoods. At the same time the environment, with all its inherent heritage resources, is what every nation depends on for the sustainable development of the tourism sector, especially ecotourism. For communities to be fully involved and to respect environmental laws, they must understand both government policies and trust the commitment of those responsible for the management of the resources.

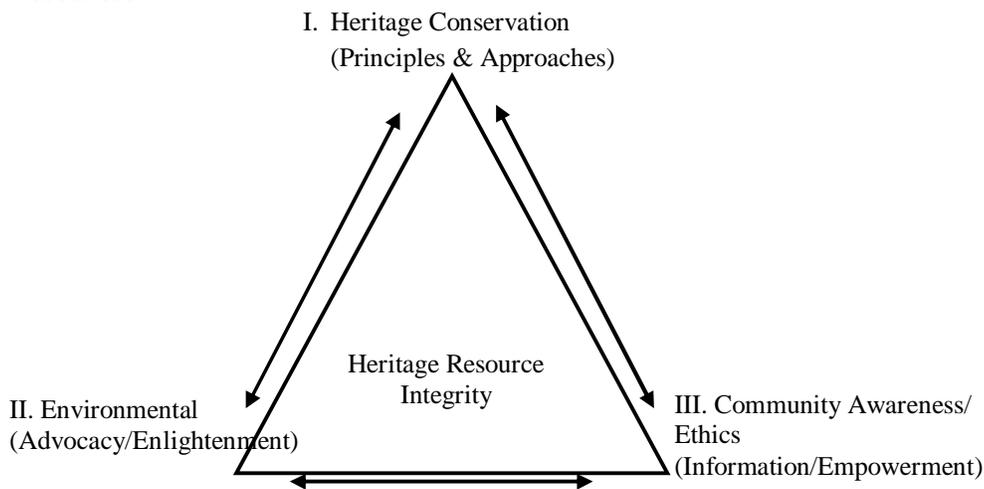


Fig. 1 Factors that constitute Heritage Integrity

The diagram above illustrates the relationship between heritage resources conservation strategies, public enlightenment and advocacy programmes by the well-informed agencies, working hand in hand with Government Agencies, all aimed at involving all stakeholders, especially the rural communities so as to enlist their support in a joint effort to achieve heritage resource integrity.

This paper evaluates the current status of Nigeria's major Natural and Cultural Heritage Resources and discusses the need for their proper conservation and preservation. These resources are all those attributes, namely arts and culture, as well as natural resources of fauna and flora, inherited from our past and passed down to succeeding generations.

Tourism in Nigeria

The tourism sector in Nigeria has been identified by the Federal Government as one of the six priority areas of development. Accordingly, Nigerian (2005) Tourism Master Plan Nigeria into five major clusters as follows:

- i. The Sahara Gateway Cluster – Kano Region,
- ii. The Scenic Nature Cluster – Plateau Region,
- iii. The Capital Conference Cluster-FCT Region,
- iv. The Atlantic Gateway Cluster – Lagos Region, and
- v. The Tropical Rainforest Cluster – the Cross River Region

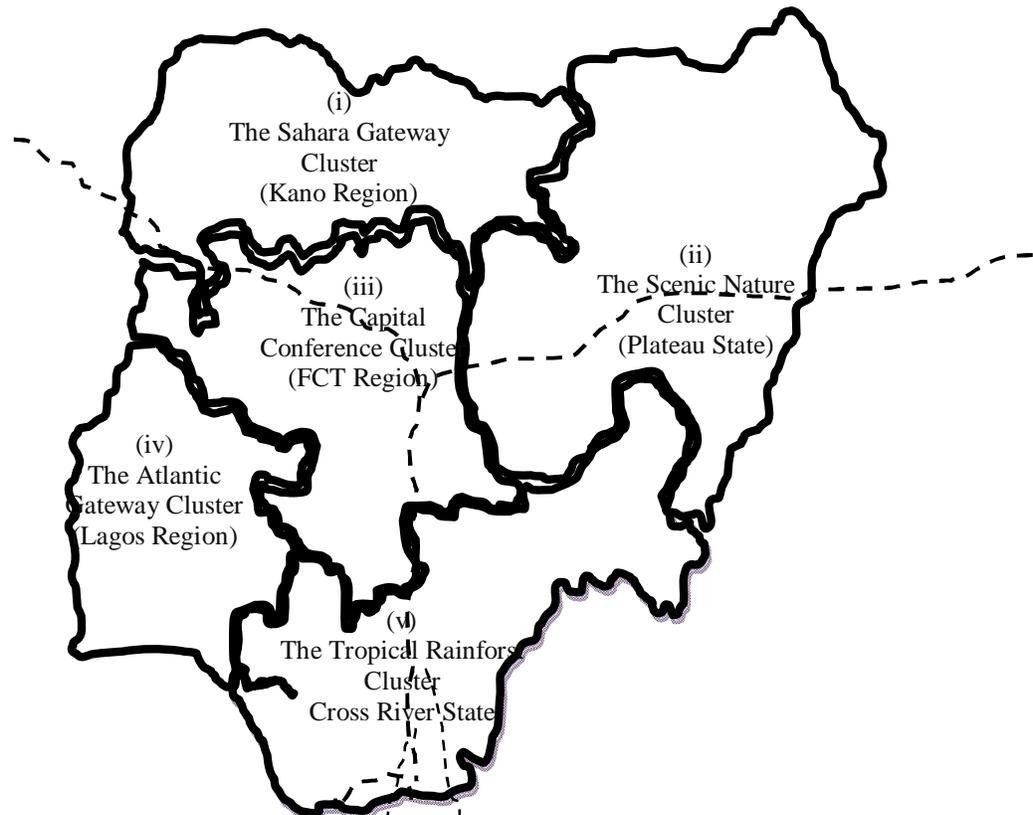


Fig. 2. The Author's Representation of Nigeria's Tourism Clusters in a map form.

The Master Plan was designed to address national issues like: poverty alleviation and general unemployment, physical environmental enhancement, cultural and social issues; including HIV/AIDS.

This section highlights Nigeria's heritage endowments and evaluates their current status in line with these tourism clusters.

(I) The Tropical Rainforest Cluster

The Tropical Rainforest Cluster, under the Cross River Region, is said to have a rich and diverse historical, ethno-cultural, archaeological

and very rich ecological heritage, all combined, which can be a prospective window of investment that should appeal to investors, if these endowments are properly *harnessed* and the appropriate infrastructural base put in place (Cross River State Tourism Bureau, 2012).

This Region has everything from the species-rich Rainforest; to water bodies (including Lakes, Rivers, the Atlantic Coast, and Waterfalls); to the extensive scenic high altitude ranges of Obudu Plateau, in Cross River State, endowed with a variety of wildlife (some of them critically endangered, for example the Cross river gorilla and other apes and rare bird species. The Obudu Plateau and the adjoining ranges is the only place in the West African Sub-region where gorillas still occur in the wild (Ebin, 1983). It is in the Rainforest of Cross River State that rare and endangered plants and animal species are still found in the wild. According to WWF, (1990), Cross River National Park is home to many, endemic species which include : Gorillas, Drills, Chimpanzees, Agwantibo (Golden Potto or Bush baby), forest Elephants, Baboons, Leopards, Red Foxes, the primitive Ball-headed Rock-fowl *Picathartesoreas*. Also, rare plant species such as *Ancistocladiuskoropensis*, (which contains chemical properties for the cure of HIV/AIDS) and *Prunusafricana* (with properties for the cure of prostate cancer) are found in the forests of Cross River State.

WWF (1990) further described Cross River National Park, as home to one of the thickest forest plants species in the world, endowed with the highest level of biodiversity and species endemism. Other writers have described the Park as 'the Amazon Forest of Africa', waiting to be explored by visitors and fun seekers. Adisa (2011) stated that the Rainforest of Cross River National Park is one of Nigeria's top ecotourism destinations where tropical rainforest rare animals, birds and plant species can be observed in their pristine habitats.

However, by the late 1990s, Nigeria had lost about 90% of her original rainforest. The remaining 10% is located mainly in Cross River State (WWF, 1990). This informed the creation of Cross River National Park by the Federal Government of Nigeria with the assistance of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), in 1990 to save the remnants of this all-important ecosystem.

It is the Rainforest of Cross River State that gave Nigeria the qualification to become one of the nine Biodiversity Hotspots in Africa. Other areas of importance in this Region include:

- a) The Obudu Plateau (also known as Obudu Mountain Resort (OMR)) and Ranges

The Obudu Plateau, also referred to as Obudu Mountain Resort (OMR) is located in Obanliku Local Government Area of Cross River State. It is an extension of the Bamenda Highlands in Cameroon and is characterized by steep mountain ranges peaking at an altitude of 1,575.76 meters above the sea level, hence its tranquil climate (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, 2014) The Plateau, which has been named a 'World Heritage Site', is one of the world's most scenic locations. It hosts the yearly Obudu Mountain Race, attracting thousands of tourists from all over the world.

The area is made up of semi-montane grassland ecosystem, interspersed with clusters of gallery forests, located along the steep slopes and extending to the valley bottoms (Ebin, 2013). These gallery forests used to be safe habitats for rare and endangered bird species, some of them Pale-arctic migrants mainly from Europe (Ash and Sharland, 1986). Obudu Plateau is listed as an 'Important Bird Area' (IBA) in Nigeria, given the number and variety of bird species found in the area. It is indeed nature's milestone where the wonderful work of nature can be appreciated with its awesome and near incredible panoramic views stretching into Cameroon, in the east and the Adamawa Mountain Ranges to the northeast. The Plateau, which is adjacent to the Okwangwo Division of the Cross River National Park, used to be home to many endemic plants and animals species, especially primates, including preuss monkeys (*Cercopithecuspreuss*), large troops of baboons and of course the endangered Cross river gorilla. Today, however, these animals have almost all disappeared due to lack of protection of the Plateau and the area is threatened with landslides (Ebin, 2013).

b) Waterfalls:

The Region is also endowed with two spectacular waterfalls: Agbokim Waterfalls, near Ikom and Kwafalls near Calabar. These two Waterfalls attract scores of tourists annually but their integrity is being threatened by deforestation taking place upstream.

c) Archeological, Historical, and Other Natural sites:

There exists numerous Archeological, Historical and Natural Sites in this Region, too many to be mentioned in this report. However, the prominent ones are the Ikom or Bakor Monoliths. These structures decorated on hard rocks and hewn into the form of a phallus tell the ingenuity and history of the people who settled in these places hundreds of decades ago. However, for so many decades these Monoliths have suffered exposure to extreme weather conditions and they have been put under the risk of erosion and deterioration (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia, 2012).

Another very serious threat to the security of the Monoliths is theft. It is stated that Nigeria has lost most of her artifacts to thieves who, with the connivance of our people, have shipped the artefacts to private museums abroad. According to a report in the Daily Sun Newspaper of 5th August, 2010, Nigeria once had well over 450 unique, priceless stones but today only 119 are found. The same report said that two of the Ikom Monoliths were recovered in France and formally returned to the National Commission of Museums and Monuments (NCMM) on Jan. 26, 2010 by the French Embassy. From the above accounts one can say that this particular aspect of Nigeria's classical antiquity has been looted beyond imagination. However, with the listing of the Alok Monolith Site as one of the 100 most Endangered Sites in the world by World Monument Fund in 2008 and the consideration to include same in the UNESCO's World Heritage List there is a ray of hope.

d) Cultural Heritage:

The Region's cultural environment is no doubt illuminating and exciting, in spite of the apparent lack of proper harnessing and packaging of our authentic cultural events into viable and attractive tourism products. Apart from festivals and other cultural events, there exist a number of other activities worth protecting, harnessing and packaging as in-situ tourism products.

Nigeria can be said to be currently at the cross-roads. Most Nigerian cultures are threatened by modernization. According to the World Commission on Environment and Development Report of 1987, Nigerians are said to adopt modern institutions, methods and life styles without safe-guarding and protecting their indigenous ones. The result has been a synthesis which is at times uneasy and clumsy and which, in some cases, has produced new forms of behavior and attitudes totally alien to the culture of the land. A good example is what is currently going on during the yearly carnivals across the country. A greater portion of the costumes used in these carnivals are foreign, even the behavior often times exhibited is totally foreign. The risk involved in all these is what has been referred to as 'systematic cultural erosion' (Ebin,2013).

(II) The Scenic Nature Cluster - Plateau Region

a) Plateau State Sector:

As the name implies, this Region comprises highly scenic natural environments, carefully crafted by nature. These include the Jos Wildlife Safari Park, Mando and the Jos National Museum founded in 1952 and located within the Jos metropolis. Others are: the Pandam Game Reserve, a wildlife sanctuary, established to protect the natural habitat of

hippopotamus, crocodiles, and other reptiles in Pandam area of Plateau State. The Region is also endowed with two prominent waterfalls and rock outcrops, one of which is said to be one of the only five breeding sites of the White Pelican in Africa. This site is protected as a Bird Sanctuary (Galleria Media Ltd., 2004).

From available records, this area of the Region does not seem to be under a very serious threat. This, notwithstanding, more sites need to be investigated, documented and given the necessary protection to further boost the tourism potentials of the region.

b) Bauchi State Sector:

Bauchi State is famous for the long standing Yankari Game Reserve. Yankari is a premier Game Reserve in Nigeria, famous for its Wiki Warm Spring, located around the Ganji River. Yankari has become the most popular nature-based tourist destination in Nigeria, receiving an average of 20,000 visitors a year, from more than 100 countries of the world (Odunlami, 2003). According to Odunlami, "if properly managed Yankari could play a significant role in the development and promotion of tourism in Nigeria". It is one of the few places left in West Africa where wild animals are still protected in their natural habitats for Game Viewing. Established in 1956, Yankari is said to be threatened by farm encroachment into the Park area and the subsequent clashes between the local villagers and wild animals that stray into their farms, destroy their crops and get killed or cause damage to human lives and property (Ubaru, 2000). Outright poaching has also become a big threat to the Reserve.

c) The Adjoining Nassarawa State Sector:

Nassarawa State, located between Plateau State and Abuja Federal Capital Territory, is said to be endowed with huge deposits of solid minerals. In addition, it has some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. Some of these features include: beautiful lakes and other water bodies that require harnessing into viable tourism opportunities.

Activities of touristic value include: dyeing pits and Calabash Carvings in Lafia Town. Traditional clothes in various sizes and designs are woven and dyed (Northern Nigeria Tourism, n.d.).

(III) The Capital Conference Cluster – Abuja FCT Region

This Region is known for its big Hotels and International Conference Centers within the Federal Capital Territory. Abuja City and the rest of the Territory is a modern, well-planned municipal area, with beautiful natural and man-made areas of high touristic value.

Nearby natural attractions include the Aso Rock and Zuma Rock. Aso Rock is a rock outcrop that stands out very conspicuously in the outskirts

of the City. The large, 400m high rock formation, consisting of one massive stone, is the city's most noticeable feature. The Rock has become very significant due to the fact that the Nigerian Presidential Villa Complex, which houses the residence and offices of the Nigerian President, is located at the foot of the Rock. The Presidential Villa which was built in 1991, when Nigeria's capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, has popularly become known simply as 'Aso Rock', as a result of its location near the Rock. The Complex, from all indications was deliberately located on the valley of the Rock which, as it sounds, connotes 'fortification'.

Abuja has been described as a 'tourist heaven', with so many places to visit on a city tour, especially for visitors and conference attendees. These attractions include: Aso Rock Presidential Villa Complex and environs, among others. Zuma Rock, another natural stone Monolith stands imposingly in Suleja at the boundary between the Abuja Federal Capital Territory and Niger State, on the way into Abuja from Kaduna (Abuja_ng.com, n.d.).

Other Natural Heritage Sites and Resources in this Region, worth protecting and developing into full tourist facilities include: Kamuku National Park in Kaduna State – a typical open savanna woodland ecosystem with large Game Animals; Kainji Lake National Park, located near the Kainji Lake from where the Park derived its name and the Gurara Waterfalls, located in Niger State, between Suleja and Minna. The Gurara Waterfalls, located about an hour's drive from the City of Abuja, is a beautiful cliff covered with a curtain of white water, especially in the rainy season, is an ideal place for bird watching.

Kainji Lake National Park has a variety of big game animals and savanna woodland birds. However, Birdlife International (2012) has stated that the Park's integrity is seriously threatened by numerous human activities such as: poaching, deforestation, wildfires and illegal grazing.

(IV) The Atlantic Gateway Cluster – Lagos Region

This Region, like the Abuja Region, is characterized by big hotels and Conference Centers as well as a number of natural and man-made sites of attraction. Apart from being the nation's foremost seaport, Lagos is endowed with many tourist facilities, ranging from the Barr Beach, the Slave Route in Badagry and the Lekki Conservation Center located in Lekki. The Conservation Center which was established in 1990 is Biodiversity icon and Environmental Education Centre set up by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) to protect the remnants of the Coastal Rainforest in this Region.

Old Oyo National Park: Old Oyo National Park is located across northern Oyo State and the southern part of Kwara State, Nigeria is a combination of rich history of the culture of the Yoruba Empire and wildlife (National Park Service Report, 2010)

(V) The Sahara Gateway Cluster – Kano Region

Geographically, this Region is located in the Sudanian-savanna ecological zone, which stretches across the Sahel, immediately south of the Sahara.

The main attraction of the Region is Kano City (Nihotours, 2000). The big metropolitan population of Kano makes it the second largest city in Nigeria. The inhabitants are mainly Hausas and largely Muslim.

Kano City is strategically located and it holds a leading position as a commercial hub in sub-Saharan Africa, being linked to many other African countries by road. Kano hosts to the vast Kurmi market, known for its crafts and the old dye pits which are still in use near the City. Kano is famous for its Durbar Festivals, which constitute a big tourist attraction. According to Barau (2007). Durbar is usually characterized by a procession of highly, elaborate and colorfully dressed horsemen who ride through the city in large numbers.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the foregoing, one can readily agree with the statement that 'Nigeria is endowed with abundant natural resources and sites of high touristic value. However, the issues at stake are: how Nigeria as a country has conserved and harnessed these resources for her sustainable tourism development?

Indeed, the rich ecosystems and sites in the country, the diverse cultural and other natural endowments provide ample opportunities and potentials for tourism development, especially ecotourism. These abundant potentials are not only untapped, but also caused to deteriorate to a state of disrepair. The Okwangwo Division of the Cross River National Park, for example, contiguous with the Obudu Plateau, is the only place in the West African Sub-region that still has Gorillas in the wild (Ebin, 1983). The area is not receiving adequate protection and the remnant population of Gorillas is diminishing fast, yet Gorilla-based tourism is a high income earner in African countries that have Gorillas.

As stated earlier, tropical rainforests for example, are said to be the most species rich environments on Earth, with the highest level of biodiversity and extremely important biophysical properties. The future of the tourism industry in the country is intimately tied to the sustainability of this and other ecosystems, with their unique and

complex vegetation and land forms. However, Ayodele, et al (1999) have stated that the search for material well-being, and the soaring increase in consumption and the extraordinary rate of demographic exploitation of natural resources by man have led to the destruction of wildlife habitat, species extinction both fauna and flora and loss of ecological diversity.

Given the enormity of the problems with our environment and natural resources, more focus and attention need to be given to the environmental sector. Environmental issues are part of daily living, therefore, knowledge of them must be reduced to messages and languages understood and appreciated by all. It is a question of attitude and not only poverty. Some other African countries, poorer than Nigeria, have imbibed the conservation ethics and are respecting their conservation laws. The solution to all these prevalent problems lies in attitudinal change and Ecological Restoration of the damaged sites as well as their effective protection. This approach must form an integral part of future policies for environmental protection and stability as well as tourism development for Nigeria.

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