Tourism and Regional Integration in West Africa

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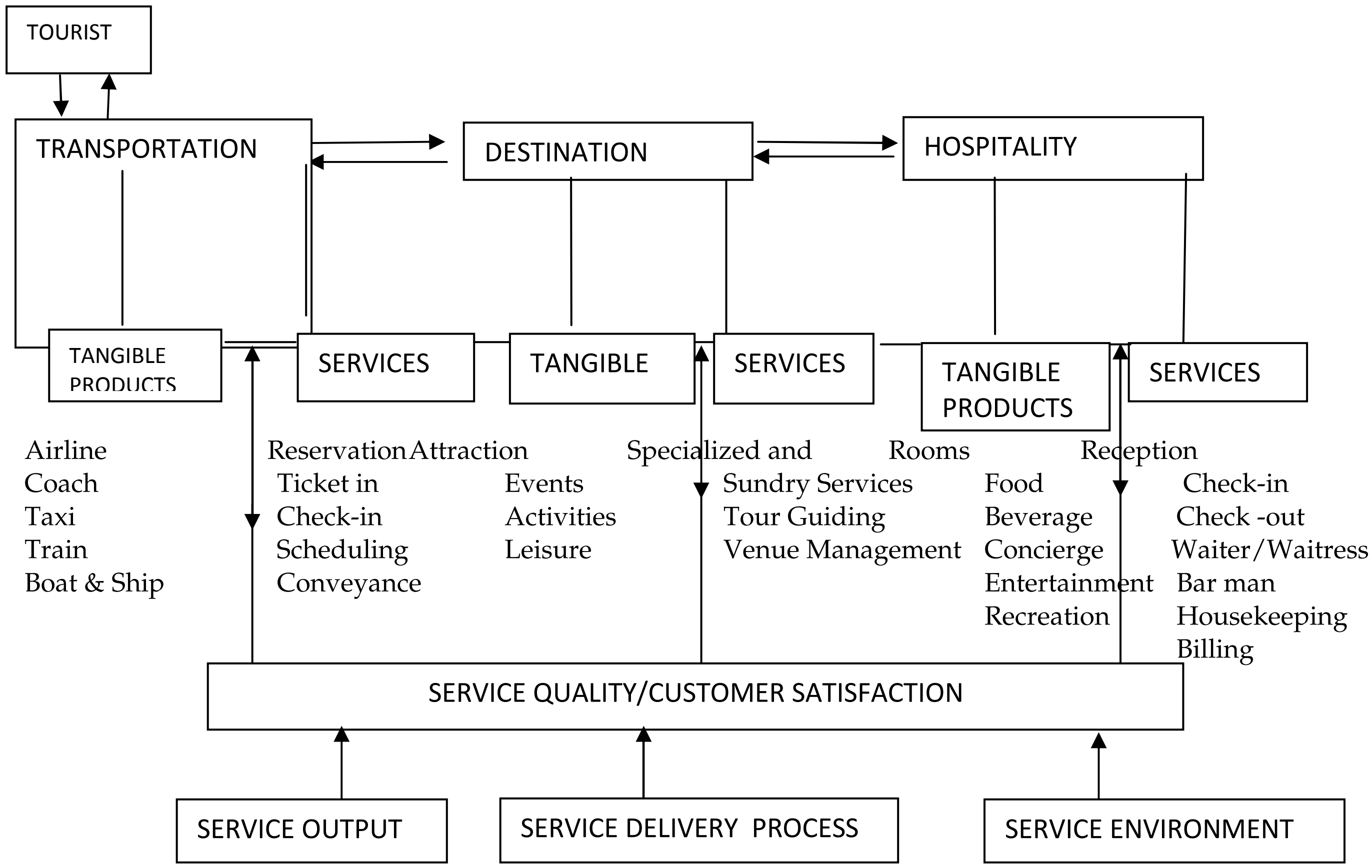
Introduction

Operationally, tourism can be defined as a composite of activities, services and industries that delivers a travel experience to individuals and groups traveling 50 miles (80 km) or more from their homes for the purpose of pleasure (Pilaus, 2012).

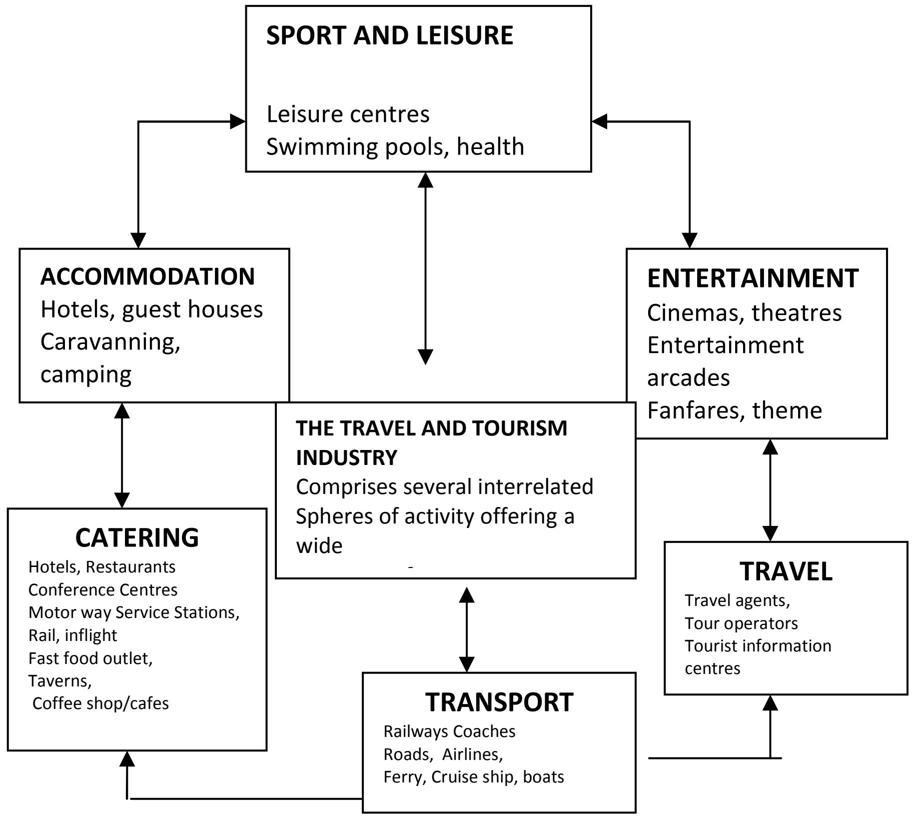
Tourism incorporates some business sectors: transportation, accommodation, catering establishments, shops, entertainment venues, activity facilities and a variety of hospitality services providers who cater for individuals or groups traveling away from home. By and large, tourism is a service sector activity (see fig I). Nevertheless, the "tourism products" comprise multi-faceted components and are indeed, a range of complementary services which are purchased and or used often in sequence e.g. reservation, travel agencies, financial services, transportation, accommodation, food and beverages, attractions, etc. (see fig II). Tourism is by nature complex. Its definition is unequivocal neither is its boundaries or scope clearly delineated. It is structurally multifaceted and operationally fragmentary.

FIG I: A MODEL OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM SERVICE SYSTEM



Source: Okoli

Fig II: IMPORTANT SECTORS OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY



Source: (Adopted from Ward, et al 1996)

Lickerish and Jenkins (2003) observe that for many of the poorer countries in the world, tourism has become a major input to their development process, development being seen as essentially a measure or indicator of economic progress. Most development indicators centre on changes in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Income (GNP) or per capita income. It is recognized that these concepts are difficult to quantify particularly in developing countries as statistical data are scarce and usually unreliable. However, the World Bank uses GNP per capita to classify countries (see tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Classification of countries by GNP per capita

Country Classification	**GNP per capita ($)**
Low income	695 or less
Lower – middle income	696 – 2785
Upper – middle income	2786 – 8625
High income	8626 and above

Source: World Bank, World Trade p. 763, 1995
Washington, DC

Table 2: Classification of countries by GNP per capita levels and by region

Income levels	**Number of countries in region**				
	Sub-Sahara	**East-Asia and Pacifics**	**South Asia**	**East Europe and Central Asia**	**America**
Low	35	6	7	5	4
Lower – middle	5	14	1	18	17
Upper – middle	6	6	-	4	17
Total	46	26	8	27	38

Source: World Bank, World Trade p. 763, 1995
Washington, DC

Most of the developing countries particularly those in West African region, are characterized by the following problems:

First, because of their low levels of development and because of their need for development-capital most developing countries have severe deficits on their balance of payments. In other words, they import more than is covered by their export earning.

Many of the developing countries have recognized tourism as being able to provide an alternative source of foreign earnings to service existing debt and to facilitate new investment.

Second, the lack of foreign exchange is a crucial constraint for many of the developing countries. Foreign exchange is required to conduct international trade and buy development inputs such as goods, expertise and other skills. Unfortunately, most of the developing countries have currencies which are weak and often inconvertible. Tourism revenues provide an opportunity to relieve these constraints.

Third, most developing countries are very highly populated and are characterized by rapid population growth, highly skewed to a high population of young people which put heavy socio-economic and political pressure on government.

Prospects for Tourism Growth in Developing Countries/Regions

It is against this economic and political background that most of the developing countries have seen tourism as a means of enhancing their development efforts. Erhes in Lickerish and Jenkins (2003) observes that: everything seems to suggest that developing countries look upon tourism consumption as manna from heaven that can provide a solution to all their foreign settlement difficulties. The role of tourism in economic development are thus highlighted as follows:

- ❖ Tourism is historically a growth sector. In the immediate post World War II period, especially from 1950 onwards, tourism, as an international activity, has been resilient and dynamic. Favourable economic and social determinants of demand result in tourism growth. For most developing countries, tourism offered a growth prospect which other exports did not.
- ❖ As an export activity, tourism has one advantage over other forms of export – it is not faced with tariff or quota barriers. That is most countries do not have to put barriers on where their residents travel to and how much to spend.
- ❖ Tourism tends to be an employment–intensive activity. Job creation is one of the most important economic and political necessities in the developing countries and governments support tourism in order to create employment opportunities. There is also the consideration that at the initial entry level to the tourism industry, skill and training requirements are limited, thereby limiting or reducing the employment costs of creating jobs.
- ❖ Many developing countries are located in tropical or semitropical zones and can attract tourists because of the quality of the natural infrastructure, eg, climate, beaches, scenery, etc. Using this natural advantage as an input to tourism often create very low entry costs for many countries.

  In reviewing the factors influencing the growth of tourism in developing countries, it is important to note some caveats:

- ❖ Although tourism is historically a growth sector in the global economy, this does not apply to every country or every region. For example, at the regional level, Africa has traditionally been a very low recipient of international tourist arrivals, currently receiving less than 2 percent of total international tourist flow.

- ❖ Although tourism undoubtedly brings hard currency into a country, it also has to be recognized that a proportion of this revenue leaks out to support imports for the tourism sector.
- ❖ Although there is relative absence of tariff and quota barriers inhibiting tourism movements, it should be noted that tourism is probably among the most competitive of international activities and therefore, the relevance of price, value for money, personal safety etc often determines the competitive advantage of particular countries.
- ❖ The natural infrastructure is an important input to tourism development, but there are so many examples where the use of beaches, forest and other ecological areas have caused serious environmental, social and cultural problems.
- ❖ More countries are becoming involved in international tourism. There is growing competition for tourists, particularly for long-travel tourists, and factors such as security, health, quality of the product, value for money are important considerations in the demand for tourism.

In order to strike a balance between the tourism prospects and challenges or problems, there is the need for carefully thought out tourism development policies and planning, as well assessing and leveraging the environmental, political and socio-cultural impacts. Tourism demand is influenced by social and cultural structures, institutions, occupation, work pattern, wealth, income gender, age and class while tourism supply at the destination has to be attractive, affordable, adequate, trendy and secure enough to meet tourist demand. Tourism is a global activity that has grown by 25 percent in the past ten years. More and more people have the desire and means to travel and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) is predicting over 1500 million international arrivals by 2020. Forecasts to the year 2020 predict growth in tourism in all regions of the world, with the strongest relative growth occurring in parts of the developing world, including the West African region. International tourist arrivals to Africa are forecast to grow, on average, by 5.5 percent, compared to a world average of over 4 percent. The continents aggregate revenues from tourism account for 4 percent of the total global earnings. The report of a study by the World Bank reveals that:

- African destinations are challenging and difficult to reach, road transport, the commonest mode of transport, is poor
- Airfares in Africa were 50% higher than elsewhere and charter tours were 20-30 percent more expensive.
- Only 10 percent of Africa's 390,000 hotel rooms were estimated to be of international standard
- Inadequate and ineffective marketing and promotion.

- Poor service delivery system.
- Under developed service sector.
- Taxes on tourism investments, multiple taxation
- Complex visa requirements

This report was based on the data collected from the study conducted in the five regional blocks of African economic community of which ECOWAS is one.

Tourism As Economic Development Tool

Governments get involved in tourism and incorporate it into their development strategy for the following reasons:

- Tourism involves direct and indirect foreign investments which impact all sectors of the economy.
- Tourism contributes to national economy and impacts closely related industries (hotel management, transportation and travel, agriculture, etc)
- The main functions of tourism are of economic nature: Foreign exchange generation, redistribution of income,
  job creation, sale of goods and services to tourists, transportation, improvement in the standard of living of host communities of destination.

Impact of tourism on the economy is manifested by investment opportunities it provides, infrastructural development of destinations and boosting of local industries of handicrafts and hotels, etc some countries have very little development options. For example, in many of the pacific and Caribbean Islands, tourism is the major economic activity because it provides a comparative advantage than exports of primary traditional products: bananas, sugar and citrus fruits. In Pueto Rico, tourism has replaced export of corals while in Kenya it is replacing tea. Perhaps, one of the major factors benefiting tourism is that it tends to have a very limited trend – it is very resilient and recovers very quickly from any mishap.

For tourism to be an effective tool for economic integration of the West African region, it should be sustainable. This term entails enjoying the tourism products and services by the present generation without compromising the opportunity of the next generation to enjoy them also (Weaver, 2003). That is: futurity or inter-generational equity (Okoli, 2001). The sustainable tourism mantra we adopt is creativity and innovation by which brand new or improved tourism products and services are developed, produced and marketed leveraging modern technologies in transportation communication and processes. The tourism industry will have to "make, create and innovate" in order to introduce new brands of products and services; modern delivery systems, improved operational and managerial techniques, effective marketing strategies, entrepreneurial culture, qualitative infrastructure and security systems. The triple bottom-line would be competitiveness, profitability and sustainability.

As reported by Okoli (2006): The new partnership for Africa's Development, NEPAD, in its development strategy which embraces diversifying and expanding business activities, strongly recommends that Africa's natural endowments and associated cultural heritage could be the bases for a strong private sector-led tourism industry.

The scope and investment opportunities in tourism are large while the skills required are less demanding. An additional benefit of the tourist trade is the linkages to such related activities as handicraft, financial services and transport, creating industrial incubators for small and medium enterprises. In the decisions taken at the 3rd ordinary session of the Heads of state and government of member states of African union held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 6-8th July, 2004, participants agreed, as recorded in the article 13, to: Endorse the Tourism Action Plan developed by NEPAD and adopted by the African Ministers of Tourism and the Executive Council, while Article 14 called: on African Ministers of Tourism to form a steering committee to guide the A.U. Commission and the NEPAD secretariat, as well as Regional Executive Council Secretariat (RECS) and member states on the implementation of the Tourism Action Plan (Okoli, 2007). The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration of September 2000 adopted Tourism as an effective strategy to "eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (MDG'S Goal)".

Tourism And Economic Integration of The West African Region

Fifteen West African countries signed a treaty for an economic community of West African states (Treaty of Lagos) on 28th May 1975, while the protocols that launched ECOWAS were signed in Lome, Togo, on 5th November, 1976. ECOWAS was founded to achieve collective self-sufficiency for the member states by means of economic and monetary union creating a single large trading block. It was designated one of the five regional pillars of the African Economic Community.

A major aspiration and policy thrust of ECOWAS is Economic Integration. To kick-start this project, the ECOWAS fund for cooperation, compensation and development was transformed into ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development in 2001. Earlier, in 2000, five ECOWAS members had formed the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) which was aimed at establishing a strong stable currency, "eco" to rival the CFA franc, whose exchange rate is tied to that of the euro and is guaranteed by the French Treasury. The eventual goal of this strategy is for the CFA Franc and Eco to merge, and give all of West and Central Africa a single stable currency. The launch of the new currency is being prepared by the West African Monetary Institute, Accra, Ghana. This is intended to be the forerunner of a common Central Bank. A common West African currency and the West African Central Bank would be the outward sign of West African economic integration, in the mould of European Union operating a common Central Bank and currency, the Euro. However, this proposal is being stymied by weak currencies and chronic budget deficit which several West African countries experience. Countries and regions richly endowed with diverse natural and cultural resources are known to adopt tourism as a strategic development option. Foreign exchange earnings, direct foreign investments and tourism-related earnings are veritable indicators to measure the contribution of tourism to national development. Globally, WTO (2003) credited tourism of generating a direct US $1.28 trillion dollars, contributing 3.7% to global cumulative GDP. On this premise, therefore, tourism is being seriously considered as a veritable tool for economic integration of West African countries as it will help strengthen the currency of West African countries and motivate them to adopt a common currency which is the end point of the quest for economic integration.

Membership of ECOWAS

Member Nations of ECOWAS include**:**

- Nigeria
- Gambia
- Guinea
- Liberia
- Mauritania
- Senegal
- Togo
- Cape Verde
- Benin Republic
- Guinea Bissau
- Cote d'Ivoire
- Mali
- Niger
- Sierra Leone
- Burkina Faso.

Tourism has positive economic, political and socio-cultural impacts and these can be leveraged for economic integration of West African countries. Tourism-related travels and activities are capable of fostering the much needed economic cooperation, socio-cultural interaction and improved diplomatic ties among West African countries. By the formation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a political block has been forged which will promote transnational movements and activities.

Some tourism typologies and phenemenologies are hereby be examined to elucidate the action plan for leveraging tourism for regional economic integration.

- **Conferencing and Business Visits:** There has been an increase in across border travels within the West African region in the past decade for conferences by Professionals and Academics (West African College of Surgeons and learned conferences by academic and non academic staff of educational institutions in Ghana, (Accra, Kumas, Lagoon), Nigeria (Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, etc) Benin (Lome) Senegal (Dakar). Travelling for sake of knowledge and exchange of ideas is a major motivation for tourism. Encouraging such educational visits by institutions and organizations and easy travel requirements will go a long way to boosting tourism. Cultural and currency exchanges are unavoidable features of such trips.

- **Educational Tourism:** In very recent past and on-going, there has been an increase in the number of young population of West Africa embarking on educational tourism whereby they leave their home countries and seek admission into universities in neighbouring West African countries. There is an alarming number of Nigerians in Ghana, studying in universities in Accra and Kumasi. So also, a good number of Nigerians are in various universities in Benin Republic, some of which are owned by Nigerians. Educational tourism is a growing trend in West Africa. The economic impacts of these tourism activities in the host countries and communities is better imagined
- **Cultural Tourism:** Most countries of West Africa post impressive cultural traits which tourists admire. Nigeria has more then 250 ethnic nationalities which are reflected in diversities in language, costume and cuisine, etc. Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire are also diverse. Nigeria has two world heritage sites – the Osun grove and the Sukur settlement, rich ancient masks and cultural festivals while Ghana celebrates Adae kex festival (Ashanti festival), displays the fetes des masques (festival of masks), Ghana highlife music popularized by E.T. Mensah and Ramblers Dance band. The slave camp in Ashanti and the slave castle in Accra are popular attractions: The Senegalese textile designs, especially the brocade attracts a good number of Nigerians to Senegal. Cultural integration, interaction and harmony are effected through marriages which are contracted among West Africans, notably Nigeria and Ghana. Tourists to Mali are thrilled by the Dogon cultural dance which was once upon a time the most popular attraction for visitors to Mali. There is also Dienne considered the most ancient and most impressive city in all West Africa and protected UNESCO World Heritage.
- **Sports**: Nigeria, Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal are very well known sporting nations of West Africa. Sports can be used as a tool for economic integration. There have been West African games for university students and a number of competitive and friendly matches in various games among West African countries. Heads of government and sports administrators should leverage sports as instrument of peace, unity and economic integration. In this regard the traditional Ghana-Nigeria football contest should be resuscitated as a strategy for promoting tourism between the two Anglo-phone countries.
- **Economic Tourism:** With a population of 16 million people, Ghana generates 12,000 mega watts of electricity. This boosts her manufacturing and industrial advantage in the region. Some industries e.g Michelin, Dunlop etc have relocated to Ghana from Nigeria. With her central location Ghana assumes an important industrial hub which attracts business visitors from other countries of West Africa. Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa with Lagos as the business capital. Onitsha,

attracts traders from West African countries. Trade fairs and industrial expos are organized in a good number of West African countries including Nigeria, Ghana, Benin etc and these attract a large number of business tourists.

West African artisans, craftsmen and entrepreneurs travel across the zone to provide services in fashion design, motor mechanic, make-up artists, etc. This group constitutes the business tourists too. Ward, Higson and Campbell (1996) note that: Ghana is especially renowned for its pottery, its metal work, carving, beadwork, basketing and leather work and dyeing. Music, dance and drama are essential part of Ghanaian life. Ghana is also known for its traditional costume, the Kente cloth. These products are bought as souvenirs to thousands of tourists who visit Ghana annually to see the slave camp in Kumasi and the slave castle and the Flatstaff house in Accra.

ECOWAS Structures And Instruments For Regional Tourism

ECOWAS has a' priori disposition towards regional co-operation in travel trade and tourism. The formation of ECOWAS could be termed the harbinger of regional integration in Africa. The founding fathers of this union had their vision and objectives beyond the mere notion of economic corporation and so envisaged a community that is destined to be the fore runner of African integration.

ECOWAS has the following aims and objectives:

i. Trade liberalization and the formation of a customs union within the West African sub-region.
ii. Abolition of trade restrictions to member states
iii. Abolition of obstacles to free movement of persons within the member states
iv. Harmonization of agriculture policies of member states
v. Implementation of schemes for joint development of transport, communication and energy etc
vi. Harmonization of economic and industrial policies
vii. Facilitation of cultural exchange
viii. Harmonization of monetary policies

The above policy objectives are "tourism compliant" and if judiciously implemented are capable of encouraging transnational travels and tourism activities within the West African sub-region.

The Lagos ECOWAS treaty of 1975 seeks to promote economic development through co-operation among its members via the instrumentality of a customs union by the:

- elimination of customs duties between partners
- elimination of restrictions to trade between partners
- establishment of a common external tariff

- elimination of obstacles to free movement of capital and services
- joint development of transport infrastructure
- harmonization of economic policies
- the treaty was revised in 1993, focusing on economic and monetary integration.

With the benefit of hindsight, regional transport policy was captured in the 1975 treaty, apparently for the benefit of international tourism within the West Africa.

Member states undertake to evolve gradually common transport and communications polices through the improvement and expansion of their existing transport and communication links and the establishment of new ones as a means of furthering the physical cohesion of the member states and promotion of greater movements of persons, goods and services within the community. Further, the treaty provides for increased mobility and a comprehensive inter-state net-work of all-weather roads, improvement and re-organization of railways as well as merger of national air lines owned by the governments of member states.

The vision of the founding fathers of ECOWAS emphasizes economic integration, but the provisions of the treaty and policy objectives indicate that tourism is adopted as a major strategy to achieve this objective. Institutional and infrastructural policy thrusts indicate that tourism should play a major role in the economic integration of West African countries. Virtually dismantling international boundaries and travel restrictions (visa, custom and tariff concessions) makes for increased mobility within West Africa. A monetary union has existed since 1962 among seven francophone countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo, Guinea Bissau who use F'franc as their currency. The Anglo-phone countries, Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leon and Liberia technically adopt the U.S. dollar as the common currency; however, real economic integration will be achieved when the two blocks adopt a common currency. This dream will come true through tourism.

Conclusion

Many of the developing countries have recognized tourism as being able to provide an alternative source of foreign exchange to service existing foreign loans and to facilitate new investments. Lack of foreign exchange is a major constraint in many of the developing countries; especially those riddled with foreign debts and also have issues with balance of payment. Most countries in the West African region are portrayed in this light. The fifteen countries that constitute the West African region signed a treaty for an economic community of West African states in order to achieve collective self-sufficiency for the member states by means of economic and monetary union, thus creating a large trading block. They look to achieve economic integration through the protocols and policies which aimed at customs union, dismantling trade and travel barriers, thereby increasing mobility within the region. All these measures promote tourism. Most countries of West Africa have alluring natural and cultural attractions which make them tourism destinations visitors would relish. Tourism has to be well planned and made sustainable through reasonable investment in infrastructure, modern technologies and effective marketing strategy. The enormous economic benefits of tourism projects it as a crucial development tool for economic integration of the West African region.

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