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# Community Participation and Rural Tourism Development in Bonny Local Government Area, Rivers State

**Abstract**

*This study examines community participation and rural tourism development in Bonny Local Government Area, Rivers State. It investigates participation in planning and decision-making, identifies tourism resources, assesses perceived socioeconomic benefits, examines constraints and tests the relationship between participation and perceived tourism development. The study adopts a descriptive cross-sectional survey design supported by documentary review and proposed key-informant interviews. For demonstration, 200 simulated resident responses are analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, Pearson correlation and chi-square. The illustrative results show a positive relationship between participation and perceived tourism development ($r=0.583$, $p=0.0000$) and a significant association between categorical participation and development levels ($\chi^2=20.69$, $p=0.0000$). Bonny possesses important cultural, coastal, heritage and ecological resources, including Finima Nature Park. The study argues that tourism development is more likely to generate local benefits when residents participate meaningfully in planning, implementation, monitoring and benefit sharing. Because the statistical dataset is simulated, all numerical findings must be replaced with actual field results before submission.*

***Keywords:*** *Community Participation, Rural Tourism Development, Bonny Local Government Area, Rivers State.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

Tourism is a spatial, economic, social and environmental activity that connects visitors with destinations and creates demand for accommodation, transport, food, recreation, culture and nature-based experiences. In rural areas, tourism can diversify livelihoods by creating markets for local products, guiding, crafts, hospitality and transport. Its contribution, however, depends on the degree to which local people participate in decisions and capture value. A destination can attract visitors while local residents remain excluded from ownership and planning.

### Statement of the Problem

Tourism is increasingly recognized as an important component of urban economic development because it generates employment, stimulates investment, supports hospitality and transportation services, promotes cultural interaction, and contributes to the development and utilization of recreational infrastructure. Port Harcourt Metropolis, as the capital and major commercial centre of Rivers State, possesses a variety of tourism and

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recreational resources, including Port Harcourt Pleasure Park, Port Harcourt Tourist Beach, Port Harcourt Zoo, museums, cultural and heritage sites, waterfront environments and other leisure facilities. Despite these resources, the ability of the metropolis to develop and sustain a competitive tourism industry is influenced by several structural and environmental factors, among which security has become a major concern.

Security constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for tourism development because tourists generally seek destinations where they can move freely, enjoy attractions, transact business and return safely to their places of residence. Unlike essential forms of travel, tourism is largely discretionary; consequently, actual or perceived insecurity can cause potential visitors to cancel trips, choose alternative destinations, reduce their length of stay or avoid certain locations altogether. Similarly, tourism investors and operators may be reluctant to establish or expand businesses in environments perceived as unsafe because insecurity can increase operating costs, damage property, reduce patronage and create uncertainty about returns on investment.

Port Harcourt Metropolis operates within a wider security environment characterized by concerns relating to kidnapping, armed robbery, cult-related activities, gang violence, harassment, vandalism, theft, youth restiveness and other forms of criminality. These challenges may not occur directly within every tourism attraction, but their presence in the surrounding urban environment can influence how destinations are perceived and accessed. The problem is therefore not limited to the actual occurrence of criminal incidents within tourism sites; it also includes the fear and perception of insecurity among visitors, residents, employees, investors and destination managers. A destination may consequently experience declining patronage even where actual incidents are relatively limited if potential tourists perceive the location as dangerous.

The implications of these security challenges for tourism development can be considerable. Persistent insecurity may reduce tourist arrivals and repeat visitation, discourage private investment, reduce revenue generated by tourism businesses, increase expenditure on private security, shorten operating hours, restrict night-time tourism activities and contribute to the deterioration of tourism facilities. It can also adversely affect destination image and competitiveness. Where visitors share negative experiences or security concerns through interpersonal communication and social media, the resulting reputation may extend beyond the particular attraction where an incident occurred and affect perceptions of the wider destination. Thus, security challenges may generate both direct and indirect effects on tourism development.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that security at tourism destinations is a multidimensional responsibility. It involves not only conventional policing but also destination management, environmental design, emergency preparedness, transportation security, lighting, surveillance, access control, community participation, visitor information and inter-agency coordination. Inadequate security infrastructure, poor emergency response mechanisms and insufficient coordination among tourism authorities, security agencies, local government institutions, destination managers and host communities may increase vulnerability. Consequently, addressing tourism insecurity requires an integrated understanding of the specific threats confronting individual destinations and the ways in which those threats influence tourism performance.

Available studies have provided useful evidence concerning insecurity and tourism in

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Port Harcourt. Research on Port Harcourt Tourist Beach, for instance, identified insecurity among the constraints to tourism development, alongside inadequate funding, insufficient personnel, poor facilities and other management challenges. Other research on insecurity and tourism development in Port Harcourt has also reported a significant negative relationship between insecurity and tourism development. Studies on kidnapping in Port Harcourt have further indicated that insecurity can influence business location, development, government revenue and freedom of movement. These findings demonstrate that security is relevant to the tourism-development question in the metropolis.

However, important gaps remain. Much of the existing research has concentrated on individual attractions or has treated insecurity as a broad urban phenomenon without adequately comparing the experiences of different tourism destinations. There is insufficient destination-level evidence on how specific security challenges—such as kidnapping, armed robbery, cultism, theft, harassment, vandalism and inadequate security presence—affect different dimensions of tourism development. In particular, there is a need to establish whether these challenges primarily affect visitor patronage, repeat visitation, investment, revenue generation, employment, destination image, operating costs, facility maintenance or a combination of these outcomes.

Another problem concerns the perception of security among different tourism stakeholders. Visitors may evaluate security differently from residents, tourism workers or destination managers. A visitor may be concerned primarily with personal safety and freedom of movement, while a tourism operator may be more concerned with property protection, business losses and increased security expenditure. Residents may focus on community safety and employment opportunities, whereas destination managers may be concerned with institutional capacity, surveillance and emergency response. Failure to incorporate these different perspectives can result in an incomplete understanding of the security–tourism relationship.

Furthermore, there is inadequate empirical evidence comparing security conditions across different categories of tourism attractions within Port Harcourt Metropolis. A recreational park, beach, zoo and museum do not necessarily have the same spatial characteristics, operating patterns, visitor profiles, access arrangements or vulnerability to security threats. Consequently, a security intervention that is appropriate for one destination may not be equally effective at another. This creates a need for a comparative destination-based investigation capable of identifying both common and destination-specific security challenges.

The persistence of these challenges raises a critical question about the sustainability of tourism development in Port Harcourt Metropolis: to what extent are security challenges undermining the capacity of existing tourism destinations to attract visitors, retain investment, generate revenue, provide employment and improve their facilities and services? Without reliable empirical evidence addressing this question, tourism planners and destination managers may find it difficult to prioritize security interventions or evaluate their likely effects on tourism performance.

It is against this background that this study investigates security challenges and their effects on the development of selected tourism destinations in Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study seeks to identify the major security challenges confronting the selected destinations, assess their perceived severity, determine their effects on tourism

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patronage and other development indicators, compare security perceptions across destinations, and propose practical measures for improving destination security and promoting sustainable tourism development in the metropolis.

**Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim is to examine the relationship between community participation and rural tourism development in Bonny Local Government Area, Rivers State. However, the objectives are to:
Assess participation
Identify tourism resources
Examine socioeconomic and cultural benefits
Identify constraints
Test the participation-development relationship
Recommend mechanisms for inclusive tourism governance.

**Research Questions**

The study asks: What is the level of participation? What tourism resources are available? What benefits are perceived? What constrains participation? Is participation significantly related to tourism development? What strategies can improve inclusive development?

**Hypotheses**

H01: Community participation has no significant relationship with perceived rural tourism development.
H02: There is no significant association between participation level and tourism-development level.
H03: Institutional and socioeconomic barriers do not significantly affect perceived tourism development.

**Significance of the Study**

The study is relevant to residents because it identifies mechanisms for greater influence, employment and benefit sharing. It is useful to government because it can guide participatory planning, skills development and local enterprise support. It is useful to investors because local knowledge can improve tourism products and social acceptance. It is useful to environmental managers because community participation can support conservation. Academically, it extends Bonny tourism research from visitor-centred questions toward community governance.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Rural Tourism**

Rural tourism can complement traditional livelihoods rather than replace them. Its products may include farm visits, fishing experiences, cultural events, crafts, nature walks, wildlife observation, heritage interpretation and local food. The key principle is place-based development.

**Participation Theory**

Arnstein's eight-rung ladder—manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power and citizen control—provides a useful framework for distinguishing symbolic participation from real power. Tourism programmes should aim for interactive participation rather than one-way consultation.

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**Social Exchange Theory**

Homans and Blau developed foundational social exchange ideas, while Ap applied them strongly to tourism. Residents evaluate tourism through perceived benefits and costs. Where employment, income, infrastructure and cultural recognition exceed perceived costs, support is more likely.

**Empirical Study: Ijeomah and Duke**

Research on Finima Nature Park used observation, interviews, records and questionnaires. It identified attractions including the natural environment, walkway, beach and nature trail and found strong dependence of surrounding households on fishing, trading and forest resources. It recommended empowerment strategies.

**Empirical Study: Efenakpo et al.**

Visitor research at Finima found strong interest in the park's biodiversity and tourism activities. Insecurity around the coastal beach was identified as a major challenge, while many respondents perceived untapped tourism potential.

**Empirical Study: Destination Attributes**

A later study of Finima visitors reported that natural attractions, outdoor activities, location, cleanliness, service, safety and host-community friendliness influenced destination choice and satisfaction.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Research Design**

A descriptive cross-sectional survey design is appropriate because the study seeks to describe participation and examine statistical relationships at a defined period. Documentary review and key-informant interviews provide contextual evidence.

**Population**

The target population comprises adult residents in tourism-relevant communities and tourism actors such as guides, traders, artisans, hospitality workers and transport providers. The final accessible population should be established through community records or a household listing.

**Sample Size**

This manuscript demonstrates analysis using 200 respondents. The final field sample should be determined from the verified population using an approved formula and the department's requirements.

**Sampling**

A multistage approach is recommended: purposive selection of tourism-relevant communities, proportional allocation, systematic household selection and purposive selection of key informants.

**Instrument**

The questionnaire contains socio-demographic items, eight participation items, ten tourism-development items and six constraint items. Responses use a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

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**Validity**

The instrument should be reviewed by the supervisor and specialists in geography, tourism and social research. A pilot test should identify ambiguous wording and improve sequencing.

**Reliability**

Reliability should be assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The actual field dataset must be used for the final coefficient; simulated reliability values should not be reported as field evidence.

**Data Collection**

The researcher should obtain community entry permission, explain the study, seek voluntary consent and administer questionnaires directly. Interviews should be conducted with appropriate consent.

**Data Analysis**

Frequencies and percentages describe categorical variables. Means and standard deviations summarise Likert scales. Pearson correlation tests association between continuous scores. Chi-square tests categorical association. Multiple regressions can estimate the contribution of participation and barriers.

## 4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

**Important Research Integrity Note**

The 200 observations analysed in this chapter are simulated data created to demonstrate how the project should be analysed. They are not actual interviews with Bonny residents. Before academic submission, replace them with the verified field dataset and rerun every table and test.

**Respondent Distribution by Community**

| Community | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Bonny Town | 80 | 40.0% |
| Finima | 40 | 20.0% |
| Dema-Abalama | 22 | 11.0% |
| Oloma | 27 | 13.5% |
| Ayambo | 31 | 15.5% |

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**Sex Distribution**

| Sex | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 113 | 56.5% |
| Female | 87 | 43.5% |

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**Age Distribution**

| Age | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| 28–37 | 68 | 34.0% |
| 38–47 | 46 | 23.0% |
| 18–27 | 42 | 21.0% |
| 48–57 | 24 | 12.0% |
| 58+ | 20 | 10.0% |

**Educational Level**

| Education | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Secondary | 88 | 44.0% |
| Tertiary | 75 | 37.5% |
| Primary | 22 | 11.0% |
| No formal | 15 | 7.5% |

**Occupation**

| Occupation | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Trading | 51 | 25.5% |
| Civil/public service | 31 | 15.5% |
| Fishing | 31 | 15.5% |
| Artisan | 29 | 14.5% |
| Tourism/hospitality | 28 | 14.0% |
| Student/other | 19 | 9.5% |
| Farming | 11 | 5.5% |

**Community Participation**

| No. | Indicator | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Residents are consulted before tourism projects are introduced. | 3.35 | 0.91 |
| 2 | Community members participate in tourism planning meetings. | 3.25 | 0.88 |
| 3 | Residents are represented in tourism decision-making. | 3.27 | 0.90 |
| 4 | Tourism information is shared openly with residents. | 3.37 | 0.90 |
| 5 | Women have opportunities to participate. | 3.35 | 0.86 |
| 6 | Youth have | 3.38 | 0.84 |

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | opportunities to participate. | | |
| 7 | Residents can influence tourism priorities. | 3.31 | 0.89 |
| 8 | Tourism benefits are fairly distributed. | 3.35 | 0.85 |

The overall illustrative participation mean is 3.33. A value above 3.00 indicates that respondents generally lean toward agreement with the participation statements.

**Rural Tourism Development Outcomes**

| No. | Outcome | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Employment for residents | 2.94 | 0.92 |
| 2 | Opportunities for trading/services | 3.05 | 0.91 |
| 3 | Support for local transport/hospitality | 2.93 | 0.83 |
| 4 | Improved infrastructure | 2.87 | 0.85 |
| 5 | Cultural preservation | 2.88 | 0.89 |
| 6 | Local guides/artisans | 2.96 | 0.91 |
| 7 | Household income opportunities | 3.05 | 0.87 |
| 8 | Skills acquisition | 2.97 | 0.95 |
| 9 | Local investment | 2.87 | 0.92 |
| 10 | Destination attractiveness | 2.95 | 0.91 |

The illustrative tourism-development mean is 2.95.

**Constraints**

| No. | Constraint | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Poor transport/access | 3.50 | 0.82 |
| 2 | Limited finance | 3.40 | 0.77 |
| 3 | Insufficient training | 3.39 | 0.76 |
| 4 | Insecurity | 3.34 | 0.85 |
| 5 | Weak institutional coordination | 3.37 | 0.78 |
| 6 | Elite influence | 3.42 | 0.80 |

**Hypothesis One: Pearson Correlation**

| Relationship | r | p | Direction |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participation–Development | 0.583 | 0.0000 | Positive |

Decision: p=0.0000. In the simulated dataset this is below 0.05, so H01 is rejected. The result suggests that higher community participation is associated with stronger perceived rural

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tourism development.

**Hypothesis Two: Chi-square**

| **Participation level** | **High** | **Low** |
|---|---|---|
| High | 30 | 54 |
| Low | 10 | 106 |

| Statistic | Value |
|---|---|
| Pearson chi-square | 20.691 |
| Degrees of freedom | 1 |
| p-value | 0.0000 |

Decision: p=0.0000. The simulated result indicates a statistically significant association between participation level and development level. H02 is rejected for the demonstration dataset.

**Regression Analysis**

| Parameter | Estimate |
|---|---|
| Intercept | 0.936 |
| Participation | 0.611 |
| Barriers | -0.007 |
| R-squared | 0.340 |

The illustrative model explains 34.0% of variation in perceived tourism development. Participation has a positive coefficient, while barriers have a negative coefficient. Final significance tests should be generated from the actual field dataset.

**Extended Discussion**

Participation and local ownership: Meaningful participation can create a sense of ownership because residents see their preferences reflected in tourism projects. Ownership can increase willingness to protect attractions and cooperate with visitors.

For Bonny, community participation should be institutionalised rather than treated as occasional consultation. Representatives should have defined responsibilities, access to information and mechanisms for reporting decisions back to residents.

**Extended Discussion**

Participation and employment: Residents who participate in planning are more likely to know about opportunities and influence the design of skills programmes. Local recruitment can increase the share of tourism expenditure retained within Bonny.

For Bonny, community participation should be institutionalised rather than treated as occasional consultation. Representatives should have defined responsibilities, access to information and mechanisms for reporting decisions back to residents.

**Extended Discussion**

Participation and culture: Community members are custodians of local narratives and cultural protocols. Their participation can prevent inappropriate representation and ensure that cultural tourism supports identity.

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**Extended Discussion**

Security: Visitor confidence depends on safety. Community knowledge can support responsible security planning, while security measures should not unnecessarily restrict local livelihoods.

For Bonny, community participation should be institutionalised rather than treated as occasional consultation. Representatives should have defined responsibilities, access to information and mechanisms for reporting decisions back to residents.

**Extended Discussion**

Planning implication: A participatory tourism master plan should map attractions, sensitive ecosystems, cultural assets, enterprises and infrastructure needs.

For Bonny, community participation should be institutionalised rather than treated as occasional consultation. Representatives should have defined responsibilities, access to information and mechanisms for reporting decisions back to residents.

**Extended Discussion**

Sustainability implication: Tourism should be managed within environmental limits and should not undermine the resource base that attracts visitors.

For Bonny, community participation should be institutionalised rather than treated as occasional consultation. Representatives should have defined responsibilities, access to information and mechanisms for reporting decisions back to residents.

**Extended Discussion**

Overall discussion: Rural tourism development is not simply a matter of marketing attractions; it is a governance and livelihood process.

For Bonny, community participation should be institutionalised rather than treated as occasional consultation. Representatives should have defined responsibilities, access to information and mechanisms for reporting decisions back to residents.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

Bonny has substantial potential for rural tourism based on its cultural heritage, coastal landscapes, biodiversity and established conservation assets. Tourism should be linked to local participation, enterprise development, skills, environmental management and equitable benefit sharing.

### Recommendations

Establish a community tourism forum; prepare a participatory tourism plan; create local enterprise finance; provide guiding and hospitality training; ensure transparent benefit sharing; support women and youth; improve visitor safety; strengthen environmental monitoring; develop culturally appropriate heritage products; encourage community-private-public partnerships; and conduct periodic tourism-impact surveys.

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