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Assessing the Tourism Potentials and Development Challenges in Cross River State South Senatorial District: A Case Study of Selected Sites in Calabar Municipality and Akpabuyo.

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Abstract
This study assessed the relationship between the availability of tourism potentials, stakeholder participation, and tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District, with specific focus on selected sites in Calabar Municipality and Akpabuyo. Guided by two hypotheses, the study adopted a descriptive survey design, which enabled systematic data collection and analysis from a representative population. A total of 394 respondents, including government officials, community leaders, local tourism business operators, and residents, were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire validated by subject matter experts and pilot-tested for reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.83). Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic data, while inferential statistics, specifically simple linear regression, were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the availability of tourism potentials and tourism development. Similarly, stakeholder participation was found to significantly influence tourism development ($R = .862$, $R^2 = .743$, $p < .001$). These results led to the rejection of both null hypotheses. The study concludes that both the presence of tourism potentials and inclusive stakeholder engagement are critical to advancing sustainable tourism development in the region. Based on these findings, recommendations were made for infrastructure development, policy reform, inclusive participation, and strategic marketing to fully harness the tourism potential of Cross River State South Senatorial District.

Keywords: tourism development, stakeholder participation, tourism potentials, Cross River State, sustainable tourism, South Senatorial District

Introduction and Background
Tourism is widely acknowledged as a catalyst for economic growth, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation. It contributes significantly to employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, and community development (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2022). In developing countries, tourism holds particular promise as

an alternative source of revenue and a tool for rural transformation. However, in Nigeria, the tourism sector remains largely underexploited due to infrastructural limitations, policy inconsistency, insecurity, and inadequate investment (Odeku, 2020)).

Cross River State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, is widely recognized for its tourism potential. It boasts a variety of natural and cultural attractions, including waterfalls, beaches, wildlife reserves, festivals, and historical sites. The state has earned national recognition as a tourism hub, particularly through the globally acclaimed Calabar Carnival, which draws both domestic and international tourists annually (Udo, 2024). The South Senatorial District—comprising areas such as Calabar Municipality and Akpabuyo is central to this reputation, with its coastal location, colonial heritage, and vibrant cultural life. Despite these assets, tourism development in the region remains below expectations. Many attractions suffer from neglect, with poor maintenance, weak promotional strategies, and limited access infrastructure. Moreover, there is often inadequate collaboration between government agencies, private investors, and host communities in the planning and implementation of tourism development projects (Obijuru, 2023). These shortcomings limit the economic impact of tourism and hinder its potential as a driver of inclusive development in the district.

In light of these challenges, there is a need for empirical investigation into the tourism potentials of the South Senatorial District of Cross River State, the obstacles hindering their development, and the role of stakeholder engagement. This study therefore aims to assess the availability and utilization of tourism resources in the region, evaluate the level of stakeholder participation, and explore how these factors influence tourism development. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing sustainable tourism in the region.

Statement of the problem

Despite the rich array of tourism resources in Cross River State South Senatorial District including cultural heritage sites, natural attractions, festivals, and coastal environments tourism development in the region remains below its full potential. Locations such as Calabar Municipality and Akpabuyo possess significant tourism appeal, yet they face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited investment, poor accessibility, low community involvement, and inconsistent policy implementation. These factors have hindered the effective promotion and sustainable utilization of the region's tourism assets.

Moreover, while various stakeholders including government agencies, private investors, and local communities are expected to play key roles in tourism development, the extent of their involvement and collaboration remains unclear and often insufficient. This gap has limited the socio-economic benefits that tourism could generate for the region, such as employment creation, cultural preservation, and community development.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the tourism potentials of the South Senatorial District of Cross River State, examine the challenges facing their development, and assess how stakeholder participation and resource availability influence tourism growth in the area.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the tourism potentials and development challenges in Cross River State South Senatorial District, with specific focus on selected sites in Calabar Municipality and Akpabuyo. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Assess the extent to which the availability of tourism resources relates with tourism development in the region.
2. Examine how stakeholder participation relates with tourism development in the region.

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

a. There is no significant relationship between the availability of tourism potentials and tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District.

b. Stakeholder participation does not significantly influence tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District.

Literature review

Availability of Tourism Potentials and Tourism Development

The presence of rich and diverse tourism resources is commonly regarded as a foundation for the development of a viable tourism sector. However, empirical evidence suggests that availability alone is not sufficient such resources must be harnessed through structured planning, investment, and stakeholder collaboration. In Nigeria, Cross River State is widely acknowledged for its abundant tourism potentials, particularly in the South Senatorial District, where attractions such as the Calabar Carnival, Slave History Museum, Tinapa Business Resort, and unspoiled beaches offer unique experiences (Amalu, Otop, Ojugbo, Omeje & Duluora, 2019).

Despite these assets, several studies have found that the tourism sector in the region remains underdeveloped. Saner, Yiu and Filadoro (2019) observed that poor access roads, limited

hospitality infrastructure, and lack of funding are major barriers to converting these attractions into economic opportunities. Similarly, Beirman (2020) noted that without coherent government policies and marketing strategies, even the most promising tourism assets can remain dormant.

Studies from other parts of Nigeria reinforce these concerns. Aina and Abiola-Oke (2015), examining tourism sites in Oyo State, found that the Old Oyo National Park and historical monuments suffer from neglect due to budgetary constraints and weak institutional oversight. In the northern region, Yakubu, Yusuf and Yerima (2024) reported that the Yankari Game Reserve in Bauchi State has seen fluctuating tourist numbers due to inconsistent maintenance and poor security. These examples highlight a common pattern across the country: tourism potentials are available but poorly leveraged.

Beyond Nigeria, similar findings are reported in Kenya, Ghana, and Tanzania. For example, Kiswaa (2020) examined Kenya's coastal tourism zones and found that while natural attractions such as beaches and marine parks are abundant, lack of investment in local infrastructure and weak integration of communities in tourism planning have constrained growth. In Ghana, Omar (2022) highlighted how the Kakum National Park and Cape Coast Castle rich in historical and ecological value struggle with inadequate tourism services and limited international promotion.

Overall, the empirical evidence suggests that while the availability of tourism potentials provides a strong base for development, the extent to which they contribute to sustainable tourism growth depends on several mediating factors, including infrastructure, investment, policy consistency, and strategic management.

Stakeholder Participation and Tourism Development

Stakeholder participation is a key determinant of successful tourism development, especially in regions where tourism resources intersect with community livelihoods and cultural heritage. In Nigeria, Nwosu and Onah (2016) emphasized the need for inclusive stakeholder engagement in Cross River State's tourism planning, noting that government-led projects often lack community buy-in due to limited consultation. Their study found that participatory processes enhance project sustainability and promote equitable distribution of tourism benefits.

In the same vein, Mbina (2015) assessed the effectiveness of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in tourism development in Calabar. While PPPs contributed to infrastructure improvements

and events like the Calabar Festival, the authors noted that such collaborations are often limited to elite networks, marginalizing local businesses and communities.

Similar issues have been observed in other Nigerian states. Aleru and Adekola (2016), studied tourism development in Kwara State and found that the absence of community involvement in the management of Esie Museum led to vandalism and a lack of local stewardship. Their findings emphasize that when communities are excluded, tourism development is neither sustainable nor socially beneficial.

Globally, stakeholder participation has been shown to be instrumental in achieving sustainable tourism. In South Africa, Rogerson and Visser (2014), demonstrated that inclusive tourism planning in the Western Cape helped foster entrepreneurship and job creation in township areas. In Namibia, the community-based conservancy model has empowered rural populations to co-manage tourism resources, leading to increased conservation efforts and income generation (Jones, 2010).

In Kenya, Manyara and Jones (2007) observed that while community-based tourism initiatives had potential, a lack of capacity-building and institutional support limited their impact. These findings resonate with those of Okon, Agbogun and Momoh (2017), who found that communities in Akpabuyo are willing to participate in eco-tourism but face challenges such as lack of training and government support.

Thus, stakeholder participation is not only essential for inclusive tourism development but also critical for ensuring that tourism contributes to local economic empowerment, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey design to explore the relationship between the availability of tourism potentials, stakeholder participation, and tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District. The design is suitable because it allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data from a large population in order to describe the current status of phenomena and establish relationships among variables (Creswell, 2014).

Study Area

The study was conducted in the South Senatorial District of Cross River State, Nigeria, which comprises local government areas such as Calabar South, Calabar Municipality, Odukpani, Akamkpa, Akpabuyo, and Bakassi. The area is known for its rich cultural heritage, natural

landscapes, and numerous tourism assets including beaches, National Park, festivals, and historical landmarks.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises tourism stakeholders, including government tourism officials, community leaders, local business operators in the tourism sector (such as hoteliers and tour operators), and residents of communities with recognized tourism sites. These groups were selected because they play significant roles in tourism development and resource utilization in the region.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. First, purposive sampling was used to select five tourism-rich local government areas within the South Senatorial District. Second, stratified sampling was used to classify respondents into key stakeholder groups: government officials, community leaders, local business operators, and residents. Finally, simple random sampling was employed to select a total sample of 394 respondents, ensuring representation from each stratum. This approach ensured a diverse and representative sample relevant to the study objectives.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The instrument consisted of three sections: Section A: Demographic information of respondents, Section B: Items on availability of tourism potentials and Items on stakeholder participation. Section C: and tourism development.

The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" (5) to "Strongly Disagree" (1) to measure respondents' perceptions. The instrument was validated by experts in tourism and development studies, and a pilot study was conducted with 20 respondents outside the main sample area to assess reliability. A Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.83 was obtained, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, means, and percentages were used to summarize the demographic characteristics and responses to research questions. Inferential statistics, specifically Simple linear regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses at a 0.05

level of significance. Statistical analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0.

Presentation of results

Ho_1

There is no significant relationship between the availability of tourism potentials and tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District.

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the availability of tourism potentials and tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District, using data from 394 respondents. The results in table 1 revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the availability of tourism potentials and tourism development, $R = .850$, $R^2 = .722$, indicating that approximately 72.2% of the variance in tourism development can be explained by the availability of tourism potentials. The regression model was significant, $F(1, 361) = 940.46$, $p < .001$.

The unstandardized regression coefficient for the availability of tourism potentials was $B = 0.815$ (SE = 0.027), with a t-value of 30.67 and a significance level of $p < .001$. This suggests that for every one-unit increase in the availability of tourism potentials, tourism development increases by approximately 0.815 units. The constant value was also significant ($B = 1.381$, $t = 4.56$, $p < .001$).

Although it was initially hypothesized or concluded that there is no significant relationship between the availability of tourism potentials and tourism development, the statistical evidence contradicts this. The findings clearly demonstrate a statistically significant and positive relationship between the two variables. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it can be concluded that the availability of tourism potentials significantly influences tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District.

Table 1: Summary of simple linear regression analysis for relationship between the availability of tourism potentials and tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District (N=394)

R	**R-square**	**Adjusted R**	**Std. Error of estimate**		
Regression	3453.582	1	3453.582	940.456	.000
Residual	1325.680	361	3.672		
Total	4779.262	362			
Variable	B	St. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(constant)	1.381	.303		4.559	.000
Availability of tourism potentials	.815	.027	.850	30.667	.000

*Significant at the 0.05 level

Hypothesis two

Stakeholder participation does not significantly influence tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District.

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of stakeholder participation on tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District, using responses from 394 participants. The results in table 2 revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between stakeholder participation and tourism development, $R = .862$, $R^2 = .743$. This indicates that approximately 74.3% of the variance in tourism development can be explained by stakeholder participation. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 361) = 510.05$, $p < .001$.

The unstandardized regression coefficient for stakeholder participation was $B = 0.824$ (SE = 0.025), with a t-value of 32.38 and a significance level of $p < .001$. The constant term was also significant ($B = 1.354$, $SE = 0.288$, $t = 4.70$, $p < .001$), indicating a meaningful baseline level of tourism development even in the absence of stakeholder participation.

Although it was initially posited or concluded that stakeholder participation does not significantly influence tourism development in the study area, the empirical evidence strongly contradicts this assumption. The findings clearly show that stakeholder participation significantly and positively influences tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 2: Summary of simple linear regression analysis for the influence of Stakeholder participation in tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District (N=394).

R	R-square		Adjusted R	Std. Error of estimate	
Regression		3555.269	1	2798.532	510.049	.000
Residual		1223.993	361	5.487		
Total		4779.262	362			
Variable		B	St.	Beta	T	Sig.
(constant)		1.354	Error		4.697	.000
Stakeholder participation in tourism development		.824	.288 .025	.862	32.382	.000

*Significant at the 0.05 level

Discussion of findings

Ho_1

The findings from hypothesis one demonstrates that the availability of tourism potentials significantly and positively influences tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District. The regression analysis revealed a strong correlation between the two variables, with $R = .850$ and $R^2 = .722$, suggesting that 72.2% of the variance in tourism development can be explained by the availability of tourism potentials. The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 361) = 940.46$, $p < .001$. Additionally, the unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.815$, $t = 30.67$, $p < .001$) indicates that for every unit increase in tourism potentials, tourism development rises by nearly one unit. These results led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, which initially stated that there is no significant relationship between the availability of tourism potentials and tourism development.

This finding confirms the critical role of natural and cultural assets in driving tourism development, especially within the context of Cross River State. As Amalu, Otop, Ojugbo, Omeje, and Duluora (2019) have noted, the state's South Senatorial District is rich in tourism attractions such as the Calabar Carnival, Slave History Museum, Tinapa Business Resort, and pristine coastal areas. These sites represent significant economic and cultural resources with the potential to enhance local livelihoods, attract international visitors, and foster regional identity.

However, the availability of tourism potentials alone does not guarantee tourism growth. Several studies have identified persistent structural and policy barriers that inhibit the full development of the sector. Saner, Yiu, and Filadoro (2019) highlighted infrastructural deficits such as poor road access, inadequate hospitality services, and insufficient investment as major challenges in Cross River State. These limitations reduce the accessibility, quality, and

competitiveness of tourism experiences, thereby hindering the translation of tourism potentials into tangible development outcomes.

Beirman (2020) emphasized that even regions with rich tourism assets require well-formulated government policies, robust marketing strategies, and public-private sector collaboration to realize their full tourism potential. Without these supporting mechanisms, tourism potentials may remain dormant, leading to missed economic and cultural opportunities. This issue is not unique to Cross River State. Aina and Abiola-Oke (2015) found that the Old Oyo National Park in Oyo State has suffered from neglect due to weak institutional oversight and chronic underfunding. Similarly, Yakubu, Yusuf, and Yerima (2024) observed that the Yankari Game Reserve in Bauchi State experiences irregular tourist inflows owing to poor maintenance and security concerns.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while the availability of tourism potentials significantly influences tourism development, the effectiveness of this influence depends on the presence of enabling conditions. These include infrastructure development, community involvement, security, funding, and strategic planning. For Cross River State, and particularly its South Senatorial District, policy interventions must focus not only on conserving and showcasing tourism assets but also on addressing the systemic challenges that hinder their effective utilization.

H_{o2}

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that stakeholder participation significantly influences tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District. The regression analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between stakeholder participation and tourism development, $R = .862$, $R^2 = .743$, $F(1, 361) = 510.05$, $p < .001$. This indicates that stakeholder participation accounts for approximately 74.3% of the variance in tourism development within the region. The high beta coefficient ($B = 0.824$) and significant t-value further underscore the predictive strength of stakeholder involvement in shaping tourism outcomes.

This result contradicts the initial hypothesis that stakeholder participation does not significantly influence tourism development. Instead, it aligns with a growing body of literature that emphasizes the centrality of inclusive engagement in sustainable tourism planning and implementation. For instance, Nwosu and Onah (2016) underscored the importance of involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders in Cross River State's tourism initiatives. They argued that the exclusion of local communities from decision-making

processes has undermined government-led projects, resulting in limited community ownership and poor project sustainability.

Moreover, the study's findings are consistent with Mbina's (2015) assessment of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in Calabar. While PPPs have enhanced infrastructure and promoted tourism events such as the Calabar Festival, the study noted that these benefits often accrue to elite actors, sidelining grassroots stakeholders. This exclusion compromises the equitable distribution of tourism benefits and restricts the full developmental potential of the sector.

The relevance of stakeholder participation is also supported by findings from other parts of Nigeria. Aleru and Adekola (2016), for example, highlighted how the lack of community involvement in managing the Esie Museum in Kwara State led to neglect and vandalism. They stressed that tourism development devoid of local stewardship often lacks sustainability and community support. Internationally, the positive impacts of stakeholder engagement in tourism are well documented. Rogerson and Visser (2014) demonstrated that inclusive tourism planning in South Africa's Western Cape region promoted small-scale entrepreneurship and job creation in marginalized communities. Similarly, in Namibia, Jones (2010) reported that the community-based conservancy model empowered rural populations to co-manage tourism assets, leading to increased conservation efforts and sustainable income generation.

Taken together, these findings underscore the necessity of participatory governance structures in tourism development. Stakeholder participation not only ensures that tourism initiatives reflect local needs and values but also enhances social equity, accountability, and long-term project sustainability. For Cross River State, institutionalizing mechanisms for inclusive stakeholder engagement—particularly among local communities, private sector actors, and civil society—may be critical for realizing the full potential of the tourism sector.

Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of the availability of tourism potentials and stakeholder participation on tourism development in Cross River State South Senatorial District, using simple linear regression analysis on data obtained from 394 respondents. The findings revealed strong and statistically significant positive relationships between both independent variables and tourism development. Specifically, the availability of tourism potentials explained 72.2% of the variance in tourism development ($R^2 = .722$), while stakeholder participation accounted for 74.3% ($R^2 = .743$). These results underscore the importance of harnessing local tourism assets and engaging stakeholders in a participatory and inclusive manner.

Contrary to initial assumptions that these factors may not significantly impact tourism development, the empirical evidence demonstrated otherwise. The study concludes that both the availability of tourism potentials and the extent of stakeholder participation are critical drivers of sustainable tourism development in the region. Therefore, any meaningful effort to advance the tourism sector in Cross River State must take into account these variables and create enabling environments for their effective integration into policy and practice.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthen Infrastructure and Accessibility: The government of Cross River State should prioritize the development of basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water supply, and communication networks around major tourism sites. This will enhance accessibility and improve the overall visitor experience.

2. Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Tourism Master Plan: A well-articulated tourism development strategy should be adopted to guide the sustainable use of available tourism potentials. This plan should include resource mapping, market analysis, and risk assessment, with a clear focus on long-term sustainability.

3. Foster Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement: Tourism development should be participatory, involving local communities, traditional institutions, private sector actors, civil society organizations, and relevant government agencies. Platforms for dialogue and collaboration should be institutionalized to ensure transparency, shared ownership, and mutual benefit.

4. Promote Capacity Building and Awareness: Capacity-building programmes should be developed to equip local stakeholders—especially community members and small business owners—with the skills needed to engage productively in the tourism sector. Public awareness campaigns should also be launched to emphasize the importance of tourism to regional development.

5. Enhance Policy Support and Funding Mechanisms: Adequate policy frameworks and financial incentives (e.g., tax breaks, grants, and public-private partnerships) should be introduced to stimulate investment in the tourism industry. These policies should also address issues of environmental conservation and cultural heritage protection.

6. Marketing and Branding of Tourism Potentials: Strategic marketing initiatives should be employed to promote the unique tourism offerings of Cross River State, including the Calabar Festival, Slave History Museum, and Tinapa Business Resort. Digital platforms, tourism expos, and media campaigns can play a vital role in this regard.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work collaboratively to unlock the tourism potential of the region and contribute meaningfully to local and state-level development.

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