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**EVALUATION OF MARKETING POTENTIALS OF LAKES AS ECOTOURISM ASSETS IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.****DR. DEMITRUS OKIM OBA,****REBECCA ABANG**

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**Abstract**

This paper examined the marketing potentials of ecotourism in Cross River State, Nigeria. Data for the study was generated from the field through questionnaire administration, field observation, interviews and the global positioning system (GPS). The information gathered was analysed using the one-way ANOVA, the result revealed a significant F-value of 1.92. This value at .05 alpha level with 13, and 34 degree of freedom was found to be greater than the critical F-value of 1.54. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected, that there is a significant difference in the level of marketing of lakes with infrastructure as ecotourism asset. The global positioning system (GPS) was used to ascertain the size of the studied lakes through the use of a boat. The information gotten was analyzed with the use of GIS and the size and depth of the lakes were obtained and processed. The study recommended that tourism stakeholders should show more interest in the development of lake resources to boost tourism development in the state; that the infrastructure around lakes are a cardinal factor in marketing, and should be enhanced to increase the marketability of lakes as ecotourism assets.

*Keywords: Ecotourism, evaluation, marketing, potentials.*

**Introduction**

Ecotourism potentials abound in Cross River State, even though the state has not reached its maximum in terms of patronage, which is obviously because of low knowledge occasioned by low advertisement or better put marketing. Cross River state has not hit its mark of patronage yet, it combines the best of the world's wild life and scenery which draw tourist to other parts of the world. The state presents some of the areas of beauty you can find on earth, the people, their cultures, religion and hospitality in combination with the environment which makes it an obvious destination for pleasure. The presence of beautiful urban centers such as Calabar, Ikom, Ogoja among others and accessible rural areas are all great assets that people all over the world are looking out for. Cross River State holds some of the rarest wild species of flora and Fauna which are at the brink of extinction.

Other ecotourism potentials such as waterfalls, lakes, beaches, rich rain forest abound in the state even though they have continually remained untapped.

The state is blessed with rich culture, a potential for cultural tourism such as the Leboku (New Yam Festival) of the Yakurr people of central Cross River; the Akatchak Festival of the people of Oban in southern Cross River; the Yayawo festival of Yala people and recently the North fest of Northern Cross River State.

For the first time, the state experienced a boost in marketing when the state government showed a lot of interest in tourism development, this was the emerging bright spot to the gloomy spectra of non-utility of the enormous stock of tourism resources. A look at the state according to Oba (2006) shows that infrastructural development is nothing to write home about. It is also embarrassing to see that most of the roads leading to tourist centres are impassable, there is near total lack of modern facilities in most of the quest houses, a situation that usually leaves a bitter taste to visitors. Most of the staff are illiterate, or careless and not committed to work, the results are predictable- inefficiency in marketing. The presence of well-trained staff and the will to work in no small measure enrich the potentials and encourage development of the sector. It is against this background that this paper is articulated to show the richness of the potentials and the impact marketing can make in enhancing the ecotourism potentials and patronage consequently of the study.

### **Conceptual framework and literature review**

Ecotourism is a kind of tourism that involves the movement of people to relatively undisturbed areas, adds value to the local region, and preserves the environment, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN, 1990). It is also known as a nature-based tourism, a form of rural tourism strategy aimed at marketing nature-based tourism potentials in rural areas. Healy (1999) has observed that it is a kind of tourism where man and nature are in least conflict, tourist and the managers of tourism promote tourism on a sustainable basis.

Marketing can be segmented into four, according to the role it plays in the success of or development of a destination. Kotler and Keller (2009) has segmented them as follows: i. Geographic ii. Demographic iii. Psychographic and iv. Behavioral They define marketing in the sense of a set of actual and potential buyers of a product.

The concept of resource propounded by Zimmermann (1951) was used. It provided the functional interpretation of resources, which is as relevant today as when propounded. In it, he argued that neither the environment as such nor part of the environment is a resource until it is considered to be capable of satisfying man's need. Furthermore, it can no more be conceptualized as tangible object but a functional relationship that exist between man's want, his abilities and appraisal of his environment". To elaborate on this fact, Zimmermann (1951) observed that coal was not a resource until it capabilities gave it utility. In his words, availability for human use not mere physical presence is the chief criterion of resources. Zimmermann (1951) elaborated upon this functional interpretation of resources and stressed further that natural resources are dynamic, becoming available to man through a combination of increased knowledge and expanding technology as well as changing individual or societal needs. Appraising the potentials offered by the lakes of

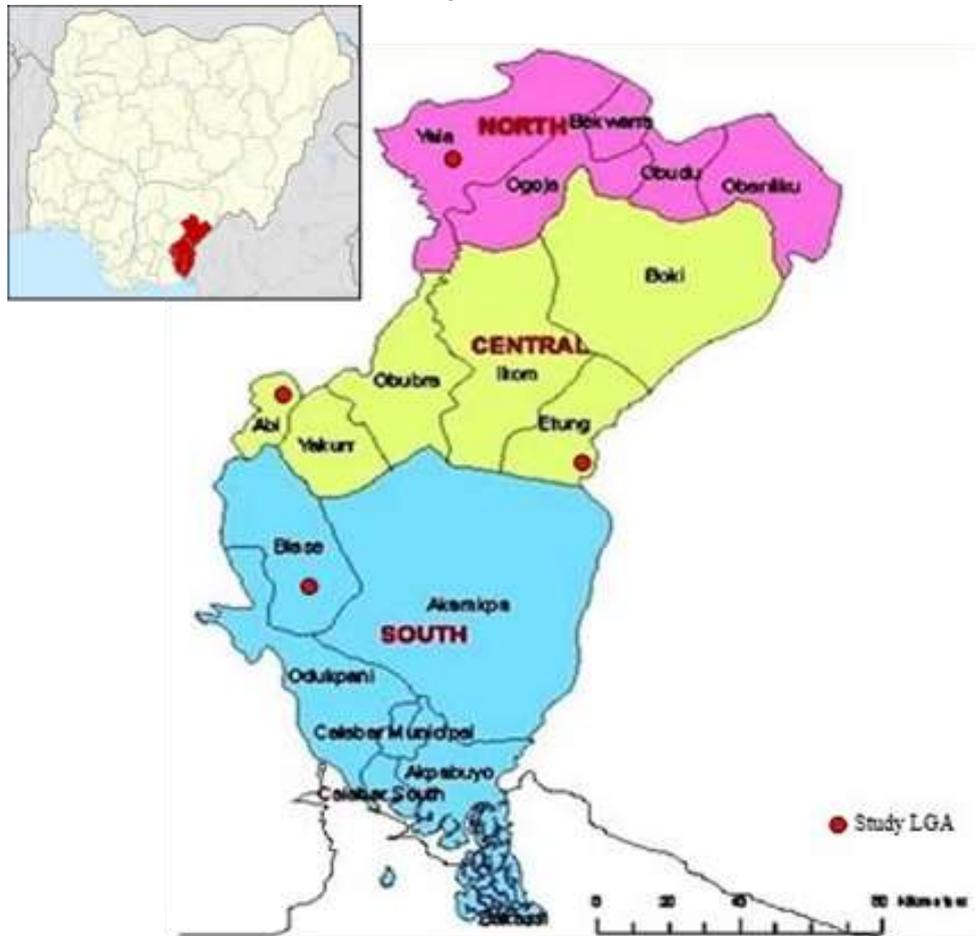
Cross River State as marketing potentials for ecotourism development is the core of this paper.

The quest for natural environment has brought about the growth of ecotourism in the study area. Since industrial revolution, industrialization has grown in leaps and bounds (Oba and Ajake 2013). The need for pristine areas is globally increasing thus making the marketing of ecotourism a viable option for tourism and rural development.

**Methodology**

**Study area**

The study area is Cross River State, South-South Nigeria, it is situated within the tropics and shares a common boundary with Cameroon Republic in the East, Benue State in the North, Enugu and Abia States in the West and Akwa-Ibom in the South. It lies between latitude 4° 20' and 7° 5' North and longitude 7° 34' 9° 8' East.



Source: Authors Field Work

Fig 1: Map of Cross River State Showing Study Local Government Areas

River is within the tropical rain *forest* region of West Africa. The Rain Forest is characterized by woody plants and scrubs, climbers and also Palm trees and rare animals species like Elephants, Chimpanzees which are endangered species the world over. Ekwere (1993) have also observed that the climate is within the Equatorial South, Characterized by high rainfall of about four to six thousand millimeters. Some parts of the state have rain for up to eight months while others have rain throughout the year. The northern part experience serious Harmattan spanning up to four months, November to February, due to the North East trade winds blowing across this area. Maximum rainfall is recorded between June and September with a slight break in August often referred to as the August break. This is indicative of the double maximum pattern of rainfall. Relative humidity is usually about 80-90 percent in the afternoon. The hottest months fall within temperatures of about 26<sup>0</sup>C – 30<sup>0</sup>C in the dry season, and 24<sup>0</sup> to 26<sup>0</sup>C in the rainy season. The temperature range is small with a higher daily temperature. The area is enriched with abundant tourism potentials including waterfalls, pristine rainforest, natural lakes, and mountains amongst others.

#### **Method of data collection**

Based on the size, location, depth, other physical attributes such as aquatic/wildlife and vegetation resources as well as potential for socio-economic development which formed the basis for marketability of lakes. Field measurement and observation was the basis for the survey. Based on the sizes of lakes chosen for the study, lakes between looking were considered to be small lakes, while the big lakes were considered to big lakes > 1000km<sup>2</sup> to  $\geq 1000\text{km}^2$ .

Two sets of data were used for the study namely; biophysical and socio-economic. The size, depth vegetation and wildlife constituted the biophysical while the socio-economic included the perception of the value of lakes as ecotourism potential, level of patronage, infrastructural, marketability etc. The physical data were generated with the help of the global positioning system (GPS) to determine the sizes of lakes, this was done with the help of a boat round the studied lakes.

Five co-ordinates were generated from each of the lakes studied, this data was used to determine the size of the lakes. The questionnaire was used to elicit information on the respondent's views regarding lakes, as ecotourism potentials. Both descriptive and qualitative statistics were used to analyze data. Data were presented in tables for ease of analysis.

**Results and discussion****Table 4.1 Biophysical data of lakes in Cross River States according to their sizes**

Lake	Location		Vegetation	Aquatic/wild life
Akae-bob	N 05.75904 <sup>0</sup> E 007.964578 <sup>0</sup>	40km <sup>2</sup>	Elephant Grass	Cat Fish, Tilapia
Tooka	N 05.69785 <sup>0</sup> E 007.97972 <sup>0</sup>	7km <sup>2</sup>	Elephant Grass	Cat Fish, Tilapia
Ebien	N 05.69820 <sup>0</sup> E 007.98013 <sup>0</sup>	30km <sup>2</sup>	Elephant Grass	Cat Fish
Egwebe	N 05.733680 <sup>0</sup> E 007.96658 <sup>0</sup>	900km <sup>2</sup>	Rain forest	Crocodiles, Catfish, Tilapia
Wobie	N 5.75633 <sup>0</sup> E 007.96412 <sup>0</sup>	5km <sup>2</sup>	Elephant Grass	Tilapia
Refome	N 05.824408 <sup>0</sup> E 007.95002 <sup>0</sup>	1000km <sup>2</sup>	Nippa Palm	Monkeys, Catfish (Guenon)
Ejagham	N 05.921190 <sup>0</sup> E 008.87395 <sup>0</sup>	250km <sup>2</sup>	Raffia	Only Tilapia
Ochako	N 6.807018 E 8.792933	10km <sup>2</sup>	Savanna Forest	Tilapia and catfish

Source: *Authors Survey, 2015*

An observation of the table above shows lake at Ebom in Abi Local Government Area with a total size of 1000Km<sup>2</sup> next to Egwebe in Afono in Biase Local Government Area with 900km<sup>2</sup> followed by Ejagham lake with 250km<sup>2</sup> in Etung Local Government. Others according to their sizes are Akae-bob (40km<sup>2</sup>) at Ibini-Biase Ebien (30Km<sup>2</sup>), Ekpirinyi – Yala 10 km<sup>2</sup>Tooka (7km<sup>2</sup>) at Etana and Wobie at Urugbam Biase 0.4km<sup>2</sup>). This is followed by a list of vegetation kinds, wild as well as aquatic life.

**Table 4.2: Biophysical data of lakes according to their depth (mtrs)**

Lake	Settlement	Depth
Akae-bob	Ibini (Biase LGA)	26m
Tooka	Etana (Biase LGA)	59m
Ebien	Abanwan (Biase LGA)	47m
Egwebe	Afono (Biase LGA)	28m
Wobie	Urugban (Biase LGA)	63m
Refome	Ebom (Abi LGA)	34m
Ejagham	Abia (Etung LGA)	31m
Ochako	Ekprinyi (Yala LGA)	44m

Source: *Authors survey, 2015*

In respect of depth, Egwebe Lake located at Afono village in Biase Local Government Area ranked first with a total depth of 63m followed by Ejagham at Abia Village in Etung Local Government Area with a depth of 59m. Others according to their

depth are Refome (47m) Akae-bob (44m), Ebien (34m) Tooka (31m) Wobie (28m) and Ochako (26m).

### **Evaluation of marketing potentials of lakes as ecotourism assets**

Lakes have high value as ecotourism potentials for the marketing of tourism in Cross River State, some people prefer them for swimming, others for boating and fishing as indicated in the table below:

**Table 4: Respondents view/interest on marketing of lakes.**

<b>Marketing activity</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents' willingness</b>
Swimming	180	51.43
Boating	100	28.57
Bird viewing	70	20.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table above, it is obvious that the marketing potentials of lakes in Cross River State are high. In other words, if lakes are properly developed, their patronage will be high. This is substantiated from the table above where 180 respondents representing 51.43 percent were willing to pay for swimming activities and 100 respondents representing 28.57 percent were willing to pay to participate in boating activities. Finally, 70 respondents representing 20.00 percent were also willing to pay to view birds around lakes.

Bird viewing as stated in the literature, attracts about 78 million travelers within the United States with the consequent financial implication of as high as US\$ 78 Billion.

### **Summary of findings**

The paper was based on a research survey carried out to assess potentials for the development of ecotourism in Cross River State, Nigeria. The paper is sub-divided into several sub-heads Viz: Abstract, introduction, Literature, Methodology, results and discussion, summary of findings recommendations and conclusion respectively. The paper points out succinctly that the lakes of Cross River State hold great potentials for ecotourism development, considering their large sizes, aesthetic beauty, with diverse aquatic life, which are of immeasurable value in ecotourism ventures if well developed.

However, the paper advocated that they should be developed and enhanced through marketing to bring them to the knowledge of many to be used for their various activities, considering the fact that it can sustain the economy of the state.

### **Recommendations**

The lakes with a high carrying capacity like Refome in Ebom in Abi, Local Government Area, and Egwebe in Afono Biase Local Government Area and Ejagham in Abia village

Etung Local Government Area should without delay be developed for recreational purposes by the stake holders

They are great assets in these lakes so if they are well marketed, the rural communities where there are found could have their economy boosted, this will affect the lives of the rural people positively.

The infrastructural needs of areas where these potentials are located should be met, to make the tourist sites attractive to both local and international visitors. This calls for campsites decent hotels, communication facilities, and good road network among others.

Private tourism operators should be encouraged by the Nigerian Tourism Board (NTB) this will help relieve the burdens of government as practiced in other tourism area

### **Conclusion**

The study explored remote lakes for their marketing potentials. The lakes where found to poses great potentials that will enhance their marketing if well harnessed. In all ramifications, the vegetation, wildlife and aquatic life, size all joint together to make them worth developing immediately, this will in no small measure raise the economic status of the state.

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