

## **Assessment of Potentials of Historic Sites in Boosting Tourism Development in Imo State Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *Cultural heritage is the main issue for the identity of different Nations and race. The increasing urbanization of the world coupled with global issues of environmental degradation, economic restructuring demands that we take a deeper look of the future of cultural and heritage sites. In this research Arondizogu community of Imo State in Nigeria will be a focal point for its numerous historic sites, however most of this cultural heritage and sites are partially or completely deteriorated due to lack of proper planning, and documentation, thus modernization theory of development was employed in the study. Cultural heritage and historic sites have lost their dynamism especially during the recent years hence the urgent need for development. As cultural heritage sites are considered as a part of our National assets, so we must reconsider our ways of planning, and developing these sites. Therefore this paper attempts to explore the possibility of using the potentials of cultural heritage sites as a resource to boost tourism development hence increasing our National income through good management. Findings were made through interviews and personal observations, the study was concluded by recommending proposed guideline planning methodology for government, non-government, and conservation specialist etc, which will help them in establishing a sustainable cultural heritage sites.*

**Keywords:** *Arondizogu Community, cultural heritage, development, historic sites, planning,*

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### **I. Introduction**

Because of people's inclination to seek out novelty, including that of traditional cultures, heritage tourism has become a major new area of tourism demand, which almost all policy makers are aware of and are anxious to develop. Heritage tourism one of the most important parts of cultural tourism is based on experiencing the places and activities that authentically represent historic, cultural and natural resources of a given area or region. It is an activity commonly regarded by visits to historic places or sites (Garrod & Fyall, 2001). Historic sites is an official location of building, sites, structure where pieces of political, military or social history have been preserved and which is of local, regional or national significance. Historic sites are lasting records of past lives and endeavors, people are motivated to visit those sites as a result of nostalgia for bygone eras or learn about the historic context of the site this have given rise to heritage tourism

Heritage tourism is quite a new phenomenon at one hand concerning cultural tourism but on the other hand its routes can be traced back to the ancient times of human history (National Trust for Historic Preservations 1998). Due to the modern trends of tourism its demand has been rapidly growing from the 1990's but especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The recent trends of extraordinary growth of heritage tourism development are due to several phenomena experienced in social life, the increase of education level of the population and the trends of the tourism industry. Tourism has gradually become the world's largest industry with a trend toward an increased specialization among travelers and heritage tourism is the fastest growing segment of the industry. Heritage tourism is now a major pillar that can be use to boost local culture and aid the seasonal and geographic spread of tourism. In America their interest in traveling to heritage sites has increased recently and is expected to continue (Hollinshead, 1993). The Travel Industry Association Travelometer in 2003 listed visiting historic sites as one of the top five activities for travelers in North America (Kaufman, 1999). These historic sites are increasingly threatened with destruction and decay; hence the creation of the World Heritage Sites by UNESCO's concerning "The Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage" and was adopted by the general conference at its seventeenth session in Paris 16<sup>th</sup> November 1972 (<http://whc.unesco.org>).

Arondizogu community is a town made up of so much heritage ranging from their popular cultural festival called "Ikeji festival" which is a masquerade carnival to the various historic sites in the community which have the potentials to be developed into tourist attraction hence boosting tourism development. Therefore there is need to identify, plan, develop, conserve, organize, manage and promote the local heritage and historic sites in rural areas. The study aims at assessing the potentials of historic sites in Arondizogu with a view of properly planning and developing them into tourist attraction which will in turn provide the basis for tourism development and further development.

### **1.1 Objectives**

The aim of this study will be achieved through the following objectives:

- To identify the historic sites and characterize their tourist potentials
- To identify the possible ways of conserving and managing cultural heritage sites.
- To identify the problems affecting or hindering the development of these sites
- To determine the requirements necessary to develop them into tourist sites.

## **II. Heritage**

The word 'heritage' in its broader meaning is generally associated with the word 'inheritance' that is something transferred from generation to another. Owing to its role as a carrier of historical values from the past, heritage is viewed as part of the cultural tradition of a society (Nuryanti, 1996). Heritage is a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time. Timothy and Boyd (2003) states that heritage can be classified as tangible immovable resources (e.g. building, rivers, natural areas); tangible moveable resources (e.g. objects in museums, documents in archives); intangible such as values, customs, ceremonies, lifestyle, including experiences such as festival, arts and cultural events. Prentice(1993) defined heritage as not only landscapes, natural history, buildings, artifacts, cultural traditions and the likes which are literally or metaphorically passed on from one generation to the other but those among these which can be promoted as tourism products. Hall and Zeppel (1992) referred heritage tourism whether in the form of visiting preferred landscapes, historical sites, buildings or monuments as experiential tourism in the sense that one seeks an encounter with nature or seeks the feeling of being part of the history of a place.

Tourists often view visits to historic sites as opportunities for cultural and educational experiences, they are seeking authentic experiences that are tied to a specific historic places rather than just leisure in a resort that could be anywhere. Hence heritage tourism involves visiting historical sites that may include old values and the overall purpose is to gain appreciation of the past (Macleod, 2006). Peterson (1994) reveals three major reasons for visiting historic sites: to experience a different time or place, to learn to enjoy a cerebral experience and to share with others or teach children the history of the site.

Tourism is an irreversible social, human, economic and cultural fact. Its influence in the sphere of monuments and sites is particularly important and can but increase because of the known conditions of that activity's development (ICOMOS, 1976).Tourism can capture the economic characteristics of the heritage sites and harness those for conservation by generating funding, educating the community and influencing policy. It is an essential part of many national and regional economies and can be an important factor in development when managed successfully (ICOMOS, 1997).

In Nigeria, in an attempt to promote and project the image of the country as a country in which tourists and holiday makers will find abundant attractions, tourism policy was launched in July 10, 1990 with the following objectives:

1. To increase inflow of foreign exchange through the promotion of international tourism.
2. Encourage even development of tourism based enterprises.
3. To accelerate rural/ urban integration
4. To preserve our cultural heritage and historical monuments.

One of the ways to achieve these objectives is to identify and designate centers of attraction for tourism purposes by the three tiers of the government which will participate in collaboration with the private sector, in physical planning and promotion of such centers. Institutional framework was drawn in order to implement the strategies of tourism development in all levels of the government, this include the following;

1. The Federal Ministry of Culture and Tourism assumes full responsibility for policy initiation and monitoring and maintains direct link with the state on tourism matters.
2. The State Tourism Board should carry out a scheme aimed at identifying, preserving, protecting and develop tourism assets and resources in the state.
3. The Local Government Tourism Committee should preserve and maintain monuments and museums in their area of jurisdiction.

In order to promote the tourism sector in Nigeria, the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) was established by a decree on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1992. The corporation was also saddled with responsibilities one of which include to assist in the development of museums and historic sites, games reserves, beaches, natural beauty spots, holidays resort and souvenir industries. With all these policies and framework one will like to ask; if the tourism industry in Nigeria is well developed? How many tourist potential sites have been identified and developed? Lastly how much awareness has been made in order to encourage tourists within and outside the country? Nigeria is richly endowed with natural and historic monuments is an obvious facts that

have been widely realized for a long time now, it is also believed that if properly developed, these attractions which form the basis for Nigerian tourism industry, could approximate returns from the oil industry (Aremu. D, A 2001) As tourists are becoming more sophisticated, their need to recapture the past has been increasing, tourists have been visiting historic sites more frequently hence the urgent need for identifying, developing and preserving them for continual use. The degree of benefits a local government or community can derive from heritage tourism should not be overlooked because it offers the opportunity for the protection and conservation of historic sites, cultural and natural resources in communities, towns and cities. Secondly it educates residents and tourists about local, regional history and traditions, it promotes the economic and civic vitality of the community or region. The economic benefits include: helps in the expansion of rural business districts, it enhances property values within the historic sites, economic diversification in the service industry, and creation of new jobs.

### **III. The Study Area (Arondizogu)**

Arondizogu is a town inhabited by the Igbo subgroup, the Aro people in the Imo State of Nigeria. The town was founded by Mazi Izuogu Mgbokpo and Chief Iheme in the mid -18<sup>th</sup> century. Izuogu Mgbokpo was a charismatic slave merchant who came from Arochukwu to Awka in search of slaves. He was usually harbored by a friend from Umualaoma where he slept when going in search of slaves and with his goods (slaves. Iheme, himself, was his Chief Servant and he came from Isi-Akpu Nise, in Awka. Iheme and his master Izuogu used all the arsenals at their disposal including the slaves, juju, guns and the equipments for securing slaves which they sold to the European slave merchants Arondizuogu people refer to themselves as "Izuogu na Iheme". Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mazi Okoli Idozuka was an immigrant from Isi-Akpu Nise to Arondizuogu. As a great slave warrior, he expanded Arondizuogu's boundaries. He later changed his name to Okoro Idozuka, an Aro equivalent of his former name. He was a wealthy ruthless and almost conscienceless slave trader like Izuogu Mgbokpo but was also a great leader. Nwankwo Okoro was the first son of Okoro Idozuka. At the age of 21 he joined his father in the slave trade. By collecting slaves and war-captives he was able to build a very large family. When the British came, they made him a Warrant Chief because they believed he could subdue any body and collect the tax they desperately needed for they them. Until this day, Arondizuogu is the biggest former Aro colony and a land of immigrants settling mainly on the rich land. Most of the wars were stopped by one powerful charismatic Patriarch of the host community (Isokpu) by the name Ezerioha Udensi of Obiokwara, Obinihu, Umualaoma(Isuokpu). Ezerioha has subsequently organised peaceful allocation or donation of land by different villages and towns close to Arondizuogu after cleverly discovering that Arondizuogu people cannot go back to Aro Chukwu. Arondizuogu communities are spread out into three local government areas: Ideato North, Okigwe and Onuimo according to the various indogenous villages were the lands were obtained through the same means. Arondizuogu is made up of 20 Towns and 10 Autonomous Communities. Each autonomous has its own "Eze" (as the traditional rulers recognized by the State Government are called) viz: Awa - Izuogu Autonomous Community (which is the Crown Head of Arondizuogu).

The town is known for its numerous festivals notably among them is Arondizogu day Instituted in 1948, which is an annual end-of year convention of people of Arondizuogu descent resident in Nigeria and the Diaspora. It is a day set aside to celebrate achievements, review challenges, and generally keep the flag of patriotism flying in the community. For the culture – loving people of Arondizuogu, popular Ikeji Festival which is touted to be “the greatest carnival of masks and masquerades in Africa” brings the Igbo speaking community around the world together. Its origin dates back to over five centuries and it is acclaimed as the biggest pan-Igbo cultural community festival with strong heritage, international recognition and is witnessed by thousands of people on a yearly basis (Uche Ohia 2007).

Despite the Ikeji Festival which is well known and applauded by the community and surrounding, the town is also made up of some historic sites which tells the story of the people and can be develop also to attract tourist. Unfortunately the people and the government are yet to recognize that the development and conservation of historic sites will attract more tourist to the state and community which will help not only in developing the town but also create an avenue to promote their identity and image, showcase their diverse handicrafts and also promote the image of the country at large. The historic sites located in the study area include the following:

1. Mazi Mbonu Ojike Cottage: this is the village home of Nigeria’s late BOYCOTT KING which is located at Ndiakeme Uno, he is known as a ‘cultural nationalist’. He is the former National Vice President of National Council of Nigeria and citizen (NCNC) and finance minister in the defunct Eastern region. He was best known by attacking the colonial masters and their anti African policies. He traversed the length and breadth of the colonized territory, urging the people to “boycott the boycottables” hence earning him the name the ‘BOYCOTTKING” he preaches cultural nationalism in so doing he wore native attires to work, adopt native names, serve palm wine instead of whiskey in official parties. He urged and encouraged people to promote their culture and identity. Presently this house is being maintained by the children, it attract little or no tourist presently.

2. Uno Ogologo: which means (long house) this is a safe house built in 1887 for hiding children during the slave trade era by one of the slave merchants.
3. The Stone Palace: This is a one- storey architectural masterpiece cast in stone constructed by the late chief Green Mbadiwe for his father the West Africa's first millionaire. This ancient building is amazing to behold considering the technology of the era it was built. The building houses Nigeria story being told through the various collections of pictures, there are about 600 wooden framed photos and each of the photos captures a very significant event in Nigeria's history. Even the car used by his late father Dr. K.O. Mbadiwe. It is located at Ndianiche Uno.
4. National High School Arondizogu: this is a pioneer model school built by community effort and commissioned in 1951 at Ndiakeme Uno.
5. IHEME Memorial Secondary School: this is also a second model school built by community effort and commissioned in 1951 is located at Ndianiche.
6. Palace of The People: This is a legendary home of grandiloquent Nigerian nationalist, politician, statesman and former government minister Dr, K.O. Mbadiwe. He helped to establish African Students Association at the New York University where he gained the attention of the first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who received him and his organization in the white house. On his return to Nigeria in May 1948, he undertook a tour of the country with a movie "Greater Tomorrow" to promote the cause of African Academy of Arts and Science, Uche Ohia (2007). The house which is another awe- inspiring structure houses some Nigeria picture collections; it is located at Ndiianiche Uno and was commissioned by late Prime minister, Alhaji Tafewa Balewa in 1965.
7. Obi Ezerioha Palace: He was a powerful charismatic patriarch of the community who stopped most of the wars in the community. The palace is located at Umualaoma it holds historical significance for the people, as it was the place where the peace agreement that fostered the unity and peaceful co- existence of the people was signed by the forebears, thus significantly signifying the transition from bestiality to civility.
8. Ogbuti Ezumezu: this is the exotic visitor's chamber of Ikeji master Piericomo Okoye located at Ndiogbuonyeoma Ofe Imo;IHEME. This chamber houses the musical instruments of pericommo who was highly regarded then as Ikeji music mastero.
9. Obi Omenuko: this is the homestead of Igewgbe Odum, the hero of Omenuko, the first Igbo novel by Pita Nwana. It is located at Ndiuche.

Regrettably most of these sites are yet to be identified by the community and Local government those that are in good condition are all privately owned but not for tourism purposes. The development of these identified sites for tourism purposes in addition to other attractions like streams, springs etc in the study area will go a long way in providing sustainable development for the people. The sites identified have the potentials that needed to be develop in order to attract tourist; sites like the notably Mbadiwe castle which houses significant pictures of Nigeria can be develop into a museum showcasing some historical moments in the country. The two model schools which was built through the community efforts can actually house some pictures of those who labored to build the school, pictures to show the process that involve in building the school this will go a long a way in cultivating the spirit of patriotism in the people. Uno Ogologo the slave trade house is actually surrounded by a river and good vegetation, trees, the environment alone serve the purpose of tourism. It is noteworthy to say that the town is also surrounded with natural springs and streams with awesome vegetations which include tall trees forming like a canopy, all these can be integrated in planning for the development of these sites. Cultural heritage conservation means positive preservation of old and historic buildings or sites through intervening by several strategic plans of upgrading and development, these strategies are such as; restoration, renew. Rehabilitation, reuse clearance etc. The power of cultural heritage and its potential of generating values cannot be over emphasized hence there is need for its conservation in order to protect its scarcity and importance.

#### **IV. Theoretical Basis**

Society always changes from traditional to modern form hence the study made use of the modernization theory of development. The theory emerged in the 18th-century 'Age of Enlightenment' when a number of philosophers began to look at how society changed and progressed with the idea that people themselves could develop and change their society. Modernization theory is a grand theory encompassing many different disciplines as it seeks to explain how a society progress or how a society changes from traditional to a modern society, it identify the social variables that contribute to social progress and development of societies and how societies can react to that progress, it also looks at the internal factors of a country while assuming that, with assistance, "traditional" countries can be brought to development in the same manner more developed countries have (Asha C. 2013). The major feature of the theory is that development process involves stage by stage which involves, the traditional society, pre- conditions take off, the take off, the drive to maturity and the age of high mass consumption (Nalani H. 2010). In the modern age the theory believes that humans would be

able to change their society within a generation, and this change will be facilitated by advancements in technology, productions and consumption where cultural mores and ideas will be easily spread throughout the world.

**4.1 Relevance Of The Theory To Focus**

The focus of this study is to assess the potentials of historic sites in boosting tourism development thereby encouraging the use of these tourist sites to facilitate developmental changes in the community. First development is understood as a social condition within a nation in which the authentic needs of its population are satisfied by the rational and sustainable use of natural resources and systems. It is also the utilization of natural resources based on technology where people have access to basic services like education, health services, roads etc and above all their culture and traditions are respected within the social framework of a particular country (So, A 1991). Many countries are developing their tourist sites most especially heritage sites in order to attract tourist hence boosting their economy; thus the historic sites mentioned above in Arondizogu community need to be developed because it will; contribute to sustainable growth by merging modernity and tradition, and through a creative combination of the legacy of the past with innovative ideas aimed at shaping the future. Heritage is thus seen as a resource, which not only preserves historic memory but, if used creatively, can also bring various social and economic benefits to a variety of stakeholders. It will also raise the profile of places making them more competitive in the contemporary world, and serves as a source of inspiration for the contemporary arts and creative industries. Modernization theory posits socio- cultural transformation, hence it is believed that it will also aid the people to adjust to any changes that may have occurred or that are likely to occur in the future.

**V. Methodology**

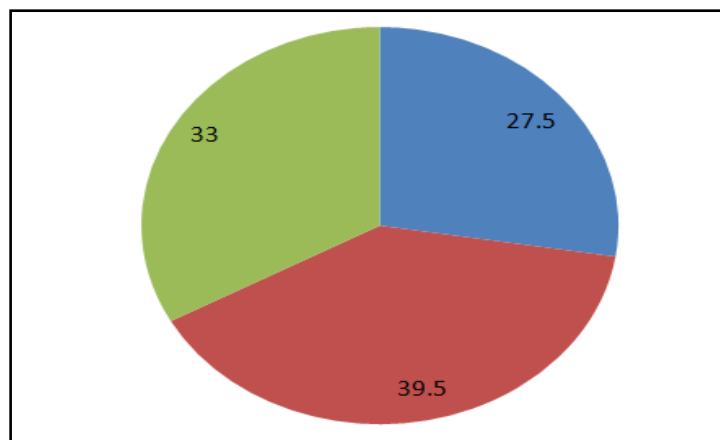
The study made us of interviews and personal observation in order to get adequate information about the place. Two hundred (200) Questionnaires were administered in order to ascertain the level of awareness of the people on the historical sites in their community and also to examine their level of patronage to these sites. Simple random sampling method was used in selecting the respondents.

**VI. Results**

**TABLE 1: To examine the level of awareness of the people on the historic sites**

QUESTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Are you aware of any Historical site in this town		
Yes	55	27.5
No	79	39.5
No idea	66	33
TOTAL	200	100

Source: Researcher’s field work, 2014



**Fig 1:** Pie chart showing the level of awareness of the people about the historical sites in the community.

**TABLE 2: to Ascertain the level of Patronage**

QUESTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Have you ever visited any of the site		
Yes	25	45
No	30	55
TOTAL	55	100

Source: Researcher’s field work, 2014

**TABLE 3: To Identify the Problems Hindering the Development of the sites.**

QUESTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
What are the problems faced by these sites?		
Not accessible	50	25
Lack of social amenities	57	28.5
Lack of government interest	53	26.5
Lack of awareness	33	16.5
Privately owned	17	3.5
TOTAL	200	100

Source: Researcher's field work, 2014

**TABLE 4: To Determine the Requirements Necessary to Develop the Sites**

QUESTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
What are the measures to be taken in order to develop the sites		
Provision of social amenities		
Government Participation	58	29
Govt. – Private Partnership	51	25.5
Community Participation	52	26
	39	19.5
TOTAL	200	100

Source: Researcher's field work, 2014

### **VII. Discussion Of Findings**

This section deals with the analysis of data collected through questionnaire, interviews and personal observation. Table 1 reveals that 39.5% are not aware of any historical sites in the community, 33% had no idea while only 27.5% are aware of the historical sites. Although research shows that the popular ones are; the stone house, the palace of the people, Mbonu ojike cottage home, and Ogbuti Ezumezu this is because these sites are privately owned and managed. Table 2 shows that out of the fifty five persons (55) that are aware of these sites, only 45% have visited the sites while 55% are yet to visit the sites. Table 3 shows the problems hindering the development of the sites 57% indicates lack of social amenities which is the highest problem faced by the sites, 53% shows lack of government interest, while 33% shows lack of awareness. Table 4 shows the requirement necessary to develop the site into tourist attraction 58% indicate provision of social amenities, 51% suggest government participation, while 52% shows government- private partnership.

The interview section comprises of the Igwe, Elders, and the Youths of the community. Response from the Igwe indicate that the major cultural heritage the people are aware of is their famous "ikeji festival" which is held annually and is been referred to as carnival of masquerade. He said it is unfortunate that most of the youth are not aware of the history of their hometown. He cited the "Uno Ogologo" house as one example of monuments in his kingdom, he describe the house as the beginning of the town, Arondizogu where the founder of the town always keep his slave waiting to be sold the white men. Another example cited was the "Obi Ezerioha palace which also mark a significant change in the history of the land because that is where peaceful treat, was signed. He stressed the importance of people getting to know their history, their story and most especially their identity who made them who they are. When asked if he want the government to develop such sites he was reluctant to say yes reason that the government is not always sincere. Some elders interviewed lamented that the two schools built through the help of the community has helped in training many youths of the community, but regrettably only few of them have recognized the importance and history behind the school and have contributed immensely in the renovation and in equipping the school to standard. Majority of the youth are not aware of all the sites, the notably ones are the; Ogbuti Ezumezu, Mbonu Ojike Cottage home and the Mbadiwe's castle although most of them have not visited the sites, they got the information through stories while others actually said they get to know through reading. The chairman noted that he will be glad if the state government will assist in developing the sites and also the private sectors

Personal observation shows that the popular and most patronized are those ones that are privately owned, although it was observed that only the politicians and the elite have the privilege to visit the sites such as the Mbonu Ojike Cottage home and the Mbadiwe's castle as it is fondly called in the town. Ogbuti Ezumezu owned by Pericomio which houses all the musical instruments used during the famous Ikeji can only be visited during the Ikeji festival; it is of the record that the house always witness mass tourism during the festival. People troop to see the various instruments that usher out different kinds of masquerade and the sound they produce after the festival only few people are allowed to visit the sites because it is believed that the masquerade spirit are resting and need not to be disturbed. The Obi Omenuko house is also significant; access is being allowed for people to visit any time especially for academic purposes for people studying Igbo language and other related culture courses in higher institutions. The Obi Ezerioha palace also received visitors to the palace for academic and tourism purpose. Regrettably the "Uno Ogologo" is in a very bad state that needs to be repaired. The findings also reveal that the government had little or no interest in developing these sites, the local government

complained of inadequate fund being allocated to them hence no capital for tourism projects, most of the roads leading to the sites are in bad state, and the basic infrastructures required for tourist stay are lacking.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

Cultural heritage has a great potential for skills development, it provides avenues for generation of knowledge which is an indispensable feature of the heritage sectors, help in creating knowledge, foster innovation and transmission of cultural heritage to the new generation, it also help in the provision of basic services like schools, health centers which are fully equipped with facilities. The heritage sectors are also innovative not only where it overlaps with the creative industries but also in its core activities related to conservation and restoration. The development of these sites will lead to the generation of direct, indirect economic benefits, industrial development, induced jobs along with drawing investment and tourists, it provides an efficient tool for providing social cohesion, if properly designed and managed, heritage sites can serve as efficient means for the policy of social inclusion, intercultural dialogue, conflict resolution, it will attract tourists from home and abroad, help foster community growth in terms of social amenities such as electricity, water, good health centers and also infrastructures such as roads, shopping mall e.t.c.

### **IX. Recommendation**

Development of any nation, county, state community relies much on harnessing their resources through advanced technology, planning management etc. the following recommendations are made after a careful review of the major findings: Public sectors are supposed to cooperate with the private sectors in order to conserve and rehabilitate cultural heritage sites. Planning requirements; tourism needs planning, creativity, infrastructures and allied services. Careful planning is needed to protect the visual integrity of historic places and sites.

There should be an enabling social and political environment for tourism development to thrive, government should also ensure to be sincere with the people and avoid politicizing everything. There should be political will of our communities to encourage and support tourism development they should be educated and awareness should be created. The local government in particular should show more interest in such ventures as their areas would be opened to a wider world. The community should use the Ikeji festival as an avenue of exhibition of their historical sites these will help in ensuring varieties and attract more tourists. More so people should be given access to all tourist sites. Tourism has been a positive force in the conservation of heritage resources. Hence care should be taken to minimize the impact of tourist facilities and development in order to achieve sustainable development. Tourism has a lot of economic and social advantages, if the industry is made productive. Nigeria has the tourist potentials which through capital, commitment and good planning will transform the tourist potentials to tourist attractions.

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