

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM: OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH

A paper presented at 2012 UNWTO Commission Meeting for Africa (CAF): Regional Seminar

Protocol:

Distinguished Chairman, Distinguished participants, all protocols observed.

Introduction:

I am very delighted to be invited, to speak at this seminar with the theme *Responsible Tourism: Opportunity For Women And Youth*. I am delighted first because this seminar offers me a platform to share with this august gathering the experience of '*Women in Tourism Foundation*', an NGO I set up in 2006, in tapping into the opportunities presented by Responsible Tourism to impact on the lives of women and youths as our humble contribution to the promotion of Responsible Tourism in Nigeria. I am also delighted that this important seminar which has in attendance Ministers of Tourism in Africa is focused on opportunities that are available to women and youth through Tourism; this is because I am an ardent believer in the important place and role of women and youth in the overall development of a nation. I also believe that tourism is a veritable vehicle for actualization of economic development in African nations.

Conscious of fact that the largest proportion of Africa's Tourism assets is situated in rural areas and the related need to integrate the rural population with the Rural Tourism Assets in a manner that the people's consciousness is awakened to the implications of their action for the Tourism sector which in Nigeria has growth challenges as a result internal and external factors, despite targeted efforts at promoting sustainability for the sector. In practical demonstration of support for the 2002 Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, we set out in 2006 to set up the Women In Tourism Foundation. This is with a view to fill the gap of needed skills as well as creating awareness in the minds of the people on the benefits and opportunities tourism industry offers to the economy. We also aimed at instilling in the stakeholders the fact that the benefits presented by tourism can be tapped into with minimal negative impact on the environment and society. This is in addition to emphasizing that the local population's social and economic wellbeing can be enhanced through job creation for women and youths by taking advantage of the opportunities that exist for women in Tourism in the areas of entrepreneurship, education and training, leadership and community. To us, this was very important because it is obvious that we are in an era when unemployment is the greatest driver of crime and youth restiveness on our society.

The Foundation's Experience

* In Nigeria women has held and are still holding leadership position in the Tourism public and private sector. These positions cut across all aspects of the industry. At various times the positions held include top government appointments such as Minister, Commissioners, Permanent Secretaries, Director General, Directors and Heads of Department. In the private sector women hold such positions as Business owners, General Managers, Mangers and Heads of Departments. Generally speaking, the numbers of women in leadership position in Nigeria are

low compared to men. The larger proportion of women working in the industry work as cooks, waiters, bartenders, tour guides, fashioner designers, traditional cloth makers, artifact production and sales, dancers, musicians and other low paying jobs. In all cases, these women are doing very well and are not discriminated against in terms of earnings and wages.

Increasing the number of women in leadership position in Tourism has not been given any focused and coordinated attention. This is made worse by the fundamental problems faced by our Tourism industry. The industry in Nigeria has not stimulated the expected social, economic and infrastructural development given the country's vast and rich eco-tourism attractions. There is also obvious lack of appropriate policy to promote eco-tourism and a general positive disposition to promote enclave tourism. This support for enclave tourism enables government to raise the needed revenue from tourists using its utilities and few facilities provided by the private sector to sustain the industry. This revenue is largely from the rich locals and foreign tourists who can afford to pay while the poor and rural communities are alienated. The rural-urban migration phenomenon is affecting rural development efforts. Policies on integrated rural developments are not seen to achieve increase in per capital income of dwellers because of related reasons.

Potentials for growth exist in rural areas, however, these potentials have not been realized because of poor human capacity development in spite of various policies of government. This is despite the modest but the focused efforts of the Nigerian Tourism Corporation (NTDC) to empower the youths through the creation of Tourism Centers in various parts of the country. These centers promote travel experience, and the quality and sale of Nigeria's cultural products.

For us at the Foundation our considered solution is to create attractive opportunities through the development of tourism in rural communities. It is for these reasons that Women in Tourism Foundation is focused on the empowerment of rural women with the right skill and market strategy to significantly contribute to the improvement of socio-economic well-being of rural dwellers individually and through cooperatives.

The basis of our choice for women is based on our experience that in Nigeria women are predominantly responsible for the upbringing of children, yet most of these women do not have the economic power to instill the right training for their children as well as avail them the needed provisions for daily living. The problem in some situation is associated with the economic development, policy support, technology, socio-cultural aspects, gender inequality, management and financial capacities. However the fundamental issues are the acquisition and development of sellable skills and ideas for women and youths; these we have tried to achieve through education and appropriate practice exposure.

The objectives are closely linked to governments' efforts of job creation and strengthening of Tourism Small and Medium scale enterprises, poverty alleviation and Tourism development in general.

OUR APPROACH

We aimed at reducing poverty, while taking into consideration government initiative in this direction. To this end, every effort is made to maximize information sharing and complement government efforts, civil society and other partners as well as the activities of other agencies. Our approach is integrated and concentrated on a limited number of geographical areas. These are located in states within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and Lagos.

Our choice of Niger Delta region is based on our understanding of the fact that our focus and activities in this region will go a long way to assuage youth restiveness through:

- minimizing negative economic, environmental and social impacts of Tourism
- generating greater economic benefits for local people and enhancing the wellbeing of host communities
- improving the local people working conditions and access to the industry
- involving local people in decisions that affect their lives and lives' chances
- making positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage embracing diversity
- providing more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local, cultural, social and environmental issues
- providing access for physically challenged people
- Promoting culturally sensitive interaction which encourages respect between tourists and hosts, and building local pride and confidence

This is all that the Cape Town declaration identifies with in its definition of Responsible Tourism destination. In terms of Economic focus we aim to support social sectors, transport, food, security, rural development, individual and institutional capacity building. At every stage of the execution of our project, we consider such issues as gender equality and environmental protection.

In this regard our strategies include:

- Organizing high level seminars, workshops and exhibitions on tourism opportunities for rural women and operators. In doing this we place emphasis on how best the tourism community can help reduce traceable negative impacts of tourism and also contribute meaningfully to conservation efforts as it affects natural resources, culture and heritage.
- Organizing capacity building workshops for tapping the potentials for tourism in rural areas.
- Collaborating with relevant tourist organizations, agencies and nongovernmental organizations
- Developing tourist projects for skill acquisition and socio economic developments particularly in the area of appropriate packaging of tourism products to generate greater economic benefits.

This initiative now runs an indigenous language school, Urhobo resource and language learning center, known as Language Links School which aims at supporting Urhobo history, culture and language development. The school has expanded its services to include the teaching of all major Nigerian languages as well as other popular international languages such as French, German and Spanish as means of promoting communication at tourism sites and destinations in addition to contributing to the fight against the threat of extinction posed to indigenous languages.

CONCLUSION

In view of the importance of upholding a responsible tourist development in socio-cultural, environmental and economic terms and in keeping with the principle of the World Charter of Sustainable Tourism, governments in Africa must as a matter of urgency review their Tourism policy to align with the dictates of the principles of Responsible Tourism with a view to promoting touristic ideal that is based on respect for the environment, cultural diversity and social responsibility. This must be the outcome of a Strategic Plan that reflects on the present status of rural tourism in our respective countries and how this impacts and relates to the local community, particularly women and youths. This must be done if the desired effects are to be achieved in tapping into the opportunities provided for women and youths through Responsible Tourism.

Taking action in this regard will further help our respective countries to:

- Facilitate the building of awareness and cooperation amongst stakeholders to safeguard the Tourism assets of our destinations.
- Promote knowledge exchange and best touristic practices with a view to encourage responsible tourism;
- Stimulate the development of new tourist products and activities that promote the use of cultural and natural and other heritage resources in respectful manner and most importantly;
- Link the quality of tourism development to both the principles of sustainability and responsibility.
- Promote the integration of the tourists, in a manner that enhances the required balance with the residents in addition to the preservation of the values of identity and co-existence.

Ladies and gentlemen it is my considered opinion that we must leave here today with a determination to encourage respective countries to:

1. Develop local frame and action plan for promoting the ideals of Responsible Tourism, where this does not presently exist.
2. Inspire the National Tourism Organisations as well as the Tourism Boards to expand their roles beyond destination marketing to include the promotion of responsible Tourism.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Mrs. E.O. Ibru

Calabar - Nigeria

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