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Religious Activities and their Tourism Potential in Sukur Kingdom, Nigeria

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Religious tourism is a form of tourism whereby people of the same faith travel individually or in groups for religious purposes. This form of tourism comprises many facets of the travel industry ranging from pilgrimages, missionary travel, leisure (fellowship), vacations, faith-based cruising, crusades, conventions and rallies, retreats, monastery visits and guest-stays, Christian and faith-based camps, and visits to religious tourist attractions. In Sukur Kingdom, most tourists embark on religious travel for the primary purpose of sharing faith and fellowship together as they explore the various religious sites within Sukur and Adamawa State at large. Others seek inspiration and desire to witness significant religious events while assisting others with humanitarian and spiritual needs. This paper examines the tourism potential of religion/religious sites and belief systems in Sukur Kingdom with a view to harnessing them for sustainable tourism development. The study uses ethnographic methods to elicit information and analyze the data collected from respondents.

Key Words: Religious activities, Tourism development, Pilgrimage, Sukur Kingdom

Introduction

Religious tourism is one of the earliest forms of tourism that was practiced by people travelling to holy sites. This form of tourism could be traced way back to the dawn of humanity. According to Biblical accounts, sacred religious sites were visited by admirers or people who shared the same faith and fellowship while exploring the holy sites. Today, these religious sites have become part of the cultural landscape within their environs and now constitute major players in the tourism market; thus, improving the economy of host communities. Cities like Mecca, Rome, Jerusalem etc continue to attract millions of visitors on a yearly basis.

Nigeria is a country with many different religions. The majority of the people are Muslims, but there is also a large Christian community and many different ethnic religious communities. Thus, religious pilgrimages and travels are significant motivations today. Although many Nigerians profess either Christianity or Islam, they have continued to practice some of the older religious traditions like ancestor worship and the belief in deities.

Sukur Kingdom is an ancient Kingdom that flourished between the early 16th and late 18th centuries and in 1999 was inscribed as a Cultural Landscape under the

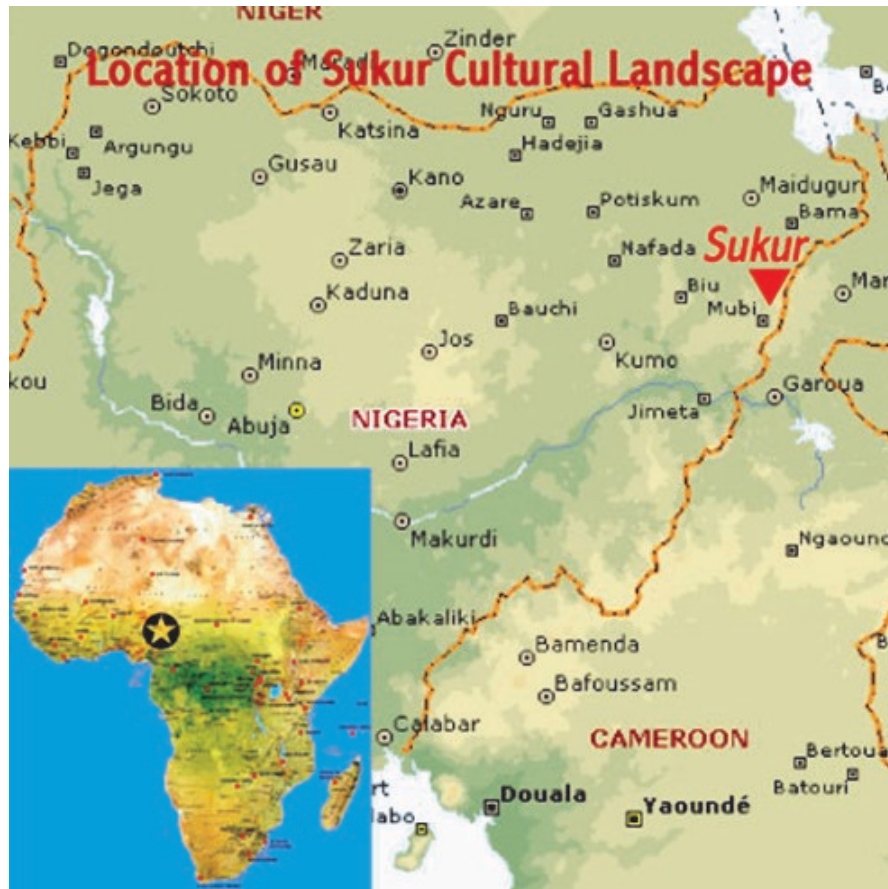
World Heritage Site (WHS) designations of UNESCO. The area possesses numerous worship sites that attract admirers and adherents. This paper shall emphasise the two religions and belief systems in Sukur Kingdom to which pilgrimages are common, with a view to examining their tourism potential. The paper argues that religion and tourism in Sukur are powerful forces for economic growth, job creation, cultural preservation, environmental protection and peace.

The Study Area

Sukur is an ancient Kingdom that flourished between the early 16th and late 18th century. It is a small community located in the west (130 34'E and 100 44'N) of the Mandara mountains of Adamawa State, about 15km from Gulak, the Madagali Local Government Headquarters and 245 kilometers from Yola, the capital of Adamawa State (Kinjir, 2001).

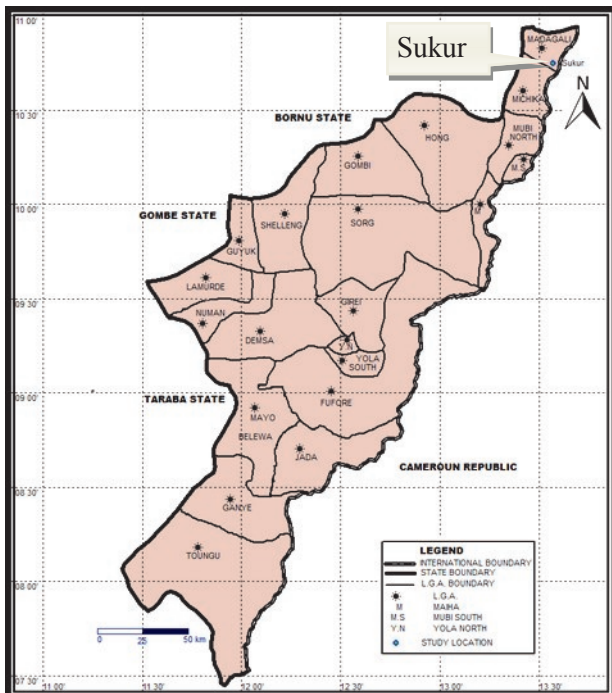
Adamawa State is located in the north-east of Nigeria and shares boundary with Taraba State in the South and West, Gombe State in its Northwest and Borno State in the North. To the east, Adamawa State has an international boundary with the Cameroon Republic and has a population of 3,178,950 people according to the 2006 census (National Population Commission,

Figure 1: Location of Sukur Kingdom Showing Her Neighbours



(Source: www.africanworldheritagesites.org)

Figure 2: Adamawa State Showing the Twenty-one Local Government Areas



Source: Adapted from Adebayo (1997)

2006). The people of Sukur are called ‘Sakur’, which also stands for the name of their language; while the nomenclature of the paramount ruler is Hidi.

Religions and Belief Systems in Sukur Kingdom

The two major religions and belief systems that form faith tourism in Sukur Kingdom are traditional religion and Christianity. Christianity in Sukur is a recent phenomenon with a handful of adherents. Their worship places are found in some of the villages; while the majority of the people practice traditional belief systems. Research results reveal that 20% of Sukur people are Christians and 80% are members of traditional religions (Okonkwo 2013).

Sukur traditional religious practices and belief systems are rooted in the people’s cultural practices enshrined in their customs, norms and beliefs. These beliefs combine family/clan deities with relations to the primordial spirits of a particular site. In effect, the right of a group, defined by common genealogical descent, was linked to a particular place and the settlements within it. The primary function of such beliefs was to provide supernatural protection and sanctions, as well

Plate 1(a-b): Gate leading to Hidi's Palace and the Hidi's Royal Stone Throne (Source: Fieldwork, 2010)

(The Royal Stone Throne is Surrounded by Other Stone Seats for the Chiefs of Various Ethnic Groups Signifying the Political Authority that the Palace Wielded in the Past)

as legitimacy and regulations governing claims on resources, especially agricultural land and house sites. Also, rights of access to resources, political offices, economic activities, or social relations were defined and legitimized by these same religious beliefs (www.country-data.com).

In the past, the people practiced only traditional religion and this explains why the Hidi was portrayed as a divinity with considerable spiritual power over the neighbouring people and chiefs. The traditional religious life of Sukur people is exemplified in many festivals associated with deities such as *Zoku*, *Yawal* etc; shrines and altars including the Man-jam shrine, Fumai hi and Muva shrines as well as Sukur mountains constitute cultural resources because of the beliefs and myths attached to them. These mountains (*Muzi*, *Muva*, *Vulungwa* mountains etc) are also worship centres/deities for Sukur traditional religionists.

Christianity is regarded as a minority religion in Sukur Kingdom, being introduced in recent times. The first Christian doctrine in Sukur was the Catholic Church followed by the Ekkilisiyar Yariwaa of Nigeria (EYN) which is now found in several villages of Sukur. It should be noted that early Christian missionaries representing diverse denominations set up rural networks in parts of Nigeria by providing schools and health facilities. Many such facilities, particularly schools, have been taken over by state governments in order to standardize curricula and indigenize the teaching staff (Okonkwo and Nzeh 2009).

Sukur Religions/Belief Systems and Tourism

Tourism and religion are inter-woven in the sense that most religious tourists travel for a period of not less

than 24 hours, and do not pick up jobs to earn money. People travel to religious centres because they want to have experience, explore where their ancestors might have worshiped, or better still, understand their religious background (Okonkwo and Nzeh, 2009). It is therefore believed that religious tourists travel to religious centres/historic places mentioned in holy books such as the bible because it will not only enrich their understanding of the scripture, create good atmosphere where peace reigns supreme among religious groups, but will also create wealth and job opportunities for the communities where such centres are located. It will therefore be of great help for us to look at the various religious sites that Sukur pilgrims visit so as to help us appreciate the implications of religious tourism in the study area.

For the purpose of this study, religious tourism is defined as the movement of people from one place to another for a period of not less than 24 hours and for religious purposes. The money spent on the trip should be derived from home. Thus, a group of people who embark on a trip for religious purposes are religious tourists, but they are often referred to as pilgrims. Oftentimes, it is a journey literally "far afield" to a sacred place or shrine which is of spiritual importance to a person's beliefs and faith (Okonkwo and Nzeh, 2009).

It is a shared belief amongst the many peoples of Sukur Kingdom that ancestral spirits and gods influence the affairs of the living. They not only protect the people from mishaps, but also serve as a link between the world here and the world beyond. This explains why many traditional societies maintain constant communion with these spirits through sacrifices, libations and other religious observances (Okpoko

2001:94). Groves and shrines are believed to be the dwelling places of these spirits. In Sukur Kingdom, certain forests, tombs and water bodies are designated as sacred. Selected species of trees such as Baobab trees (*Adansonia digitata*), Khaya Senegalensis (*tsendad*), Tamarine (*Mbulum*) etc., are perceived to be sacred as well as shrines and temples/altars.

Indeed, there are several places that have assumed sacredness because of their religious importance in the life of their admirers and adherents. Such places become very important in the history of humans, and over the years, people travel to such places for religious activities. In Sukur, there are numerous examples of shrines, tombs and altars that have been points of attraction for adherents and admirers. These shall now be examined.

Shrines

Ethnographic sources (like Barth cited in Sterner 1998) corroborate documented evidence, which describes Sukur as the natural stronghold of a pagan king who was called Hidi who "...is said to possess a great many idols" (Sterner, 1998:2). With the exception of *Tson Midalla* and *Yawal Duba* shrines, all Sukur shrines are located in awe-inspiring places, usually isolated/deserted places symbolized by special arrangement of rocks in a pyramid form, often on top of a hill. Such shrines include *Mudumum*, *Famai Hi* and *Dovdoi* shrines that have dense rocks around them. The shrines are characterized in people's minds by solemnity, quietness and fear, suggesting the presence of something more than the ordinary. It is not common to find a shrine, which has no fragment of paved stone/rocks around it in Sukur. Nearly all surrounding hills are dedicated to the gods that have the shrines.

The people believe in the existence of an omnipotent God known as "*Zhigal*". Beside *Zhigal*, there are other deities (gods) that the people worship. These include '*Piss*' (the sun god), '*Sakur-yam*' (the rain god), '*Maidtril*' (god of the forest), the moon god (*Tia*) and god of stars (*Maila*). These deities have their different shrines scattered all across Sukur Kingdom, some on top of mountains, an act (according to our informants), that gives them supremacy and prying eyes over their worshippers.

The paths that lead to the top of the hills hosting the shrines from the base are usually narrow and sometimes quite difficult to pass, with fragments of rocks all through the walkways. Stepping on them by strangers requires extra carefulness as a wrong step could lead to dislocation of the ankle. The constructions were not accidental, but were done on purpose to enhance the psychological feelings of fame and fear surrounding the deities. Each of the shrines visited has a foot-path that leads to it. Information gathered from the chief priests of these deities during

the field research revealed that the selection of a site for a shrine is not man-made. According to Dalatu, before a shrine is set up, a *boka* (diviner) is consulted to divine and ascertain the place approved by the deity concerned. Similar information was recorded by Arinze (1970) when he said that to select the site of a shrine, among the Igbo, the elders of the community hold a meeting, but a '*dibia*' (diviner) must be consulted; the final decision lies with him.

The shrines in Sukur are decorated with bones, feathers and blood of sacrificial victims. They are tied around with skin (made in a rope form) of animals sacrificed for protection. This is used to inhibit people from entering them unauthorized. People can only enter these shrines in the presence of the priests or with their permission.

Dietrich (1953) argued that people go to the theatre for one of three reasons –to laugh, to cry or to be thrilled. Tourists at Sukur Kingdom will find these shrines attractive sites for a variety of reasons, but principally to be thrilled, to be soothed, vexed or over-awed. Shrines in Sukur therefore satisfy the herding tendency in a human who is: "an adventurous animal, a being that glories in warfare, derives pleasure from risks and finds strength in danger" (Okonkwo, 2004:93). The mysterious, the magical and the fearful aspects of the shrines appeal to the tourists' desire for the occult and the unknown as well as for true religious tourism.

Deities are said to have power to inflict serious hardship on anybody in Sukur Kingdom that does evil. Such hardships include famine, poor harvest, drought, barrenness, untimely deaths of young people, among others. According to Dalatu (priest of the Gamzam shrine), remedies for such hardship are sought via consultation with a *boka* to find out the source of the punishment and how to appease the deities responsible for them. Okonkwo (1987:12) states that:

cases are reported where communities or persons who suffered some kind of calamities had their misfortunes suddenly arrested after consulting oracles and complying with the wishes of the deity or deities responsible for the misfortune.

These phenomena give a researcher room for concern and many questions come to mind. First, are the deities in Sukur kingdom myths or realities? Secondly, of what importance are they to the past, present and future society? And finally, are the powers of Sukur deities figments of the imagination or is there more to them than we know on the face level?

For a non-Sukur man, it may sound like a fairy tale to hear about the powers arrogated to some of these deities in Sukur (powers like neutralizing harmful and

Table 1: Names of Major Shrines in Sukur Kingdom

S/No	Names of Shrines	Functions	Names of Chief Priest / Title	Description of Title	Months of Sacrifices	Duration of day(s) for Sacrifice(s)
1.	Tson Midalla	---	Smila Timin – Midalla	Defence Minister	November	One
2.	Midlirth	The shrine that houses the deity that owns Zoku festival	Joseph Kwaji – Mbuzufwai	Chief Priest/ Sacrificer	September	One
3.	Manjam	The shrine for justice	Dlera Tarukoma – Mbuzufwai	Chief Priest/ Sacrificer	May	One
4.	Fumai Hi	The shrine that controls catastrophe such as locusts and deadly animals' invasion	Dali Sinu – Makarma Binhud	Chief Priest/ Sacrificer	Emergency / occasions of bad and strange happenings	Two – three
5.	Yawal Duba (Gam)	An area where the brewing of drinks for yawal is done	Mara Puu – Dalatu	Chief Priest/ Sacrificer	January ending	One
6.	Yam Hidi	A fertility shrine for Hidi only	Yohana Barka – Tlisuku	Hidi's Chief Priest/ Sacrificer	At Hidi's discretion	One
7.	Muva	Neutralizes evil charms coming into Sukur. It is also a shrine for weather points and seasonal changes observation	Mbaku Thuduv – Thuduv	Royal Chief Priest/ Sacrificer	February/ March before Hundlei festival	Two
8.	Midalla	Announces festivity period and good omen	Shetima Dali – Dzarima	Information Minister	November/ December	Three

Source: Fieldwork, 2010

dangerous charms brought into Sukur Kingdom by strangers). Nevertheless, field research revealed that Sukur people believe that there are supernatural beings that control the universe, who possess more powers than ordinary human beings and that these deities and shrines work in communion with these supernatural forces. Thus, they satisfy tourists' desire for adventures, occult and the unknown. Table 1 outlines some of the major shrines in Sukur.

To give a sense of distance, a transect walk from Hidi's palace to four selected shrines in Sukur recorded the following time distances: *Midlirth* Shrine (30 minutes), *Manjam* Shrine (1 hour, 30 minutes), *Fumai Hi* Shrine (1 hour), and *Yawal Duba* Shrine (5 minutes)

Tombs

Two types of burial grounds were identified in Sukur – *Dazha* (royal graveyards) and *Telmu* or *Girdahua* (common burial grounds for the villages); the cemetery (both *dazha* and *telmu*) lies a short distance to the

Plate: 2: *Yawal Duba* Deity

(Source: Fieldwork, 2010)

northwest of Hidi's palace. People are forbidden to enter, cut down trees or to farm within and around the graveyards. The areas are regarded as sacred and can only be entered by the chief priest through gate 24 in Hidi's palace.

The informants revealed that in the event of Hidi's death, a duration of three days is allowed for embalment. Ndai Kirba (the royal chief blacksmith) must be the first to touch his corpse, perform embalment and start the production of burial goods. He makes a wooden seat and stool since the deceased will be buried in a sitting position, while resting his feet on the stool. Three metal supporting rods are used for the burial; two rods to support his hands and one at the back to enable him recline backwards. A shield produced from hippopotamus skin will be used to cover the king – right, left, front and back. Thereafter, a newly produced charcoal will be poured in on the king. Once the task is completed, the grave is finally covered with sand. A stone structure (paved stones / segments of rocks) is then raised to symbolize the burial spot. The *telmu* or *girdahua* is used by the villagers, and every Sukur person has the right to bury his / her deceased family member there.

Generally, Sukur tombs are described as homes of the ancestors. Just like the granary metaphor, the grave is believed to conserve and keep the body of the deceased. For the Sukur, a dead person clearly lives in their tomb, often located in a cemetery where other

members of their kin-group also reside. Perhaps, this explains why Sukur people do not bury a deceased person within their compound. It could also be attributed to their belief that the dead assume the role of an ancestor and ancestors are revered and constitute part of the spirits worshiped, because of their role in protecting family members.

Sukur tombs are an attraction as well as a site for sober reflection and connection with ancestors. The architectural pattern of the tombs in Sukur is simple. Stones are used to erect a pyramid of about three feet on the spot. This is the only metric symbol of a tomb in the kingdom. If the deceased person was a man, two stone pillars called *maparam*, just like the gate to the house, are set on top of the tomb. If it was a woman, her cooking pot, broom and grinding stone are left on top of her tomb. This is with the belief that the deceased woman would need these objects in her husband's home in the world beyond. In other words, Sukur people believe in life after death.

Altars

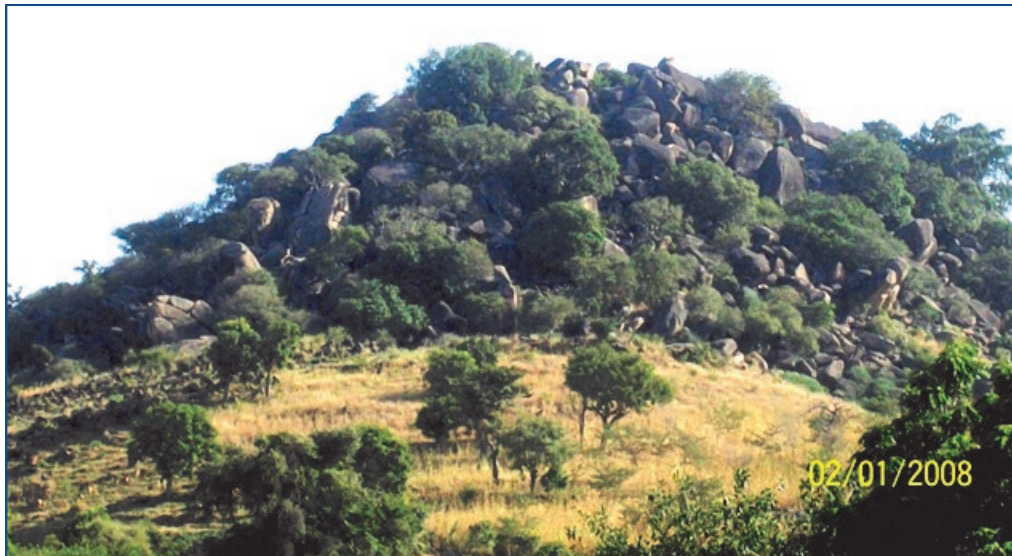
In Sukur, altars are places meant for sacrificial purposes. These places are mainly mountains, which have been designated as sacred places that thus, attract people. The altars include:

- a. **Muva Mountain** – The highest sacrificial spot where the chief and the whole village sacrifice.

Plate: 3(a) Sukur Female and (b) Male Tombs



(Source: Fieldwork, 2010)

Plate 4: Muva Mountain (Sukur Highest Sacrificial Spot)

(Source: Fieldwork)

The Barukuma (Elder Tangwa Nzayu) is the chief priest. It takes roughly one hour, twenty minutes to climb to this spot, and the base of the hill is a forty-five minutes walk from the palace.

- b. Muzi Mountain** – During the time of harvest (October/November), sacrifices are offered on the mountain top by the chief priest with prayers requesting bountiful harvests.
- c. Mungwalai Mountain** – Sacrifices are offered at this mountain by Dalatu (Elder Mara Puu) before farming begins—around April and May.
- d. Vulungwa Mountain** – The Hidi's uncle sacrifices on this mountain. Nobody other than his uncle can farm on the mountain.

Other sacrificial altars include **Tangwurah** altar officiated and maintained by *Makarama* (Elder Kwajimtu Dluku), which is located at Rak (first gate leading to Sukur Kingdom); **Dlyang-Mbadlavai** altar officiated by *Mbuzufwai* (Elder Jatau Zura), **Dalatu** (Elder Mara Puu) and **Tlégum** (Elder Mara Gaudlya) as well as **Mulirth Mountain**.

In everyday life, misfortune, sickness, political rivalries, inheritance disputes and even marital choices or the clearing of a new field are incorporated and explained within this traditional religious framework. Given these beliefs, causal relations are stipulated and explained through the actions of supernatural entities, whose relations to the living involve interventions that enforced morality and traditional values (Cline 2003). In addition to ensuring access to and the continual

fertility of both land and people, the spiritual entities (deities) protect their adherents from misfortune, which often is strengthened by charms, amulets and medicinal products sold by special practitioners referred to as “chief priests”. These entities also adjudicate disputes through trials by ordeal or through messages divined by special seers and; punish personal or communal immorality, personal and group failures, through sickness, drought, fire and others catastrophes (Cline 2003).

Christianity is recent in Sukur Kingdom, following the establishment of two churches – Catholic and Ekkilisiyar Yariwaa of Nigeria (EYN). The Catholic Church known as St. Krin Catholic Church has branches in seven Sukur villages of Fah, Daza, Tukson, Wurogas, Twakya, Kwaziti and Dishu, with the cathedral parish at Dur clan. The EYN on the other hand has two branches, namely Guzka and Damai. EYN is popularly known as the ‘Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria’ with their headquarters at Sukur kasar (lower Sukur) in Rugudum Village (a buffer zone adjacent to the Sukur Kingdom).

Like the traditionalists, many Christians travel abroad for spiritual gratification – visiting magnificent cathedrals, ancient temples and other historic religious sites – which can have profound effects on anyone that encounters them. In 2014, the number of pilgrims from Nigeria to Israel, Rome and Greece was estimated at 30,000 (Opara, 2014); thus, many experts agree that Christian pilgrimage is one of the fastest growing vacation trends, but the travel industry has no way of tracking these spiritual sojourners. In Adamawa State, Christian gatherings that constitute religious tourism

include conventions, retreats, conferences, Catholic and Anglican synods, crusades as well as monastery visits etc. Examples of centres for religious gatherings in the state are the Ebenezer Baptist Church annual gathering at Yola, Church of the Lord Aladura Worldwide Organization Convention at Yola, Living Faith Ministry Retreat at Hong, Adamawa State to mention but a few.

Religious crusades, conferences, summits, evangelisms etc that form religious pilgrimage emanate from churches such as Grace of God Mission, Assemblies of God Church, Redeemed Christian Church of God, The Lord's Chosen, Christ Embassy, among others. Also, worthy of note are the annual Catholic and Anglican synods often performed between October and November each year. In particular, there is a general up-surge in Christian evangelical crusades, conventions and retreats in Adamawa State. Among them are the Reinhard Bonnke and Daniel Kolenda 'Great Gospel Campaign' tagged "Yola 2008" and "Mubi 2009" respectively. The five days of these gospel crusade meetings had in attendance an outstanding 2.4 million and 1.8 million people respectively (Kolenda 2008 and Van den Berg 2009).

The World Religious Travel Association (WRTA) in 2008 held the first global trade and educational conference aimed at the 300 million potential faith travellers, with exhibitors from more than 30 countries, drawn from ecumenical communities and travel agencies. Today, building on such initiatives, Nigerian travel agencies, churches and religious groups have begun to understand the benefits of tourism and that religious tourism is not only a visitation to a particular holy destination; but may also be travel for a humanitarian cause, visiting friends or for leisure purposes. It should be noted that religious travel can be the primary reason for a trip, but it can also be part of a trip and thereby provide a destination with additional attraction. Religious travellers may not be of a particular religion in order to visit a special religious site. For instance, the Vatican holds special meaning for Catholics; however, millions of non-Catholics also visit the Vatican both for its spirituality and for its architectural beauty. Again, the island of Curacao is home to the western Hemisphere's oldest synagogue. Today, the synagogue is not only a national monument for Curacao, but also one of the major attractions both for the Jews and non-Jews (Tarlow, 2014).

It is also pertinent to note that religious gatherings as mentioned above often require tourism facilities, which ensures tourist comforts. Among them are accommodation provision (some of which are in the form of hostels), catering services, ushers and guides (often well-trained) etc. Good access roads, electricity and communication facilities are considered by the organizers of such gatherings. In addition, the Nigerian Police Force and Federal Road Safety Commission

work together with the organizers of crusades, evangelisms etc. to ensure the security of the tourists and free flow of traffic.

Tourism Potential of Religion and Belief Systems

Religious travels can provide spiritual enlightenment and understanding of how culture, history and the heritage of one's faith interact in today's life. It provides a wonderful way to vacation; thus, religious travel touches all aspects of the human person – spiritually, physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally (Okonkwo and Nzeh, 2009). It is also argued here that group travel is one of the best ways to develop a close bond among members. Visits to religious sites enhance one's faith, and provide wonderful opportunities to experience natural or historical destinations and enrich the lives of members.

The rise in demand for religious travel is clearly part of a larger trend towards deeper interest in religious products of all sorts. Nigerian greeting card producers confirm that the market for Christian products has increased tremendously in recent times. A similar boom is recorded in the market for religious musical titles, videos and books. Reinhard Bonnke's book titled *Evangelism by Fire: Igniting Your Passion for the Lost*, which was printed in 47 languages has sold 3,000,000 copies; while his gospel campaign in Lagos State attracted 1.6 million people in a single meeting (Bonnke 2008). 65,000,000 copies of Bonnke's booklet titled *Now that You are Saved* have been printed in 50 languages and were distributed free to people of southeastern and northern Nigeria. A further 4 million booklets were shared for free with Christians all over Nigeria. It is pertinent to note here that the production of these books and the considerable cost of their shipment to Nigeria as well as local transportation is accrued as religious tourism dividend (Okonkwo and Nzeh 2009).

It is worthy of note here that religious tourists are often involved in sustainable efforts in the areas of conservation or cultural education. Many missionaries arrive in host countries with the strong desire to make a difference, not just in people's spiritual beliefs but also in the physical world in which they form those beliefs. Education, conservation, and the establishment of basic hygiene, medical and agricultural services are activities that allow visitors to foreign countries, be they on holiday or religiously inspired missions, to close the gap between themselves and the people they have come to get to know, and in many cases, to serve. Tourism in this way furthers development as an active and vital meeting ground where both religious and secular activities are at play (Jill 2006).

Many Christian churches in Nigeria generally have evangelical mobile medical teams, which provide a clear example of the way religion and development activities can combine with tourism to create tangled and hybrid situations that push against any simple definition dividing religious motivations from secular. Thus, praying for sick people, taking pictures of the landscape of the host communities visited and attending to and / or distributing medication for communities, are all part of a larger process in which religion, tourism and development can intertwine and have done so in the course of their engagement in the world (Okonkwo & Nzeh, 2009).

Focusing on Sukur, the cultural landscape contributes to revenue generation and foreign exchange receipts accrue from various tourist ventures; such earnings will stimulate the overall development of the host economy by improving the level of income. Furthermore, due to the continued interest of tourists in religious sites in the Kingdom, the price of commodities are on the increase. Since tourism involves movement of people to another destination, income generated elsewhere is spent in the destination, thereby bringing about income redistribution. Proceeds from the sale of locally manufactured materials like works of arts, gate fees etc. generate money for host communities.

Tourism brings together other sectors of the economy to enhance national growth. These, according to Okpoko, *et al.* (2008:42), include, among others, hotels and other forms of hospitality industry, education, arts and crafts, construction and manufacturing, agriculture and transportation. The declaration of Sukur as a World Heritage Site gave rise to the construction of a hotel by an individual (Hon. Saleh Kinjir –The Chiroma of Sukur). The hotel has a total of 9 rooms rented at the rate of N4,000 and N3,000 per night (N200 = approximately US\$1 in 2015). Sources revealed that they receive at least 8 visitors in a month resulting in an average income of N28,000 per month. The hotel has a conference hall with sitting capacity of 100, which is rented at N8,000 per day, restaurants serving local, continental and international dishes on request as well as assorted soft drinks, there are also local craft shops making art works and a reception. The hotel facilities include a bore-hole for constant water supply, electricity and a stand-by generator, satellite dish, and communication facilities. The hotel is managed by five personnel.

Indeed, besides improving the living standard of the host community, tourism also creates job opportunities. Apart from the persons that manage the hotel mentioned above, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) employs six persons to manage the Information, Ticketing and Interpretation Office at Sukur. These personnel include a senior resident guide, an administrative officer, a security officer, education officer, and two supporting

staff. These people were employed because of Sukur's status as a World Heritage Site, thereby improving their economic life as they are gainfully employed. As argued by Okpoko, *et al.* (2008:44), tourism creates other industries, which are relevant to the existence and sustenance of a particular tourism destination. In addition to tourism specific employment, these sub-sectors (accommodation and restaurants, transportation etc) create spin-off employment opportunities for local residents (multiplier effect). These go a long way to increase the standard of living and income of the host population.

Sukur people are proud of their cultural practices that have withstood all modernization influences and challenges. Their cultural practices exemplified in their beliefs, customs, values, norms, etc. have remained virtually the same to the present day. Sukur people have become more cautious in the preservation of their cultural practices following the development of the area as a destination site. Perhaps, this explains why Sukur religious sites, festivals and ceremonies have continued to attract more visitors. Their willingness to partner with government for sustainable tourism development in their community has energized them to maintain the tradition of responding to challenges with one spirit and to cooperate with one another, and with external parties (like UNESCO, UNDP etc) for the betterment of the entire community.

According to Okpoko, *et al.* (2008:43) tourism can encourage and promote the cultural heritage of the host community. The use of quality local materials in the area in the provision of furniture, arts, crafts and textiles helps to uplift the image of the destination area. The stone architecture of the Sukur tombs and Hidi's residential quarters are an outstanding cultural practice evident in various hillside communities in Northeastern Nigeria. The people continue to renovate, reconstruct and maintain their stone walls / buildings, which have become attractions to tourists. It should be noted that the use of stone for construction is ingenious and there is a lot to be learned from it. The unique architecture and stonewalls are reminiscent of the Ziwa stonewalls of Zimbabwe. However, while those of Ziwa represent relics of a by-gone era, those of Sukur represent a living heritage (NCMM, 2006:35).

The tourism implications of religion and belief systems represent, a somewhat complete picture of the multitude of ways that religion and development interact in the space that tourism creates. This case highlights the manner in which religion and development can and does find common expression in acts of tourism and in "tourists" themselves. By mixing religious motivations and development activities into hybrid forms, participants in religiously motivated development projects challenge common scholarly assumptions that development is a purely secular endeavour (Escobar 1995).

Above all, the potential of religion and belief systems for tourism development and promotion in Sukur Kingdom can never be over-emphasised as it ranges from economic, cultural and political to environmental benefits. Holy sites act as a focal point for the pilgrimages of many Nigerian religions. Hence, once an area is declared a holy place, it is usually beautified and this enhances the commercial value of the area. As Okpoko *et al.* (2008) rightly argue, the obvious implication is that many investors – both within and outside the country – would like to establish their enterprises there. Markets for tourist shopping, banks and transportation facilities will be put in place to facilitate tourists. Another implication is that religion and belief systems help to improve the infrastructural base of the place they developed. This is done through the establishment and maintenance of existing access roads, electricity, healthcare delivery and communication networks. Again, religious tourism helps to promote peace and unity among host communities, states and nations as it brings about improvement in the quality of life for both urban and rural dwellers, through the provision of leisure facilities and healthy relationships and interactions with others.

Finally, religious tourism in Sukur creates jobs for local people. It also creates other spin-off industries namely transportation, accommodation, catering / restaurants etc., which in turn create employment opportunities for the local residents, while increasing their standard of living and income.

Conclusion

Although religious travel is one of the historic forerunners of today's mass tourism, faith tourism is only recently recognised as making significant economic contributions in many nations that have harnessed its potential resources for tourism development. Faith tourism is a market that is currently experiencing extraordinary growth on multiple fronts and is poised to continue this trend if adequate attention is given to the sector. The establishments of the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) for Muslims and Christian Pilgrims' Welfare Boards (CPWB) for Christians are visible measures directed towards the development of religious tourism in Nigeria.

Viewing the abundant tourism implications of religion and belief systems, it is argued in this paper that Nigeria should take advantage of the economic, social and religious benefits that accrue from the development and promotion of religious tourism. Some religious tourists are motivated not only by faith but also by an interest in the history of the place in question and / or by other subjects best known to them. It should also be noted that religious tourists bring religious beliefs and practices with them to host

countries, often maintaining these beliefs and practices in the face of divergent cultural norms; thus, while religious tourists often abide by the rules and regulations guiding the destinations visited, their code of conduct is also guided by the ethics of their own religion / belief systems.

This paper also advocates that more research should be directed towards religion, tourism and development in Nigeria. In particular, not much work has been done to study the effects of missionaries who are often directly involved with development projects, despite the fact that many Nigerian missionaries engage in aid activities. At the same time, most studies on tourism do not consider religiously motivated visitors. Therefore, for us to fully appreciate the tourism implications of religion and belief systems in Nigeria, we must take into account all religiously motivated tourism activities, and the relationships between faith-based tourists and the communities with which they interact.

If visits to holy places, conventions and rallies, retreats, crusades, monastery visits and guest-stays, missionary travels, leisure (fellowship), vacations, faith-based cruising, Christian and faith-based camps, etc. are encouraged by government at all levels, religious tourism will not only be brought into the limelight, but will also help in securing a prominent position for Nigeria in the world tourism map.

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