

POTENTIALS OF COMMUNITY BASED ECOTOURISM IN IKO ESAI COMMUNITY OF CROSS RIVER STATE, SOUTH-EASTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Community Based Ecotourism is a form of tourism where local communities have substantial control over, and involvement in ecotourism development and management with a major proportion of the benefits accruing to the community. The study sought to access the potentials of Community Based Ecotourism in Iko-Esai Community of Cross River State in Nigeria. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. Questionnaires and interviews were applied to collect primary data using a multistage method while secondary data were from relevant documents from CERCOPAN (an NGO operating in the area) as well as other past studies. A total of one hundred and forty-six (146) questionnaires were administered to respondents in two (2) selected wards in the community. Data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The research results revealed that CERCOPAN is the major body, assisting in Community Based Ecotourism in the Community. There are enormous ecotourism assets in the study area, including the rich tropical forests, wildlife species and cultural heritage of the people. Other sites yet to be developed are Ikpibitoi, Bagamukum, Agorom Epkun and Owai. Ecotourism in the area was reported to have registered significant positive impact on the natural environment and the people of the area through active participation in all aspects of tourism development while benefits from ecotourism are accrued to the community. The community has good potentials of being organized and eager to see tourism and biodiversity conservation play a vital role in its economy. The elders in the area are also well respected which is critical in Community Based Tourism development.

KEYWORDS: CERCOPAN, Economy, Community Based Ecotourism, Participation