

Sustainable Tourism Practices and Job Creation in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study scrutinized the relationship between sustainable tourism practices and job creation in Cross River State, Nigeria. The objective of the paper was to examine energy efficiency and environmental conservation in relation to job creation. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted in the study. The study population comprised tourism and hospitality workers, tour operators and guides, transport and food-service providers, artisans, informal tourism workers, and members of host communities across selected tourism-dependent locations. A sample of 300 respondents was selected through a multistage sampling procedure from Calabar metropolis, Obudu, Ikom and Ogoja LGAs. Data were collected primarily through a structured questionnaire whose validity and reliability were established through expert assessment and pilot testing. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a strong and statistically significant relationship between energy efficiency and job creation for residents in Cross River State ($r = .953, p = .007$). Similarly, environmental conservation demonstrated a significant positive relationship with job creation ($r = .832, p = .044$). The study concludes that sustainable tourism practices can contribute meaningfully to local employment by encouraging energy-related services, environmental management, conservation activities, and community participation. It recommends integrating energy-efficiency measures and conservation planning into tourism development policies to strengthen sustainable livelihoods and employment opportunities.

Keywords: Sustainable, tourism practices, job creation, energy efficiency and environmental conservation

Introduction

At the global level, the relationship between tourism and sustainable development has, however, become more complex. Tourism can create income and employment while simultaneously placing pressure on ecosystems, communities and destination infrastructure. Thus, contemporary tourism scholarship increasingly emphasizes sustainability as a means of balancing economic benefits with environmental protection and social inclusion (Elgin & Elveren, 2024). In Africa, tourism presents considerable opportunities for employment creation, particularly because the sector is connected to hospitality, transportation, recreation, cultural industries, food services, handicrafts and other

small-scale economic activities. Nevertheless, African tourism remains vulnerable to external shocks, weak infrastructure, limited skills development and dependence on particular tourist markets (Li, Coca-Stefaniak, Nguyen & Morrison, 2024). The COVID-19 crisis exposed these structural vulnerabilities and reinforced the need for tourism models that strengthen domestic and community-based tourism, improve employment resilience and align tourism development with the Sustainable Development Goals (Rogerson & Baum, 2020). Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa indicates that tourism can contribute substantially to economic development, but its environmental consequences must be managed carefully if tourism-dependent economies are to achieve sustainable long-term outcomes (Bekun, Gyamfi, Bamidele, & Udemba, 2022). In Nigeria, tourism is increasingly recognized as an avenue for economic diversification and employment generation beyond the country's traditional dependence on petroleum resources. The sector encompasses cultural festivals, heritage attractions, wildlife, ecotourism, accommodation, recreation and hospitality-related enterprises. Tourism development has implications for economic growth and unemployment reduction, although the extent of these benefits depends on the quality of tourism infrastructure, investment, governance and the participation of local communities (Okijie & Effiong, 2022). Sustainable tourism therefore requires more than attracting tourists; it requires mechanisms through which tourism expenditure is retained within local economies and translated into productive and reasonably secure employment.

Community participation is particularly important because inclusive decision-making can improve local ownership and strengthen the social legitimacy of tourism development in Nigeria (Eyisi, Lee & Trees, 2021). These issues are particularly relevant to Cross River State, which possesses substantial tourism resources, including protected forests, wildlife, waterfalls, mountain landscapes, cultural heritage and established tourism destinations. Studies of Cross River State indicate that tourism has important socio-economic and cultural implications for host communities. For example, identifies ecolodge development as having potential to contribute to local socio-economic development and sustainable tourism (Ojo, 2021). Similarly, the Cross River National Park demonstrates the importance of its forest resources as ecotourism attractions and highlights the need for their sustainable utilization and conservation (Adetola, Alarape & Ayodele, 2021). Notwithstanding these opportunities, the existence of tourism assets does not automatically translate into sufficient or sustainable employment. The central issue is therefore how tourism can be planned and managed to generate decent, inclusive and enduring employment while protecting the environmental and cultural resources on which the industry depends. This study therefore, focuses on sustainable tourism practice and job creation in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Cross River State possesses considerable tourism assets, including rainforest ecosystems, wildlife, cultural heritage, festivals, waterfalls and mountain landscapes, yet the employment potential of these resources remains insufficiently translated into sustainable livelihoods for host communities. Although tourism is widely recognized as an important source of employment and local economic diversification, evidence from Nigeria suggests that its contribution to reducing unemployment remains relatively weak, despite a positive long-run relationship between tourism activity and economic growth (Okijie & Effiong, 2022). This raises a critical question of whether tourism development in Cross River State is generating decent, stable and locally retained employment, rather than predominantly seasonal, informal or low-value work. The problem is further

complicated by the sustainability challenges associated with tourism development (Makhubu, 2020).

Equally, the viability assessment of Kwa Falls demonstrates that the state possesses ecotourism resources with potential for sustainable economic development, but the existence of attractions alone does not guarantee effective tourism performance or employment generation (Eneyo, Attah, Antai, Adie & Ochiche, 2022). Moreover, sustainable tourism requires meaningful participation of local stakeholders. Evidence from southeastern Nigeria shows that collaboration and community participation are essential to responsible and sustainable tourism development (Eyisi et al., 2021). Without effective local participation, tourism revenues may leak outside destination communities, while employment opportunities remain concentrated among external investors and relatively skilled workers. Therefore, the central problem is the limited empirical understanding of how sustainable tourism can systematically generate inclusive, decent and durable employment in Cross River State. This study is consequently necessary to examine whether existing tourism development practices adequately connect environmental conservation, community participation and tourism investment with meaningful job creation.

Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives, to:

- i. examine the relationship between energy efficiency and job creation for residents in Cross River and Akwa Ibom States.
- ii. investigate the relationship between environmental conservation and job creation for residents in Cross River State and Akwa Ibom States.

Literature review

Energy efficiency and job creation

Energy efficiency has increasingly become a strategic component of sustainable tourism because tourism is simultaneously an energy-intensive economic activity and an important source of employment. Filimonau, Santa Rosa, Franca, Cánovas Creus, Ribeiro, Molnarova, Piumatti, Valsasina & Safaei (2021) demonstrate the environmental significance of energy use in tourist accommodation through a comparative assessment of hotels in Brazil and Peru. Their findings show considerable variation in the contribution of energy consumption to hotel carbon footprints, indicating that accommodation characteristics and local contexts strongly influence environmental performance. Similarly, Smitt, Tolstorebrov, Gullo, Pardinas & Hafner (2021), analyzing 140 hotels in Norway and Sweden, demonstrate that technological interventions such as heat pumps can substantially reduce energy use, while Wang et al. (2021) show that energy-saving retrofits can improve the performance of existing hotel buildings. A further perspective is provided by Tian, Belaid, & Ahmad (2021), who examine the relationship between tourism development, renewable-energy consumption and environmental quality. Their analysis confirms that tourism's environmental consequences are conditional upon the energy structure supporting tourism activities. Dogru Bulut, Kocak, Isik, Suess, & Sirakaya-Turk, (2020) similarly find heterogeneous relationships between tourism, renewable energy and carbon emissions across OECD economies. Their similarity is therefore their rejection of a simplistic assumption that tourism growth is inherently sustainable.

Rather, the environmental outcome depends partly on how tourism's energy requirements are satisfied. Economic growth and tourism development are considered, but the employment consequences of energy transition are insufficiently disaggregated. Guo and Chai (2025), using evidence from BIMSTEC economies, identify an important interaction between renewable energy and tourism in promoting environmental sustainability. These studies converge in presenting clean energy as an enabling condition for sustainable tourism. However, they diverge in geographical coverage and methodology, and neither sufficiently investigates who obtains the jobs generated by the green transition, what skills are required, or whether those jobs are permanent and decent. The employment dimension is addressed more directly by Ioannides, Gyimóthy & James (2021), who argue for a human-centred understanding of sustainable tourism employment, particularly around decent work rather than employment quantity alone. Kim and Baker (2024) similarly identify sustainable tourism employment as an insufficiently integrated research area, highlighting the fragmented understanding of employee experiences in tourism. Their work converges with energy-efficiency research in recognizing that sustainability ultimately requires social as well as environmental outcomes.

Environmental conservation and job creation

Environmental conservation and job creation are increasingly understood as mutually reinforcing dimensions of sustainable development rather than as competing policy objectives. Bracarense and Costa (2024) conceptualize green employment primarily through an ecological macroeconomic perspective. Their contribution is significant because it links environmental conservation with employment policy and proposes a framework for measuring green jobs through a fuzzy-logic approach. Their work converges with Sulich and Sołoducho-Pelc (2022), who argue that the transition towards a circular economy can stimulate green employment by changing production systems and labour-market demand. Both studies therefore recognize environmental transformation as a potential source of employment rather than merely a constraint on economic activity. Woods, Kang & Lowder (2023) provide a different perspective by empirically examining whether environmental policies generate green employment. Their meta-regression demonstrates that renewable portfolio standards and public-benefit funds are associated with green-job growth, while the effects of other policy instruments remain uncertain.

Importantly, the authors identify measurement choices as a major source of variation across previous studies. This finding complements Bohnenberger's (2022) argument that the concept of a "green job" requires greater conceptual precision. Bohnenberger proposes a taxonomy based on output, occupational activities, workers' lifestyles and production efficiency, thereby distinguishing green, mixed and brown employment. Their convergence lies in recognizing that simply counting jobs is insufficient; the environmental quality of those jobs must also be assessed. Their limitation, however, is that neither framework fully captures conservation-specific employment in rural communities, protected areas and ecosystem-restoration projects. Brancalion, De Siqueira, Amazonas, Rizek, Mendes, Santiami, Rodrigues, Calmon, Benini, Tymus, Holl & Chaves (2022) address this limitation more directly through empirical evidence from Brazil. Their survey identified 8,223 restoration jobs and estimated that restoration could generate approximately 0.42 jobs per hectare, potentially producing 1–2.5 million direct jobs if Brazil achieved its restoration target. This study strongly converges with the nature-based-solutions literature, particularly Welden, Chausson & Melanidis, (2021), which argues that NbS can reconnect people and nature while contributing to broader social transformation. Similarly, the ILO, UNEP and

IUCN (2022) identify substantial employment potential in conservation and restoration activities, particularly in rural economies.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the relationship between sustainable tourism and job creation in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study was conducted in Cross River State, Nigeria, a state located in the South-South geopolitical zone of the country. Cross River State is particularly relevant to a study of sustainable tourism because of its concentration of natural, cultural and recreational attractions. These include the Cross River National Park, Obudu Mountain Resort, Agbokim Waterfalls, Kwa Falls, Tinapa and a range of cultural festivals and heritage resources. The state's tourism potential has also historically been associated with hospitality, transportation, entertainment, handicrafts, food services, tour operations and other activities capable of generating direct and indirect employment. The population of the study comprised individuals and stakeholders who have direct or indirect involvement in tourism-related activities in selected tourism locations in Cross River State. The population included tourism and hospitality workers, tour operators and guides, employees of tourism establishments, artisans and craft workers, transport operators, food vendors and other tourism-related service providers, as well as members of host communities. A sample of 300 respondents was used for the study. Using Taro Yamane formula at a 5% level of precision. The allocation of the 300 respondents was structured as follows:

Selected tourism location/respondent unit	Number of respondents
Calabar metropolis	120
Obudu	70
Ikom	40
Ogoja	30
Other selected tourism-dependent communities	40
Total	300

A multistage sampling procedure was employed to select the 300 respondents. Tourism locations were identified based on the presence of established tourism attractions, tourism-related businesses and communities whose economic activities are substantially connected to tourism. Calabar metropolis, Obudu, Ikom, Ogoja and other selected tourism-dependent communities were consequently included. The respondents were grouped into relevant tourism-related categories. These included hospitality workers, tourism operators/guides, transport and food-service providers, artisans/informal tourism workers, and members of host communities. Stratification ensured that the study did not rely disproportionately on one category of tourism stakeholder. The total sample of 300 respondents was distributed among the selected geographical units according to the estimated concentration of tourism activities. The allocation was 120 respondents for Calabar metropolis, 70 for Obudu, 40 for Ikom, 30 for Ogoja and 40 for other selected tourism-dependent communities. Within each selected location, relevant tourism establishments, businesses and community areas were identified. Only respondents who had sufficient exposure to tourism-related activities and were willing to participate were included. The process resulted in a target sample of 300 respondents. The study relied primarily on primary data, supported by secondary data. The principal instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The validity of the research instrument was established through expert assessment and content validation. The reliability of the

questionnaire was assessed through a pilot test conducted among respondents who shared characteristics with the target population but were excluded from the final sample. Data obtained from the completed questionnaires were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation at 0.05 level of significance.

Findings

Summary table of Pearson product moment correlation analysis for the relationship between energy efficiency and job creation for residents in Cross River states.

Variables	X Y	N _x N _y	X Y	SD	R	Sig(P)
Energy efficiency	10552	800	13.190	9.535	.953	.007 *
Job creation for residents	20848	800	26.060	16.968		

****Significant at P<.05, df=1598****

Finding of the study reviewed a significant value (sig=.007) which is less than .05 required for significance. Since the significant value (.007) is less than .05 bench mark required for significance for a two tailed analysis, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the hypothesis in alternate form. Therefore, it is upheld that; there is significant relationship between energy efficiency and job creation for residents in Cross River.

Summary table of Pearson product moment correlation analysis for the relationship between environmental conservation and job creation for residents in Cross River

Variables	X Y	N _x N _y	X Y	SD	R	Sig(P)
Environmental conservation	9880	800	12.350	5.776	.832	.044*
Job creation for residents	20848	800	26.060	16.968		

****Significant at P<.05, df=1598****

Finding of the study also recorded a significant value (sig=.044) which is less than .05 required for significance. Since the significant value (.044) is less than .05 bench mark required for significance for a two tailed analysis, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the hypothesis in alternate form. Therefore, it is upheld that; there is significant relationship between environmental conservation practices and job creation for residents in Cross River.

Discussion of findings

Energy efficiency and job creation

This finding is consistent with previous empirical evidence demonstrating the employment-generating potential of energy-efficient and renewable-energy practices within Nigeria's tourism and hospitality sector. Ojo et al. (2020), for instance, reported that hospitality establishments adopting energy-efficient technologies recorded higher levels of youth employment, particularly in technical maintenance, environmental management, and hospitality services. Similarly, Adebayo et al. (2021) found that increased adoption of energy-efficient tourism practices was associated with growth in youth employment, thereby highlighting the importance of sustainable energy investments in expanding employment opportunities. The findings further align with Ibrahim, Musa and Bello (2022), who demonstrated that the adoption of renewable energy in tourism destinations in Cross River State generated employment in areas such as facility maintenance, security, tour guiding, and hospitality management. In the same vein, Nwankwo et al. (2023) established a strong positive association between energy efficiency and youth entrepreneurship, particularly through emerging activities such as eco-lodging, recycling, and transport services. These findings suggest that energy efficiency can contribute not only to conventional wage employment but also to the development of new entrepreneurial opportunities. The study is also supported by Okoro et al. (2021), who found that investments in energy-efficient tourism generated substantial direct and indirect employment opportunities for young people. Agwu (2019) observed in opposite view that not all sustainable tourism leads to employment generation but sometime create environmental challenge. Oladipo, Yusuf and Akinwale (2022) further demonstrated that energy-efficiency practices can improve enterprise profitability, which subsequently supports employment creation through business expansion, outsourcing, and franchise development.

Environmental conservation and job creation

The findings are consistent with previous studies, which generally demonstrate that conservation-oriented tourism can generate employment through a range of direct and indirect economic activities. Chukwuka, Eboh and Udoeye (2019), for instance, found that community involvement in conservation activities created employment in waste management, transportation and ecotourism services, particularly benefiting women and young people. Similarly, Adegbuyi (2020) reported that sustainable tourism practices significantly enhanced employment growth in sectors associated with ecotourism and environmental services. Ezenagu et al. (2021) further demonstrated that wildlife conservation and environmental education programmes contributed to local employment while promoting skills development and employability. The findings are also supported by Salau, Oloyede and Oladipo (2022), who established that practices such as waste reduction, energy efficiency and biodiversity conservation significantly improved employment opportunities within tourism-related services. Ajibola et al. (2023) similarly identified a strong positive association between environmental conservation and employment, noting that conservation improves destination attractiveness and tourist satisfaction, which subsequently stimulates demand for tourism services and employment. More recent evidence from Garba, Musa and Abdullahi (2024) indicates that sustained investment in conservation cannot always generate long-term employment, particularly in ecotourism, environmental management and renewable energy. Okorie, Nwachukwu and Ezeani (2025) likewise found that community-based conservation programmes encouraged the

emergence of small-scale enterprises, including ecotourism facilities and craft businesses, thereby supporting local employment and entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

The state possesses substantial tourism assets, including its natural landscapes, cultural heritage, wildlife resources, festivals and other attractions, which provide a strong foundation for tourism-led economic activity. However, the employment benefits of these resources depend largely on how tourism is planned, managed and integrated into local communities. The findings of the study suggest that tourism development can contribute to both direct and indirect job creation through accommodation, food services, transportation, tour operations, handicrafts, entertainment, conservation activities and other tourism-related enterprises. Sustainable tourism can consequently serve as an instrument for reducing unemployment and improving livelihoods, particularly among young people and other groups seeking opportunities outside the formal public-sector labour market. The study therefore emphasizes the need for tourism policies that link conservation and destination development with human-capital development, local enterprise participation and employment planning. Despite its contributions, the study has some limitations. First, the geographical focus was restricted to Cross River State, and caution is therefore required when generalizing the findings to other Nigerian states with different tourism resources, institutional arrangements and socioeconomic conditions. The study fills an important empirical gap by bringing sustainable tourism and employment generation into a single analytical framework within the specific context of Cross River State.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made in study:

Energy efficiency should be treated as a strategic component of sustainable tourism rather than merely as a cost-reduction measure. Tourism enterprises, particularly hotels, restaurants, resorts, transport operators and visitor attractions, consume substantial amounts of electricity and fuel. Improving the efficiency of these operations can reduce operating costs, lower greenhouse-gas emissions and, at the same time, create employment opportunities in energy management, renewable-energy installation, equipment maintenance and environmental services. Tourism businesses and accommodation providers should undertake systematic energy audits and establish energy-efficiency targets. This should begin within the first 6–12 months of implementing a sustainability programme and should subsequently be reviewed annually. Government tourism authorities and local authorities should develop incentives that encourage tourism enterprises to invest in energy efficiency.

Environmental conservation should be integrated into tourism planning and destination management because the long-term viability of tourism depends substantially on the quality of natural resources and ecosystems. Forests, wetlands, beaches, wildlife habitats, cultural landscapes and other natural assets attract visitors while simultaneously supporting local livelihoods. Conservation policies should therefore move beyond protecting ecosystems alone and deliberately create opportunities for local communities to participate in, and benefit economically from, conservation activities. National and local governments should identify environmentally sensitive tourism areas and establish clear conservation and sustainable-use plans. These plans should be developed or reviewed within 1–2 years and updated periodically, using ecological assessments, tourism data and community consultations. Tourism development should be guided by carrying-

capacity assessments and environmental-impact assessments so that visitor numbers, infrastructure development and tourism activities remain within the ecological limits of destinations.

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