

## **INFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS ON SUPPORT FOR ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN IMO STATE**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examined the influence of demographic factors on support for ecotourism development in Imo State. The multiple sampling technique was adopted in the selection of respondents. Data used for the study were obtained through structured questionnaire and observations. A set of structured questionnaire was administered to 360 randomly selected respondents, however, 316 were retrieved. Data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency count, percentage and mean. Results of the demographic characteristics of the respondents showed that there were more males (70%) than females (30%) while age group 31-40 accounts for higher percentage (54%) of the population. Most of the respondents were farmers (52%) and monthly income range of <20000 (36%) was more in the state, while the respondents were able to read and write. On the influence of demographic factors on support for ecotourism development in the state, there was a no significant relationship between gender ( $p=0.212$ ), age ( $p=0.145$ ), marital status ( $p=0.126$ ), occupation ( $p=1.000$ ), educational level ( $p=0.110$ ) and support for ecotourism development in the state. The only significant demographic factor that can influence residents support for ecotourism development in the State is the monthly income ( $p=0.004$ ). It was concluded that demographic factors have no major association with support for ecotourism development in Imo State except for income. Therefore, the study recommended that since majority of the respondents were subsistent farmers, there is the need to diversify the economy through ecotourism and by making funds available to SMEs in the state in order to improve their income level.

**Keywords:** Demographic Factors, Influence, Support, Ecotourism Development, Imo State.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ecotourism is a sub-sector of the tourism industry and it depends for its very existence on quality natural environment as much as it equally does on the specific culture and society of the local inhabitants (Komla & Veirier, 2004). It is one of the world's fastest growing industry with no sign of slowing down in the nearest future (Tijjani, 2007).

Ecotourism can improve the socio-economic, including the environmental well being of the local host communities if the principles are followed (Iheaturu, 2017). Mitchell (2013) revealed that the ecotourism industry can generate revenue rapidly and the cost of creating employment in this sector is lower than in other industries. Local ownership of indigenous ecotourism products is easy to achieve and provides a boost for the local economy (Boud-Bovy & Lawson, 1998; Falola, 2008).

Demographic factors of respondents have been suggested to be an important variable associated with residents' host community support toward ecotourism development and this is measured by linking the demographic characteristics of resident host communities viz-a-viz their perceived ecotourism development impacts and hence resident community support for ecotourism development (AP, 2002; McGehee & Andercks, 2004; Adam 2011). Understanding local residents' reaction towards ecotourism development and the factors that may influence their reaction is essential in achieving host community support for potential ecotourism development (Davidson, 2014).

While resident communities' participation in infrastructural development is very important, several conditions determine its success. These conditions are referred to as factors in this study and they have influence in the outcome of resident communities' participation in tourism development (Ayoola, 2018).

In addition to natural factors, socioeconomic factors are usually considered in the development of ecotourism projects. Those that are usually considered in the study of community participation are socio-economic in nature. Most researchers (Cole, 2007; Ibrahim, 2012; Chengcai, Linsheng & Shenkui, 2012; Ayoola, 2018), considered socio-economic variables in their studies on community support in several development projects.

In order to develop and implement sustainable ecotourism projects therefore, it is expedient to identify the influence of demographic factors (Yank, 2015).

Although, several researchers have evaluated the influence of demographic factors in tourism development especially in the advanced economies (Belishe & Hoy, 1990; Getz, 1996; Long Perdue & Allen, 2000; Uysal & Williams, 2012) not much has been done in most of the developing nations. Yank (2015) highlighted gender, sex, educational level, marital status, age, and religion as the major demographic factors to be considered in sustainable tourism development. It is very necessary to evaluate if these factors could equally influence the level of support for ecotourism development in Imo State.

There are evidences in the developing nations, of situations where developers attempted to provide infrastructure in the neighborhoods without identifying the socioeconomic characteristics of the residents (Mitchell, 2013). Thus, this can inhibit the resident host communities' support for such projects. Hence, it has been observed that little or no empirical work has been done on the influence of demographic factor on support for tourism development in most of the developing nations (Janine, 2016). It is therefore, not advisable to assume that the findings from the developed countries can automatically be generalized for developing nations, since the state of affairs in advanced countries are not the same with less developed societies including Nigeria and Imo State in particular. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a similar research in Imo State as this will help to ensure the sustainability of such projects. Hence this study focused on identifying the influence of demographic factors on the support for ecotourism development in Imo State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

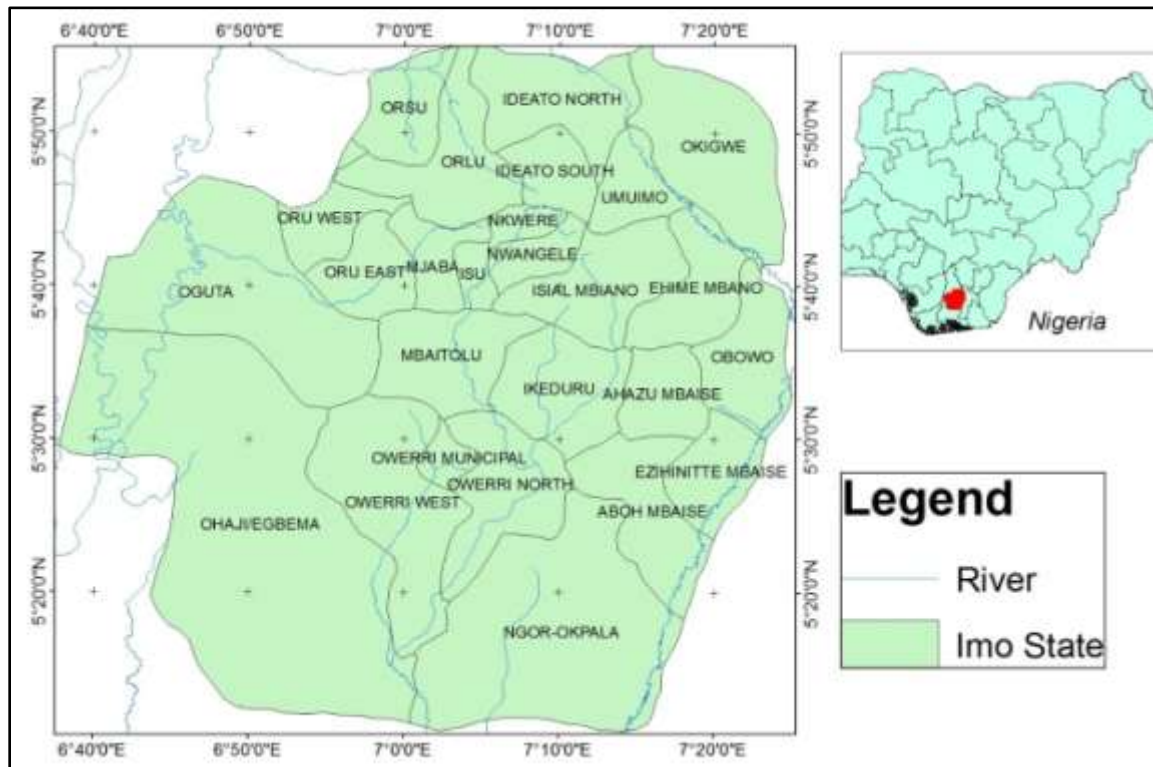
Demographic factors play an important role in the planning and development of infrastructures. Understanding the local resident's reactions especially the demographic factors and their influence on support for ecotourism development is essential in achieving sustainable development of such projects in the host communities hence; little or no empirical study has been done in the developing nations including Nigeria and Imo State in particular in this regard. It therefore becomes very imperative to investigate into the influence of demographic factors on support for ecotourism development in Imo State.

However, the study has the following objectives;

- i. Identity the demographic factors that influence ecotourism development in the study area.
- ii. Ascertain the relationship between resident communities' demographic factors and support for ecotourism development in Imo State.
- iii. Suggest strategies for enhancing host resident communities support for ecotourism development in the study area..

### **Materials and Methods**

The study was carried out in Imo State, Nigeria which is located between latitudes 4°45'N and 7°15'N, and longitudes 6°50'E and 7°25'E. It has a total population of 4.8 million people (National Population Commission, 2010), with a total land area of about 5136.052km<sup>2</sup> and an average population density of 760 people/km<sup>2</sup>. It is bordered by Abia State on the East, by River Niger and Delta State on the west, Anambra State to the north and Rivers State to the south. The state is rich in nature, history and culture which makes it a favorite destination for various tourists.



**Location of the Study Area**

### **Sampling Procedure and Sampling Size**

The household heads in the study area constituted the study population. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select respondents. The first stage involved the delineation of the study into the 3 geo-political zones which include Orlu, Okigwe and Owerri zones. The second stage was the purposive selection of 3 local government areas from each of the 3 senatorial zones and third involved the selection of 2 communities from each of the 3 selected local government areas and 2 villages from each of the communities. Finally, was the selection of 10 respondents from each of the villages, giving a total sample size of 360 respondents.

### **Method of Data collection**

A set 360 structured questionnaire was used to elicit information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Three hundred and sixteen respondents correctly filled the questionnaire used for the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Data for the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency count, percentage, mean while chi-square goodness of fit tests were used to test the influence of demographic factors and support for ecotourism development in the state..

**Results and Discussion**

Demographic characteristic of respondents

Results of the demographic/ socio economic characteristics of the respondents were presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic/Social Economic Characteristic of the Study Area**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	221	70
	Female	95	30
	Total	316	100.00
<b>Age Structure</b>	18-30	82	26
	31-45	172	54
	46-60	32	10
	>60	30	9
	Total	316	100.00
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	113	38
	Married	185	56
	Widow/ Divorced	19	6
	Total	316	100.00
<b>Educational Status</b>	F.S.L.C	95	30
	W.A.S.C	84	27
	OND/NCE	60	19
	B.SC/HND	53	17
	Postgraduate	18	6
	Total	316	100.00
<b>Occupation</b>	Student	28	9
	Farming	164	52
	Civil service	57	18
	Business	46	14
	Others	21	7
	Total	316	100.00
<b>Monthly Income</b>	₦20,000 or less	115	36
	₦ 21,000-50,000	109	34
	₦ 51, 000-100,000	48	15
	₦ 101,000-200,000	29	9
	₦ 201,000 and above	15	3
	Total	316	100.00

**Source:** Researchers Compilation, 2020

Gender and age are important demographic variables and the primary basis of demographic classification. Table 1 above (gender) shows the distribution of interviewed respondents by gender at the time of survey. There is the preponderance of males over females. Thus, approximately 70% of the respondents were males while 30% were females. The dominance of male stems from the fact that males are the leaders of households and could not be there while female attend to issues of this nature. Hence there were more male than female that participated in the survey. This is in line with the findings of other researchers on demographic and socio economic characteristic of the study area (Nwaonu, 2016; Nzekwe, 2004) which showed the dominance of male.

In terms of age structure of the respondents, Table 1 also shows that there were more people between the ages of 31-45 (54%), followed by those between ages 46-60(10%) and those between 18-30 (26%) rank third while above 60 (9%) ranked least. As a matter of fact, the age range 31-60 are more economically active in every society and can partake more in viable business ventures like ecotourism. The study by Jurowski, Uysal, and Williams (2007) indicated similar age composition of 30-60 in a related work. This also corroborated the research conducted by Okoro (2014). Their research established that this age group were very supportive in tourism development. This might not be unconnected with the interest of this age group in exploring business opportunities that would enhance their standard of living.

Table 1 further showed that (59%) of respondents were married, while (35%) were single and (6%) were either widowed or divorced. The predominance of married people as respondents may not be unconnected with the fact that marriage is one of the primary indicators of being a responsible person in the society, especially in the study area and that makes them partake in opportunities that will improve their family life and well being and hence their willingness to take part in tourism activities.

The respondent's religion from Table1 indicated that Christians constituted a larger percentage (95%) of the respondents. This is because the study area is mainly dominated by Christians, followed by other religions (4%) while Islamic religion (1%) was the least. Lankford (2004) and Jurowski, Uysal, and Williams (2007) in their research established that religion has no influence on tourism development.

The result of the educational status as shown in Table 1 equally indicated that about 30% of the respondents had First School Leaving Certificate (FLSC) and 267% obtained West African School Certificate (WASC), 19% had either Ordinary National Diploma (OND) or National Certificate of Education (NCE). The remaining 17% and 6% obtained Higher National Diploma (HND) or Bachelors degree (B.Sc /A/ED) and above Bachelors degree respectively. This implies that majority of the respondents were literate since they can read and write.

Table 1 went further to reveal that more than half of the respondents (52%) were farmers, 18% were civil servants while 14% had business as their occupation. Students constituted 9% of the respondent's occupation while 7% engaged in other forms of occupation. This result is in agreement with the findings of the researches of Ayoola (2008), Nwaiwu (2009) and Ukoha (2013) which reported farming as the major occupation of the people of Imo State.

Finally from Table 1, the average monthly income of respondents in the study area showed that a high percentage of the respondents lived on a monthly income less than N20,000 (36%), 21000-50000 (34%), 51000-100000 (14%) and 100000-200000 (9%) while few had monthly income range of N200,000.00 and above (3%). This was corroborated by Howard (2004) in his study on income distribution in South-Eastern Nigeria. Income defines the concerns of social cost of tourism pursuit and also the possible economic cost in term of opportunity to invest in tourism related businesses. Income is also considered as one of the most fundamental parameters of embarking on tourism adventure; hence exchange of resources will enhance tourism development.

### **Test of Relationship Between Demographic Factors and Support for Ecotourism Development in Imo State**

**Table 2: Chi-Square Analysis of the Relationships Between Demographic Factors and Support for Potential Ecotourism Development in Imo State**

S/N	Variables	Df	$\chi^2$	p-value	Remark
1	Gender	1	1.557	0.212	No Relationship
2	Age	2	6.830	0.145	No Relationship
3	Marital status	2	4.143	0.126	No Relationship
4	Monthly income	5	13.246	0.004	There is Relationship
5	Occupation	4	0,634	1.000	No Relationship
6	Educational level	2	3.281	0.110	No Relationship

**Source:** Fieldwork, 2020

N/B: p-values  $\geq 0.05$  are not significant

Result of the relationship between demographic factors and resident support for potential ecotourism development as presented in Table 2 showed that there is no significant relationship between gender influence and resident support for ecotourism development ( $p=0.212 \geq 0.05$ ) in Imo State. This result is in variation with the observations of Uzoeshi (2013) who was of the opinion that there is a significant difference between gender and residents support for ecotourism development. In terms of age structure, the result established that there is a no significant relationship between age structure and support for ecotourism development ( $p=0.145 \geq 0.05$ ) in the study area.

This finding corroborated a similar research studies conducted by Lankford (2004) and Jurowski, Uysal and Williams (2007) which also stated that there is no significant relationship between age structure and residents support for ecotourism development. Also marital status showed no significant relationship with residents support for ecotourism development ( $p=0.126 \leq 0.05$ ). This implies that marital status does not have any effect on residents support for ecotourism development in Imo state.

The result from Table 2 showed a significant relationship between monthly income and resident communities' support for ecotourism development ( $p=0.004 \leq 0.05$ ). Income is one of the major factors influencing any form of development in human society. The finding confirmed the observation by Bremer and Bhuija (2014) that income level influences community support for ecotourism development but runs contrary to the report by Lankford and Howard (2004) who in their research found no significant relationship between income and resident support for ecotourism development.

On occupation as equally shown in Table 2, there is no significant relationship between occupation of the residents and their support for potential ecotourism development ( $p=1.00 \geq 0.05$ ) in Imo State. This implies that most at time, occupation does not determine income and the way one spends money. This result is not in line with the findings of Churchman (2014) who observed that socio-economic characteristics such as occupation influences people's interest for ecotourism support.

Finally from Table 2, the result of the analysis showed that education level had no significant relationship with residents support for ecotourism development in the state, with ( $p=0.1110 \geq 0.05$ ). This implies that there is no association between resident's educational level and their support for ecotourism development in the state. This finding did not agree with the outcome of the research by Chengcai, Linsheng and Shenkui (2012) which stated that education level influences support for ecotourism development. Adam (2011) opined in his research that educational level in our time does not influence ecotourism development as more uneducated rich businessmen show more support than educated poor people for ecotourism development in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, it was observed that the demographic factors of the residents of the study area would not influence their support for ecotourism development except on the aspect of income. Since majority of the respondents in the area are mainly subsistent farmers, their support for ecotourism development would be negatively affected because such farmers are known for their meagre income which does not favour ecotourism development. Income defines the concerns of social cost of tourism pursuit and also the possible economic cost in term of opportunity to invest in tourism related businesses. Therefore the study recommended the diversification of the economy of the state by the government through the development of ecotourism, which requires less fund for its establishment than most other industries, but known for its enhanced revenue generation and job creation all over the world. There is also the need to make funds available in the form of soft loan for investment among the residents of the state by the government and good spirited individuals. Mechanization of agriculture can also generate more income and job for the people and these will enhance their support for ecotourism development in the state.



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