

Reinvigoration of Raffia Palm in Selected Local Government Areas: A Strategic Tool for Tourism Development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the essence of regeneration of Raffia Palm for tourism development in Akwa Ibom State. The study ascertain the impacts, challenges it faces and the factors surrounding the failures and successes of the work as well as strategies to revive the age-long raffia industry for sustainable tourism development. Data needed for the analyses were drawn from both the primary and secondary sources which includes; the focus group discussion with the heads of raffia producing households and their customers at different fora while the secondary data were drawn from publication by different scholars who have undertaken similar studies. Stratified sample technique was adopted in the selection of population for the study, whereby the state was subdivided into three different strata with each stratum covering a senatorial district while the purposive sampling technique was used to select the local government areas that are involved in raffia palm businesses. Data collected were analyzed using SWOT and PEST analytical methods. Findings revealed that some of the impacts created so far by raffia palm include: employment, revenue generation, food, medicine; and has caused human traffic into the areas where the products are distributed which has been the intending potential for tourism in the state. The study also pinpointed some challenges to include artists migration which has been the major cause of scarcity of the products, lack of training, low or absent of new technology in the business, lack of interest in planting of new palm trees and the general perception that the raffia work is mainly for the illiterates and as such young graduates find it difficult to show interest in the business and thus distance themselves. Some justifiable strategies were put forth as recommendation to reinvigorate the industry such as: financial motivation to palm wine tappers and other raffia artists who would meet the target; training of the artists and issue them with academic certificate to boost their egos; government policy to ban foreign costumes in cultural carnival hence, the demand for raffia products while tourism facilities such as airports, good road transport system, electricity, portable water, stadium, hospitals hotels and sporting facilities should be made readily available for tourism to thrive in the state.

Keywords: Raffia palm, reinvigoration, tourism, development, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria.

Aims Research Journal Reference Format:

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1. INTRODUCTION

Raffia palm all over the world is known as natural resource that provides food, employment, revenue and raw materials to other industries through its numerous products. The abundant products of raffia palm had since been used in many forms to proffer solutions to the day-to-day's problems of mankind such as: Mats for roofing, the piassava for twine, the sap for wine, kai-kai and ethanol while the popular translucent cuticle is used for raffia bags, seat cover, carpets, shoes and other raffia artefacts that attract tourism to the areas

where they exist. It has been a famous source of livelihood to the inhabitant of the rural areas, while the urban dwellers also make their living by trading on the products either on industrial standard or for domestic use. The translucent cuticle and other products can also be exported for use as garden twine and in weaving (Adakaren et al, 2017).

In Nigeria, Raffia Palms are mostly found in the coastal regions as plantation, particularly in the Niger Delta and Sout-Eastern region (Ndon, 2003), while the upland species are also found in the North-Central and South-Western regions of the country. According to Alamu et al (2014), 27% of insects consumed in Nigeria are coleopterans (Raffia palm weevil). In Akwa Ibom State, over 70 percent of the products that make up the raffia industry is drawn from the raffia palm (*Raphia hookeri*). It therefore means that the survival of raffia industry especially in a country like Nigeria where technology is still at the ebb, depends on the success of raffia palm. As a matter of fact, about 7 percent of the 30 percent non-raffia palm products are still being complemented by raffia palm products before they become finished goods. In the 1980's and 90's, Ikot Ekpene (the Raffia City) in Akwa Ibom State, was one of the foremost tourism centers that attracted tourists from different part of the world into the state due to its numerous raffia products that met the global market standard; and were patronized by people most especially from America and Europe. Sequel to the economic booms that happened within the Ikot Ekpene Local Government, and its contiguous Local Government Areas such as: Essien Udim, Ikono, Obot Akara also dabbled into the raffia business in commercial quantity in order to meet the market demands and deaden the short falls of supply by only the Ikot Ekpene people. This has so far created job opportunity to many families, and generated income on daily basis for improvement of livelihood and as well attract tourism into the area.

Presently, about 20 local government areas of the state are naturally endowed with raffia palm resources. Although in some local government areas, this economic important trees are not given due utilization as natural resource neither do they sustain it by planting new seedlings. According to Akwa Ibom – National Distribution of Natural Resources (NDNR, 2012), the 20 local government areas are: Abak, Eastern Obolo, Eket, Essien Udim, Etinan, Ibeno, Ibesikpo Asutan, Ibiono, Ika, Ikono, Ikot Abasi, Ikot Ekpene, Ini, Mbo, Mkpato Enin, Nsit Atai, Nsit Ibom, Okobo Oron, Uruefong Oruko local government areas. Although some of the identified local government areas do not have it in commercial quantities, the problem is not natural because they all have the favorable soil and weather condition that supports the raffia palm plantation, but lack the interest in planting new seedlings and develop the raffia sector in their areas, hence the need for this work to showcase the numerous benefits of raffia resource, the existing challenges and the possible strategies put forth to reinvigorate the industry in the state.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It is worth noting that Raffia business in Nigeria over the years has been characterized by primordial methods in the making of Raffia products such as patiently waiting for the Palm-wine tapper to finish with the extraction of the sap before the raffia materials could be used for raffia production. Whereas, the rate to which some of the raffia products are demanded of, is at the high speed, which has required more plantations of raffia palms to meet the purpose. Moreover, tourists who visit the area with the hope that they would go back with variety of raffia artefacts sometimes become disappointed due to insufficient products and production that does not meet the global market demands, and in commercial quantity.

It is on record that the Akwa Ibom State government has a goal to industrialize the state by the year 2023 (Udo, 2018). In this regard, it was pertinent to encourage activities that would promote investments that have direct or indirect pull of tourism in the state, in order to achieve the set goal. Howbeit, the worrisome is not the ability to achieve the set goal, but the non-inclusion of any of the identified sectors in the Raffia industry that would attract tourism which proves the fact that there is no plan of government to invest in the area of Raffia Palm, as well as projecting tourism in the state. Moreover, the raffia artifacts that used to be valuable and a mark of pride and dignity in almost every home, has now been regarded as items from the witchcraft world, hence, the tremendous denial of the products by township people and members of poor religious doctrines within the rural communities. Series of media war have been tailored against the success of this industry in both video and audio tapes, yet the government does nothing about it.

Another vigorous issue that has dampened the Raffia industry is the issue of identical features in seedlings. Even the palm wine tappers who know the raffia business environment very well are at most times confused about the different species that would serve different purposes. Once they make that mistake during the planting period, a whole Raffia palm plantation may become useless and the number of years involved become waste, because, if it happened to be the lonely bow specie, there will be no juice no matter the level of treatment.

Lately, the local government areas in the state endowed with people in the raffia palm business do not indulge in the planting of raffia palm anymore. Their reason is not far fetch from the problems that face the sector in recent times such as: scarcity of palm wine tappers, no more interest in thatch houses and inability to separate the species at the planting stage, whereby the material endowment seed could be misplaced for fresh wine endowment species. And when it comes to the time for tapping of the sap, the tappers and the palm owners would be disappointed because all their labour will be in vain.

This work sought to proffer solution to the following questions:

- a) To what extent has the raffia palm contributed to employment, income generation and tourism development in Akwa Ibom State?
- b) What are the income differentials between raffia palm business workers and other self- employed workers in other industries?
- c) What are the different products of raffia palm and their potentials for livelihood and tourism development?
- d) What are the problems facing raffia palm businesses and strategies put forth as measures to reinvigorate the raffia industry?

2. RELATED LITERATURE

The existence of raffia palm in the rural communities is the presence of nature in the form of natural resource mainly for the survival of the down trodden who could not afford to have a share in the common wealth of the state. Providentially, the third world countries are the underdeveloped settlements, mostly occupied by the natives of the areas (Umoh, 2003). Their major occupation consists of farming, fishing, hunting and palm wine tapping in subsistent standard for livelihood (Frank, 2016).

According to Udo (2017), the raffia palm (*Raphia hookeri*) is a member of the palmaceae family that has numerous potentials for employment, food, medicine and industrial materials; and has remained a source of livelihood and economic empowerment foundation for states and its citizenry. It is commonly found in West Africa and in abundance, particularly in South-South and South-Eastern Nigeria. Although it also grows in other parts of the country, the capacity to yield all its products may not be as efficacious as the ones growing in the Southern tropical areas.

In Ghana, palms especially oil palms, are basically tapped for the production of palm wine – called ‘odoka’ or ‘nsafufuo’ or ‘Deha’ in Ewe (Mintah, Eliason, Barimah, & Oldham, 2011). A typical tall *Raffia hookeri* gets to a height of 15m (Akpabio, Ekpe, Etuk and Essien, 2001). *Raffia hookeri* produces piassava from their leafstalks which are retted and the fibres beaten out. Piassava fibres were exported to Europe for brooms and are used to make brushes for sweeping, rug-washing, climbing ropes, hats and mats.

The leaves of *Raffia hookeri*, often split lengthwise (raffia), they are also used to make mats, baskets and other articles. The midribs and petioles of the leaves (raffia bamboo or bambu) are used for poles, rafters, ladders, furniture and cross-bearers in canoes. Split lengthwise they are used to make screens (Brink, 2011). Concrete, an extensively used construction material, is strong in compression but weak in tension. Its weakness is ameliorated by incorporation of steel bars. Steel is however costly, particularly in the developing countries where it is mainly imported (Salau & Sharu, 2004).

Aiyelaja and Oladele (2014) reveals that local wine production provides employment for nearly 75% of male population in some villages in Cameroun, generating average income of 20, 000 – 35 000 FRS CFA (US\$ 40–70) monthly for many tappers. Thousands of tons of raffia palm wine are produced yearly in Nigeria. In Delta State for instance, Okuoke is the highest in income earning with N13, 800 and least in Sapele with N9000. Monthly profit level of wine marketers Average Daily Sales, Net Income and Total Profit of Raphia Wine Producer in Sapele LGA. Average production cost per litre of Raphia hookeri wine range between N10 and N20 in Sapele and other communities respectively. Therefore the total daily profit made by producers is at least N320 and highest in Okuoke with at least N640. Socio economics studies will give a better understanding of this important activity of wine production and marketing among rural dwellers. Activities capable of sustaining livelihood are panacea for improved life in the rural and urban areas.

Within the raphia hookeri's family, there are various products of raffia palm that perform different functions in order to satisfy mankind and improve the economic and tourism standard. Donfack (2012) mentioned that the mountainous regions in western Cameroon, are dominated by Raffia palm, which offers various products and sub-products valorized in different ways for the benefit of local communities, mainly for the poor. The focus is on how to sustain socio economic together with ecological functions of raffia palm ecosystem in this part of the world marked by high human pressure. Raphia hookeri within any study zone is an exceptional multi-purpose tree offering various products and sub-products from organs like: Stem, bamboo, leaves, sap group of products details and utilization parts or organs used as foods and food processing pulp of fruit consumed as kola fruit, food flour from the medulla of stipe. Extract of fiber to improve the quality of the wine Fibber of young leaf. The sap provides wine, which serves as food and symbol during traditional ceremonies. The grubs locally called **Nten, Mburibu, Mkpodikpo, Mbe and Teton** are good source of protein. Extract of bamboo includes toothpick and fire-wood (Udo, 2017).

Medically, sap from the lower part of fresh bamboo is used traditionally for the treatment of hemorrhoids and burns. Dry bamboos are used for protection and enclosure curtain, while the lower stalk of the stem is used for fence, doors and bamboo gate. Leafs from raffia palm are used for Mat which is used for roofing and raffia ceiling. Chairs, seat Bamboo, creeper, fibber, Household goods like containers, Wardrobes and cupboards are combined raffia products. Bamboo beds, stake for crops such as banana, plantain, tomatoes, yams and pumpkins is another importance bamboo to the rural farmers that cannot be overlooked (Paul, 2012).

2.1 Theoretical Framework

(a). Concepts and Theories of Livelihood

Livelihood refers to the means of securing basic necessities of life including food, water, medicine, shelter and clothing. Livelihood is defined as the activities to acquire these necessities, meeting the requirements of the individual and the immediate household on a sustainable basis with self-esteem and possession (Fabusoro, 2010). Ellis (1998) defined livelihood as the activities, the assets and the access that jointly determine the living gained by an individual or household. When it comes to an individual, a livelihood is the ability of that individual to obtain the basic necessities in life, which are food, water, shelter and clothing. Therefore all activities involved in finding food, searching for water, shelter, clothing and all necessities required for human survival at individual and household level are referred to as a livelihood.

In a Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), the link between health, poverty and livelihoods is critical when analyzing the importance of microfinance. This concept was tested in South Africa where a health training component was added to group-based microfinance programmes. The outcomes showed that it is possible to achieve broader health benefits when there is partnership between health, economic and social sectors when implementing interventions (Kim et al. 2009). In 2009, 4.9 million people were identified as requiring emergency food and non-food assistance, and another 7.5 million with chronic food insecurity received assistance from the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) (Ringheim et al., 2009). Some 39 percent of all households live below the national poverty line (IFAD, 2009).

The Ethiopian economy largely depends on rain-fed agriculture which accounts for 50 percent of the GDP (2010) and 85 percent (2009) of total employment (CIA, 2011b), with grains, pulses, coffee, oilseed, cotton, sugarcane, potatoes, cut flowers, hides, dairy and meats from cattle, sheep and goats as the main agricultural products. At the same time only 10 percent of total territory has been cultivated, and permanent crops take up just 0.65 percent of the whole territory (2005 data; CIA, 2011b), while 65 percent of country's territory could be used for agricultural purposes. The Ethiopian agriculture is characterized by low productivity. According to Devereux (2000b), the entire Ethiopian economy is dependent on low-productivity, rain-fed agriculture, meaning that rainfall is the most important determinant of the economy's success or failure.

(b). Livelihoods Theory of Conservation Practice

Recent decades have seen a proliferation of theoretical and practical literature in the area of sustainable livelihoods and livelihood enhancement and diversification as tools for rural development and poverty reduction. Since the emergence of the sustainable livelihoods definition proposed by Chambers and Conway (1992), sustainable livelihoods definitions and frameworks have flourished (Hussein, 2002). Igoe (2006) posits that one area where the livelihoods approach might prove to be particularly useful is in the area of community development related to conservation initiatives. The sustainable livelihoods frameworks could be useful in several ways. First, they could offer a broad framework for researchers, conservationists, and protected area managers to look at the micro to macro level influences on livelihood assets, activities, and outcomes and particularly the ways that conservation related policies, institutions, and processes are impacting local peoples. The application of the frameworks in this manner might give both initial and ongoing insight into ways that livelihood outcomes and biodiversity conservation might be balanced. Secondly, the frameworks might suggest entry points for further research or development interventions.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To select the 15 raffia producing local government areas in the state, information from the Akwa Ibom State National Distribution of Raw Material (2012) was adopted as a guide. Based on the number of local government areas recorded with raffia business spread across the state, Stratified Sampling technique was first used to categorize the population into three (3) strata, with each stratum representing a senatorial district. In order to give a fair judgement to the study based on raffia potential of the local government areas involved, and also to make sure that such local government areas are not left out in the process, the purposive sampling method was used to select five (5) local government areas from each senatorial district for the study. Based on exploration survey, on the raffia palm tourism potential/activities, the local governments selected includes:

Esit Eket, Ikot Abasi, Mkpato Enin, Onna, Udung Uko, from Eket Senatorial District; Abak, Essien Udim, Ikono, Ikot Ekpene, Oruk-Anam from Ikot Ekpene senatorial district; Etinan, Ibesikpo, Nsit Atai, Nsit Ubium and Uruan local government areas from Uyo senatorial district.

Furthermore, One hundred and thirty three (133) questionnaire forms were administered in each of the senatorial district. A total number of three hundred and ninety nine (399) questionnaire forms were distributed among the selected local government areas in the state. People of uttermost consideration were those involved in raffia palm and tourism related activities in the areas to elicit information on their participation and experiences on raffia and tourism development. Also, focus group discussion and interviews were conducted on the community heads while direct business participation (DBP) by the researcher was adopted to gain direct access to such information that are regarded as furtive by respondents on raffia palm business in their areas.

Table 1: Population of the selected Local Government Areas in raffia business in Akwa Ibom State.

| S/n | Local Government | Projected 2018 population | Total No. of households | No. of sampled households | Percentage of sampled population |
|-----|------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. | Abak | 195,400 | 19540 | 29 | 7.2% |
| 2. | Essien Udim | 271,500 | 27150 | 40 | 10% |
| 3. | Ikono | 185,000 | 18500 | 28 | 7% |
| 4. | Ikot Ekpene | 198,700 | 19870 | 30 | 7.7% |
| 5. | Oruk Anam | 241,400 | 24140 | 36 | 9% |
| 6. | Esit Eket | 89,000 | 8900 | 13 | 3.5% |
| 7. | Ikot Abasi | 186,300 | 18630 | 27 | 6.7% |
| 8. | Mkpat Enin | 249,100 | 24910 | 37 | 9.3% |
| 9. | Onna | 173,100 | 17310 | 25 | 6.2% |
| 10. | Udung Uko | 74,500 | 7450 | 11 | 2.7% |
| 11. | Etinan | 237,300 | 23730 | 35 | 9% |
| 12. | Ibesikpo | 192,700 | 19270 | 29 | 7.7% |
| 13. | Nsit Atai | 103,100 | 10310 | 15 | 3.7% |
| 14. | Nsit Ibom | 151,900 | 15190 | 22 | 5.5% |
| 15. | Uruan | 117,164 | 11716 | 17 | 4.2% |
| | Total | 2,245,954 | 266,616 | 399 | 100% |

4. RESULT USION AND DISCUSSION

In Akwa Ibom state Nigeria, raffia artisans earn between (N30, 000 – N80, 000) monthly, while palm wine retailers earn between (N2, 000 – 4, 000) daily, amounting to the sum between (N60, 000 – N120, 000) monthly (Udo, 2017). Annual profit margin of Raffia wine producers and marketers' personal savings and occasional loan from family and friends represent the source of income of the palm wine producers and marketers in the study area. Comparatively, the average monthly income of palmy marketers in Okuoke is N13, 800 and least in Sapele with N9000. Monthly profit level of wine marketers Average Daily Sales, Net Income annd Total Profit of Raphia Wine Producer in Sapele LGA. Average production cost per litre of Raphia hookeri wine range between N10 and N20 in Sapele and other communities respectively.

Therefore the total daily profit made by producers is at least N320 and highest in Okuoke with at least N640. This implies that raffia palm business in Akwa Ibom State has the capacity to stem down the current poverty situation of the state by creating more job opportunities if seriousness is attached to it.

The study therefore, has shown that raphia hookeri's business is more lucrative in Akwa Ibom State than any other state in Nigeria. It is more profitable to work in the raffia palm sector with low academic qualification than to work in the civil service where their status would be ranked as junior staff; and with the N18, 000 minimum wage, in which their monthly salaries would not exceed N27,000 per month.

Therefore, having realized the foregoing, it has become pertinent for the government, individuals and corporate bodies to reinvigorate raffia palm industry for sustainable livelihood and tourism development of Akwa Ibom State through:

- (i). Financial motivation to artisans and palm wine tappers to boost their interest in the work;
- (ii). Introduction of improved seedlings and short span species to farmers;
- (iii). Training and certification of workers to boost their egos in raffia production and improve their skills;
- (iv). Image laundering on both the print and electronic media to regain its global acceptance;
- (v). Importation of new technologies and modern equipment to enhance production and good finishing.

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