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Tourism as a Panacea for Poverty Alleviation in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Tourism is widely acknowledged as a potential engine of economic growth and poverty reduction, particularly in developing countries. This research investigates the impact of tourist growth on poverty reduction in Wukari Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria. The study concentrated on its contributions, problems, and ideas for increasing its pro-poor effect. The questionnaire was applied to obtain data from 400 respondents. The data were examined descriptively. The findings show a clear consensus that tourism may greatly help to poverty reduction, with job creation and income generation highlighted as main advantages. However, fundamental constraints such as inadequate infrastructure, poor security, and little government backing impede tourist expansion. Respondents significantly approve policies such as government infrastructure investment, enhanced security measures, entrepreneurial training, awareness campaigns, and community participation in tourist planning. The study indicates that tourism has significant potential for poverty reduction in Wukari LGA, and that focused interventions are required to solve its obstacles for long-term and inclusive growth.

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Introduction

Global economic growth and development have been largely fueled by tourism, particularly in regions with abundant natural resources and a rich cultural heritage (Ursache, 2015). It is commonly considered a promising approach to poverty alleviation, especially in developing countries where traditional economic sectors often fall short of offering sufficient employment and income opportunities. Job creation, infrastructure development, local business assistance, and long-term economic empowerment are all facilitated by tourism (Rahman & Baddam, 2021). Due to a lack of strategic planning, inadequate infrastructure, and limited community involvement, many places with significant tourism potential are still undeveloped.

In Nigeria, poverty is a serious issue, especially in the countryside. The National Bureau of Statistics reports that over 40% of Nigerians are impoverished, with rural regions suffering disproportionately from this situation (Aluko & Mbada, 2020). Inadequate access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities exacerbate poverty (Sultanova, 2024). Sometimes, traditional economic pursuits like small-scale business and agriculture are not enough to meet the needs of a growing population. With its capacity to generate income and jobs across a range of industries, tourism is a viable alternative for poverty alleviation and regional economic diversification (Meyer & Meyer, 2015).

Tourism's contribution to reducing poverty has been indirectly strengthened by the link between tourism and economic growth. Because it promotes economic growth, tourism may aid in the alleviation of poverty. Institutions like the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development have all strongly endorsed the idea that sustainable tourism may help reduce poverty. UNWTO are promoting pro-poor tourism policies, which has accelerated the worldwide conversation on tourism and poverty reduction (Saarinen & Rogerson, 2017).

Pro-poor tourism (PPT) aims to ensure that tourism creates jobs, promotes entrepreneurship, and improves infrastructure in the most impoverished areas. Many poor countries have effectively used tourism to combat poverty. Wildlife and cultural heritage have been exploited by nations like South Africa and Kenya to draw visitors, provide employment, and strengthen local economies (Gisore & Ogutu, 2015). Similar to this, Southeast Asian community-based tourism initiatives have demonstrated that local involvement in tourism may result in improved livelihoods and long-term development (Rahman & Baddam, 2021).

The generation of jobs in Africa has also been significantly impacted by tourism. Globally, the travel and tourism sector is expected to make a record contribution of \$11.7 trillion to the world economy in 2025, representing 10.3% of global GDP (Victor, 2025). The World Travel & Tourism Council's

(WTTC) latest Economic Impact Research (EIR) projects that in 2025, the industry will support 1.9 million jobs, exceeding 2019 figures and reaching an all-time high. This reinforces the sector's significance as a major employer, accounting for 11.3% of total employment in South Africa (WTTC, 2025). Furthermore, the WTTC (2023) Sub-Saharan Africa Economic Impact Report anticipates that by 2033, the travel and tourism industry will directly sustain 29.37 million jobs, representing approximately 5.2% of total employment in Sub-Saharan Africa. On a global scale, international visitor expenditure is forecast to reach \$2.1 trillion, while overall employment in the sector is expected to increase by 14 million, bringing the global total to 371 million jobs by 2025 (Victor, 2025).

In Nigeria, tourism is seen to be a viable industry for economic diversification, especially in regions with untapped tourism potential. However, the growth of rural tourism has been hindered by poor marketing, insufficient infrastructure, and little government support (Nadube & Akahome, 2017). One of Nigeria's oldest ethnic groups, the Jukun, have their ancestral home in Wukari LGA. Along with natural attractions like beautiful landscapes and animals, the region boasts a rich cultural past that includes historical monuments, relics, and traditional festivals.

Despite these resources, Wukari is incredibly underdeveloped, with high rates of poverty and few opportunities for economic growth. According to Saner et al. (2019), inadequate road networks, limited electricity availability, and subpar sanitation are examples of bad infrastructure that hinders the growth of tourism. Low numbers of tourists, both domestically and outside, have also been caused by a lack of awareness and advertising of the area's tourism assets. Many parts of Nigeria are insecure and unstable politically, which deters tourists from traveling there.

This study aims to examine the potential of tourism development as a panacea for poverty alleviation in Wukari LGA. The study will assess the current state of tourism, identify key challenges, and propose sustainable development strategies, which will provide actionable insights for policymakers, development agencies, and local stakeholders.

The study is guided by the following objectives:

- i. Examine the contribution of tourism development to poverty alleviation in Wukari LGA.
- ii. Identify the major challenges hindering tourism growth in the study area.

Highlight the strategies to be implemented to maximize the pro-poor impact of tourism in the study area.

Literature Review

There is increasing agreement that tourism may significantly reduce poverty, especially in developing nations, since the link between tourist development and poverty reduction has been thoroughly examined in the literature. A crucial idea in this discussion is pro-poor tourism (PPT), which emphasizes

the necessity of making sure that travel helps the most vulnerable members of society. Through employment, entrepreneurship, and better access to infrastructure and services, PPT aims to provide net advantages for the impoverished (Akrong, 2019). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are in line with this strategy, especially Goals 1 (No Poverty) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Nigeria has enormous potential for the growth of tourism because of its varied cultural legacy and natural attractions. However, the industry is still in its infancy and only makes up a small portion of the nation's GDP. In Nigeria, tourism is projected to contribute about ₦11.2 trillion (\$7.5 billion) to the nation's GDP in 2025 (Victor, 2025), underscoring the industry's unrealized potential (Ogonu & Didia, 2019). The Nigerian government has acknowledged the value of tourism as a means of reducing poverty and diversifying the economy.

The ways in which tourism can help reduce poverty have been the subject of several studies. Odhiambo (2021) distinguished four primary channels: risk, price, tax, and income. While the tax channel refers to government funds received from tourism that may be used to fund social services, the income channel deals with direct and indirect job prospects in the tourism industry. However, the pricing channel may have unfavorable consequences as the growth of tourists may raise inflation and the cost of living for locals. The risk channel encompasses both positive and negative impacts, such as environmental degradation and cultural commodification, which can undermine the long-term sustainability of tourism.

Kim et al. (2016) analyzed the link between tourism, poverty, and economic development in 69 developing nations, excluding Sub-Saharan African countries, and discovered that tourist expenditures had no meaningful impact on poverty reduction in all developing countries. Torabi et al. (2020), while investigating the role of tourism in poverty reduction in the rural areas of the Turan National Park in Iran, discovered that tourism, with the support of government agencies, has been able to reduce poverty in the rural areas of the Turan National Park, even though the poor have received a small proportion of the benefits compared to other groups.

Odhiambo (2021) discovered that tourism development greatly decreases poverty in sub-Saharan African countries, particularly as assessed by tourist arrivals. Similarly, Folarin and Adeniyi (2020) established that tourism helps to alleviate poverty in Nigeria by producing jobs and strengthening the local economy. However, the success of tourism as a poverty alleviation strategy is determined by a variety of factors, including infrastructure, governance, and economic disparity. Nwokorie (2016) emphasized the need for targeted investments in tourism infrastructure and marketing to unlock the sector's potential. Tourism development could create employment opportunities in sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and handicrafts, thereby improving the livelihoods of residents. Tourism

development in Nigeria faces numerous challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, poor marketing, and limited government support.

Orga and Adasho (2024) examined the tourism potential of the Jukun cultural heritage by surveying 125 residents and conducting Focus Group Discussions with 20 traditional members across Wukari, Takum, and Ibi. Their findings revealed that the Jukun people possess rich cultural assets—including traditional games, music, dance, masquerades, and festivals—well-suited for tourism and recreation. The study emphasized that harnessing these cultural resources could significantly boost tourism in the region and recommended strategies such as increasing public awareness, securing funding, promoting private sector investment, and developing a calendar of cultural events.

Lagos and Wang (2023) investigated the effect of tourism on poverty alleviation using a panel quantile fixed effects approach that analyzes the impact across different income levels. Their study found that tourism has a statistically significant negative effect on poverty and income inequality, benefiting even the poorest segments of society. They also discovered that international tourism helps mitigate slow domestic income growth, suggesting its crucial role in poverty reduction. The authors recommended that policymakers in developing countries focus on tourism product diversification and targeted marketing to sustain post-COVID-19 economic recovery and reduce poverty levels.

Dossou et al. (2021) explored the relationship between tourism, governance quality, and poverty reduction in Latin America from 2003 to 2015 using advanced econometric techniques such as the two-step GMM and PCSE models. Their results indicated that while tourism alone tended to exacerbate poverty, the combination of tourism growth and good governance produced positive outcomes in reducing poverty. The study concluded that governance quality plays a crucial moderating role in ensuring that tourism development translates into poverty alleviation.

Ponce et al. (2020) studied the relationship between tourism and poverty across 198 contiguous cantons in Ecuador using spatial econometric models. Their results showed a strong negative correlation between tourism activity and regional poverty levels. Specifically, a 1% rise in tourism-related economic activity was associated with a 4.31% reduction in local poverty and a 0.7–2.4% decrease in poverty in neighboring cantons. The study highlighted the spatial spillover effects of tourism, demonstrating its capacity to promote regional economic inclusion and poverty alleviation.

Torabi et al. (2020) examined how tourism contributes to poverty reduction in the rural areas of Turan National Park, Iran. Their findings revealed that tourism, supported by government initiatives, has helped reduce poverty levels in the region. However, the benefits were unevenly distributed, with poorer populations receiving a smaller share of the economic gains compared to wealthier groups. The study concluded that while tourism can serve as an effective tool for rural poverty alleviation, equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms are needed to ensure inclusivity and sustainability.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design to explore the role of tourism development in poverty alleviation in Wukari LGA. The research design included primary data collection, with a focus on understanding the perspectives of residents, tourism stakeholders, and government officials.

For this research, the population comprised the people in Wukari Local Government Area of Taraba state. Wukari local government has a population of 374,800 people based on 2022 projection (City Population, 2022). For this study, the sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's (1963) formula. This formula was concerned with applying a normal approximation with a confidence level of 95% and a limit of tolerance level (error level) of 5%.

$$Ss = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where, N = Population, e = Tolerance error allowed = $(0.05)^2 = 0.0025$, Ss = 399.57.

Therefore, the sample size is 400.

All members of the population had equal chances to be chosen as part of the sample because four hundred (400) questionnaires were administered randomly to the entire population. The structured questionnaires were administered to residents, tourism stakeholders, and government officials, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation from different communities and stakeholder groups.

The questionnaire was divided into several sections, including demographic information, perceptions of tourism development, challenges in the tourism sector, and potential benefits for poverty alleviation. The demographic section collected information on the age, gender, education level, and occupation of respondents. The section on perceptions of tourism development included questions on the awareness of tourism attractions in Wukari LGA, the potential for tourism to create jobs and generate income, and the level of community involvement in tourism activities. The questionnaire response was developed based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaires were administered by trained enumerators, who explained the purpose of the study and assisted respondents in completing the questionnaire.

The data collected were entered into the SPSS statistical software package version 27 for analysis and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and means were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and their perceptions of tourism development.

Results And Discussion

Demographic Information of Respondents

The demographic data from the survey is shown in Table 1. According to the poll results, 53.5% of respondents were men and 46.5% were women, indicating a small majority of male respondents. Despite a little overrepresentation of men, this shows a very balanced gender representation. The study by Dada et al. (2022) also reported dominance of males (82.4% and 79.4%) compared to females (17.6% and 20.6%) in study areas A and B, respectively.

The majority of responders are young or middle-aged, according to the age distribution, with 36.75% being between the ages of 26 and 35 and 31.25% being between the ages of 18 and 25. This implies that the study mostly gathered the opinions of younger people, who are perhaps more engaged in the labor and more immediately affected by the growth of the tourist industry. Dada et al. (2022) reported that most of the respondents (50% and 40% for Study Area A and B, respectively) were aged between 18-30 years. Of the respondents, 38% are unmarried and almost half (49.5%) are married. The percentage of people who are widowed (4.25%) or divorced (8.25%) is lower. The high percentage of married respondents may indicate that many of the individuals surveyed are part of family units.

According to the respondents' educational backgrounds, primary education (29.5%) is followed by secondary education (37.25%). Just 14.25% have university education, compared to a substantial percentage (19%) who have no formal education. This suggests that there is limited access to higher education in the region, which might affect the population's capacity to reap the full benefits of tourist growth. Regarding occupation, government workers make up the biggest group of respondents (32.75%), closely followed by students (31.75%). Just 7.5% of the sample work in the tourist or hospitality industry, compared to 28% who are business owners or independent contractors. The large proportion of students and government workers raises the possibility that a more educated or formally employed population segment was included in the poll.

Tourism Development and Poverty Alleviation

Table 2 displays the respondents' opinions about the development of tourism, the obstacles to its expansion, and the tactics required to optimize its pro-poor effects in Wukari LGA. According to the majority of respondents, Wukari LGA's poverty might be reduced by the growth of the tourist industry. At a mean score of 4.2, the development of job chances for locals is the most highly valued contribution. This suggests broad agreement that tourism can create jobs, which is essential for raising living standards and lowering unemployment. This is consistent with Torabi et al. (2020), who noted that tourism supported by government initiatives significantly reduced poverty in rural Iran through employment and income generation.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Respondents (Researcher's fieldwork, 2025)

Variables	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	214	53.50
	Female	186	46.50
Age	18-25	125	31.25
	26-35	147	36.75
	36-45	79	19.75
	46 and above	49	12.25
Marital status	Married	198	49.50
	Single	152	38.00
	Divorced	33	8.25
	Widowed	17	4.25
Educational level	No formal	76	19.00
	Primary	118	29.50
	Secondary	149	37.25
	Tertiary	57	14.25
Occupation	Tourism/Hospitality Worker	30	7.50
	Business	112	28.00
	Government Employee	131	32.75
	Student	127	31.75
	Total	400	100

The economic advantages of tourism for both people and communities were further highlighted by respondents' agreement that it boosts local companies and market activities (Mean = 4.0) and raises family income (Mean = 4.1). This aligns with Ponce et al. (2020), who reported that a 1% rise in tourism-related activity in Ecuador corresponded to a 4.31% reduction in local poverty and spillover benefits for neighboring regions. Such multiplier effects can improve rural livelihoods and stimulate local entrepreneurship, as also highlighted by Gisore and Ogutu (2015) in their study on community-based tourism in Kenya.

Tourism is also thought to be a means of luring investors and promoting economic growth (Mean = 3.9). The enhancement of infrastructure received the lowest rating (Mean = 3.8), indicating that although tourism might aid in the development of infrastructure, its effects might not be as obvious or substantial right away as those of other advantages. These findings align with the assertions of Odhiambo (2021), who found that tourism development enhances household welfare and reduces poverty levels in Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, Folarin and Adeniyi (2020) demonstrated that tourism

creates jobs and strengthens the local economy in Nigeria and this makes tourism beneficial in combating poverty.

Lagos and Wang (2023) reported that tourism significantly reduced absolute poverty and income inequality across all quantiles, including among the poorest populations. Dossou et al. (2021) revealed that tourism development can worsen poverty, though strong governance can complement tourism to achieve better poverty alleviation outcomes.

Respondents noted some obstacles impeding Wukari LGA's tourist growth, notwithstanding the possible advantages. With a mean score of 4.5, poor infrastructure is the biggest obstacle. Limited transportation options, inadequate lodging, and bad roads are said to be the main obstacles to the expansion of tourism. Furthermore, inadequate security circumstances (Mean = 4.4) are a significant worry that deters travelers from going to the region. Dossou et al. (2021) concluded that the absence of good governance and political stability undermines tourism's capacity to alleviate poverty. Their study indicated that while tourism alone might exacerbate inequality, the combination of tourism and strong governance yields positive poverty reduction outcomes.

More public-sector participation is required to assist tourist growth, as shown by respondents' highlighting of the absence of government investment and support (Mean = 4.3) as a crucial concern. These challenges align with Saner et al. (2019), who found that poor road networks, limited electricity supply, and weak sanitation systems inhibit tourism growth in developing regions. Nwokorie (2016) emphasized that inadequate infrastructure and poor marketing are key constraints to Nigeria's tourism expansion. The current study indicates that without infrastructural development and effective governance, tourism cannot fulfill its pro-poor potential. Another issue is the lack of promotion and understanding of tourism attractions (Mean = 4.0), since ineffective marketing makes it more difficult for the region to draw tourists. The least significant challenge is cultural and environmental factors (Mean = 3.7), which may include issues such as cultural resistance to tourism or environmental degradation.

A variety of measures to optimize the pro-poor effects of tourism in Wukari LGA are overwhelmingly supported by respondents. With a mean score of 4.6, government spending on tourism infrastructure is the most highly ranked approach. There is a broad consensus that public-sector leadership is crucial to constructing the roads, lodging facilities, and utilities required to sustain the expansion of tourism. Since a safe atmosphere is essential to drawing tourists, improved security measures (Mean = 4.5) are also viewed as crucial.

In addition, respondents (Mean = 4.4) favor entrepreneurship training for residents, which might enable people to take advantage of tourism-related possibilities like launching enterprises or providing services to tourists. An additional crucial tactic is to run awareness campaigns to highlight Wukari's

tourism potential (Mean = 4.3), as successful marketing may draw both visitors and investment. Respondents agreed that involving local communities in tourism planning and decision-making (Mean = 4.2) is crucial for ensuring that tourism development is inclusive and sustainable. These findings mirror the recommendations of Rahman and Baddam (2021), who noted that community-based tourism initiatives in Southeast Asia led to improved livelihoods and sustainable development. Similarly, Orga and Adasho (2024) found that the Jukun cultural heritage has high tourism potential if supported by awareness campaigns, funding, and private sector participation.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Tourism Development and Poverty Alleviation in Wukari LGA (Researcher's fieldwork, 2025)

S/N	Responses	Total	Mean
Contribution of Tourism Development to Poverty Alleviation in Wukari LGA			
1.	Tourism creates employment opportunities for residents.	400	4.2
2.	Tourism enhances local businesses and market activities.	400	4.0
3.	The development of tourism can improve infrastructure (roads, electricity, and water supply).	400	3.8
4.	Tourism leads to an increase in household income.	400	4.1
5.	Tourism attracts investors, leading to economic growth.	400	3.9
Challenges Hindering Tourism Development in Wukari LGA			
6.	Inadequate infrastructure (roads, hotels, transport facilities) hinders tourism growth.	400	4.5
7.	Lack of government support and investment affects tourism development.	400	4.3
8.	Poor security conditions discourage tourists from visiting the area.	400	4.4
9.	Limited awareness and promotion of tourism attractions affect tourism development.	400	4.0
10.	Cultural and environmental factors restrict tourism growth.	400	3.7
Strategies to Maximize the Pro-Poor Impact of Tourism in Wukari LGA			
11.	The government should invest more in tourism infrastructure (roads, electricity, hotels).	400	4.6
12.	Security measures should be improved to attract more tourists.	400	4.5
13.	Awareness campaigns should be conducted to promote Wukari's tourism potential.	400	4.3
14.	Local communities should be involved in tourism planning and decision-making.	400	4.2
15.	Entrepreneurship training should be provided to help locals benefit from tourism.	400	4.4

Lagos and Wang (2023) found that tourism reduces absolute poverty and income inequality across all income groups. This study demonstrates that even at the community level, tourism can be an effective poverty alleviation tool when coupled with infrastructural investment and community participation. The study confirms that the development of tourism in Wukari can serve as a sustainable poverty reduction

strategy, provided the challenges of infrastructure, security, and governance are addressed. It also validates the principles of Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT), which emphasize inclusive participation, empowerment, and benefit distribution among the poor. (Akrong, 2019).

Conclusion

The growth of tourism has the power to change Wukari LGA. The survey's findings demonstrate how tourism development in Wukari LGA has a substantial potential to reduce poverty. The respondents agreed that tourism might boost local companies, provide jobs, raise household incomes, and draw in investors. Tourism development in Wukari can generate employment opportunities, boost local businesses, and raise household incomes, thereby contributing to broader socio-economic development. However, realizing these benefits depends on overcoming key challenges such as poor infrastructure, insecurity, inadequate government support, and low awareness of the area's tourism potential. Previous studies collectively highlight tourism's strong inverse relationship with poverty and inequality. Nevertheless, the uneven distribution of tourism benefits remains a concern in Wukari, where only a few individuals are directly engaged in tourism-related activities. Tourism development holds transformative potential for poverty alleviation in Wukari LGA. When integrated into broader regional development plans, tourism can diversify the economy, foster inclusive growth, and uplift marginalized populations.

Recommendations

Based on the survey findings, the following recommendations are proposed to support tourism development and maximize its pro-poor impact in Wukari LGA:

- i. The development of roads, hotels, electricity, and water supply should be prioritized to support tourism growth.
- ii. Security measures such as increased police presence, surveillance systems, and community policing should be implemented to create a safe environment for tourists and investors.
- iii. Training programs in hospitality, business management, and tourism-related services should be offered to empower locals.
- iv. Marketing campaigns should be conducted to highlight Wukari's tourist attractions locally and internationally.
- v. Local communities should engage in decision-making processes to ensure their needs and perspectives are considered.
- vi. Future research should adopt a comparative approach by examining multiple local government areas or states to provide a broader understanding of how tourism affects poverty alleviation across different contexts.

Future researchers should consider exploring the environmental and cultural sustainability aspects of tourism to ensure that development efforts remain balanced and inclusive.

Author Contribution

Adashu Favour Avyon helped with data curation, literature review and manuscript writing; Shenpam Daniel Godwin conducted the data analysis and proof-reading.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. In addition, the ethical issues including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and, or falsification, double publication and, or submission, and redundancy have been completely witnessed by the authors.

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