Yandang Cultural Festival *(Hera Yawetti):* Developing Its Tourism Potentials for Economic Growth.

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Abstract

The annual Yandang cultural festival (Hera Yewetti) has over the years become the rallying point for the Yandang nation. It has developed into an avenue to showcase the rich culture and also protect their traditions from disappearing due to modernity. There is a great tourism potential inherent in this annual event. Tourism is said to be life as it has increasingly become important sources of revenue, employment and means of displaying the rich cultural heritage of the people to the outside world. With modernization and adulteration of many cultures, cultural festivals are seen as avenues for preserving the rich cultural heritage of people groups passed down from the ancestors. In harnessing the tourism component of the Hera Yawettti festival, it can serve dual purposes of attracting financial resources as well as help in the preservation of the traditions of the Yandang people. This paper, therefore, seeks to explore how the organizers of the festival can explore the cultural tourism potentials to attract local and foreign tourists to the annual Yandang Hera Yawetti festival held in the ancient settlement of Sayonti in Sanwi Chiefdom of Lau Local Government Area, Taraba State.

Introduction

Yandang annual Festival is set aside to promote the common cultural festivities among the Yandang people, especially those found in Lau Local Government Area of Taraba State. It also seeks to explore how the people can utilize the cultural festival as a tool for revamping the rich traditions of the people that are daily being eroded as a result of Westernization, inter-marriages, etc.

The Yandang people always refer to themselves by their native appellation as "Nwin-khuk" meaning 'fellow tribe person'[1]. However, the name Yandang, from all indications, has Mumuye origin. Literally, the name consensus Yandang means people on the other side of the river. The Yandang are mainly found in Lau, Jalingo, Ardo-Kola and Gassol Local Government Areas of Taraba State and Mayo-Belwa Local Government Area of Adamawa State.

According to Bruner, "culture is always in a process of change, and when society changes drastically, its culture is affected; sometimes culture change will affect social change". It is this rapid transformation that has had an adverse effect in most African cultures; the Yandang society inclusive. That is why the Yandang day cultural festival (Hera Yawetti) has become a tool for the protection and propagation of the people's culture and traditions. By every indication, there are a lot of tourism potentials in the Hera Yawetti festival, as it has increasingly become more acceptable not only to the Yandang but their immediate and wider neighbours. It is imperative to note that to be over reliance on crude oil is widely acknowledged to be not only harmful, but also unsustainable in the long run for the country. That is why it is critical to diversify the economy's sources for the promotion of exports and other development needs.

Agriculture has since independence been the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, as it employs the majority of the populace who are engaged in small scale agriculture for subsistence and to meet their daily needs. In the past, the economy depended on palm oil, cocoa, groundnut and cotton for exports before the discovery of oil. It provided employment for about 35% of the population, according to Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).3 Agriculture also contributed 29.25% to the overall GDP during the third quarter of 2019.4

The general consensus, however, is that tourism is a feasible and verifiable alternative source of foreign cash for Nigeria at a time when crude oil prices remain inconsistent and unstable on the international market. To worsen the situation, successive administrations have not made judicious use of the oil revenue[5]. There is also growing concern that the

industrialized world may explore other energy sources such as solar power, nuclear power, electric cars, and other renewable energy sources.

Many African countries have subsequently recognized the vast economic opportunities that exist in the tourism industry, which provides a stable and predictable source of income for thousands of their citizens. For example, in 2020, South Africa earned $7,372 million, Morocco $4,617 million, Egypt $6,851 million, and Tanzania $4,468 million, to name a few, with Nigeria not being among the top tourism earners and destinations in Africa[6]. To put it another way, Nigeria makes very little money from this global sector.

Cultural festivals, in addition to available resources such as diverse plants and animals, can thus be promoted as a tourism attraction. Tourism could therefore be seen as "network of activities of persons who travel in destinations outside their homes and work place for a while, and of those who provide them with goods and services during the sojourn. The Yandang day cultural festival, the Mihu cultural festival of the Jenjo, Kuchecheb among the kuteb, Kati of the Mambilla, Mantau of the Mumuye, and Puje among the Jukun are just a few of the notable festivals in Taraba State[7]. There are many more that are too numerous to mention for the purposes of this article.

According to Taylor, tourist trade provides the opportunity to develop local folk art such as straw baskets, hats, wood carvings, ornaments, and trinkets and helps raise the standard of living of producing areas[8].

Land and People of Yandang

The Yandang people are spread across a wide geo-political area in the present-day Taraba and Adamawa States in the North East region of Nigeria. According to Vereker, 'the Yandang people occupy the hill country between Jalingo and the Districts of Mayo Belwa and Mayo Faran'. The Yandang ethnic groups are found in the lower Benue valley of Adamawa/Mandara highlands, located on latitude 90N and Longitude 12028'E[9].

It is not arguable that the Yandang people, constitute an integral part of the numerous ethnic nationalities that form what may be loosely referred to as the Yorro Federation. They include such groups as the Mumuye, Waka, Teme, Yotti, Yoffo, Poli, Sate and Kumbe 10 whom they share a lot in terms of geographical location, linguistic consanguinity and historical affinity to other intrinsic and extraneous relationships

The hilly areas around Mayo Belwa, where the Yandang people reside, are known as "Gorobi" or mountain. In Adamawa State, they are found in other Local Government

Areas like Demsa, Fufore, Jada, and Numan. In Taraba State, the Yandang people are densely settled mainly in the fertile grassland of Lau Local Government Area known in Yandang language as "Sanwi", meaning grassland. They are also found in sizeable numbers in Zing, Yorro, Bali, Karim Lamido, Gassol and Ardo Kola Local Government Areas of Taraba State. The total population of the Yandang people as recorded in the 1963, 1973 and 1991 census figures were 64,789, 130,450 and 212,820 respectively.[11]

Yandang Day Cultural Festival (Hera Yawetti)

Taraba is one of Nigeria's most resource-rich states, with the Mambilla plateau and the country's largest national park, Gashaka Gumti. The State will soon become the country's top tourism destination if properly managed and utilized.[12]

African societies had self-rule or administration, which preceded the arrival of European colonial conquerors who brought with them a new system of administration. Many societies had various forms of monarchy that allowed them to adjudicate disputes and perform various ceremonies that regulated and determined how they lived.[13] They also developed a number of methods for conveying their rich cultures and traditions, such as festivals and other initiation ceremonies. These practices strengthened the spirit of togetherness, respect, and strong relationships within and between families, clans, tribes, and neighbors.

Unfortunately, the advent of foreign influences from dominant powers of Europe and Arabia deliberately began the gradual loss of what made us people and Africans, with our age-old traditions that were passed down from generation to generation. Among other negative consequences, the Africans began to abandon their rich history, including language, cultures, conventions, ceremonies, initiation rites, and even way of life, in an ignorant and shameless manner.[14] This laid the foundation for the inferiority complex the Africans developed about themselves as they imbibed the spirit of white superiority over the black race.

With the passage of time, Africans have, however, come to terms with the reality that not everything about their way of life is negative, as portrayed by occupying European and Arab armies who misled the people into abandoning their culture in favor of European and Arab traditions. As a result, one of the strategies used to combat further erosion of African nationhood was to revive cultural festivals, and the Yandang Day Cultural Festival, held in the Sanwi Chiefdom of the Yandang nation, has become a key vehicle for this resurrection.[15]

The Yandang, who are mostly Christians, performed ancestral worship before adopting the Christian religion. Through the ancestral gods, they worshiped Rubbi, the sun deity. The ancestral gods are thought to be dead progenitors who have passed over to the other side of life. Sickness could be the result of a sin against the gods or a witch's curse (Nwin-Sorah)[16].

Role of Yandang Hera Yawetti Festival

The Yandang Hera Yawetti Festival arose from an attempt by the Yandang elites, elders, and leaders of thought to find a common platform through which they could interact, share ideas, discuss issues affecting them in contemporary Nigeria, and most importantly, create a forum through which they could showcase the rich cultures and traditions passed down to them by their forefathers to their descendants.[17] Traditional celebrations in Yandang nation, according to Mr. Cornelius Dedan Nyari, are closely linked to traditional religion, as they are in most African civilizations. He pointed out that a lack of awareness in the past about the importance of preserving the people's rich cultural history had a negative influence, as it resulted in the near extinction of their reservoir of knowledge that had been painstakingly and purposefully passed down from generation to generation.[18]

Mr. Nyari faulted early Christian missionaries for giving the idea that Christianity was incompatible with the people's culture and traditions. In a paper presented at a sister festival, the annual Yandang festival of Hera-Yawetti held on the first day of May, 2010, at Gorobi, Mayo Belwa Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Mr. Cornelius Dedan Nyari said conscious and deliberate efforts are being made to revive the Yandang culture and tradition, noting with sadness that only few people now practice the traditional religion and incidentally they are the custodians of this culture.[19]

Tourism Potentials of Yandang Day Hera Yawetti Festival

If properly utilized, the Hera Yawetti festival has the potential to become another tourism attraction and a potential foreign exchange earner not only for Taraba state but also for the entire country. Major events at the festival help to promote the local economy and showcase the place to the rest of the globe, stimulating future tourism and business activities. These are some of the reasons why events based on economic development ideas are gaining more private and public support. People travel because they want to have esperience, explore where their ancestors might have worshipped, or better still understand their religious background (Okonkwo and Nzeh)[20].

Tourism is an important economic sector for many countries in Africa. There are many countries that benefit heavily from tourism, like Uganda, Algeria, Egypt, South Africa,

Kenya, Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana and Tanzania. The touristic particularity of Africa lies in the wide variety of points of interest, diversity and multitudes of landscapes as well as the rich cultural heritage. [21]

The Secretary General of United Nations World Tourism Organization, Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili, believes that

> *"Around the world, in countries at all development levels, many millions of jobs and businesses are dependent on a strong and thriving tourism sector. Tourism has also been a driving force in protecting natural and cultural heritage, preserving them for future generations to enjoy".*

He further notes that "Our sector gives them the chance to make a living. To earn not just a wage, but also dignity and equality. Tourism jobs also empower people and provide a chance to have a stake in their own societies – often for the first time." [22]

The foregoing presents tourism a one sector with the potential to provide gainful employment for our jobless youths who have had to resort to drugs taking and other criminal activities. Unfortunately, despite the rich natural resources of Nigeria, it ranks very low on the African continent in terms of capital earning from this gold mine.

It is interesting that the Nigerian National Assembly has passed the Nigerian Tourism Development Act to underscore the importance of the sector to the development of the country. The Act grants the establishment of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation:

(l) The functions of the Corporation shall be
(a) To encourage people living in Nigeria to take their holidays therein and people from abroad to visit Nigeria; and
(b) To encourage the provision and improvement of tourism amenities and facilities in Nigeria including the development of hotels and ancillary facilities.
(2) In addition to the specific powers conferred on the Corporation by or under the subsequent provisions of this Act, the Corporation shall have power-
(a) To provide advisory and information services;
(b) To promote and undertake research in the field of tourism;
(c) To render technical advice to the states and local governments in the field of tourism;
(d) To register, classify and grade all hospitality and tourism enterprises, travel agencies and tour operators in such manner as may be prescribed.

(3) The Corporation shall in particular have power to-
(a) Carry on any undertaking which appears to the Corporation to be necessary for the promotion and development of a tourist industry;
(b) Assist in the development of-
(i) Museums and historic sites;
(ii) Parks;
(iii) Game reserves;
(iv) Beaches;
(v) Natural beauty spots;
(vi) Holiday resorts;
(vii) Souvenir industries;
(c) Advise appropriate authorities on ways of improving tourist facilities;
(d) Publicize tourism; and
(e) Do all such things incidental to the foregoing functions which in its opinion are calculated to facilitate the carrying on of the duties of the Corporation under this Act. 2018.
The Taraba State Government has been observing the annual World Tourism Day in Gembu, the headquarters of Sardauna Local Government Area. A number of promises are made on such days which have become more of a jamboree where beautiful speeches are made and few invited traditional dances perform and at the end of the day, everybody goes home happy and wait for the next ceremony. Government must take pragmatic steps to tap the gains inherent in this important sector to augment its Internally Generated Revenue IGR.[23]

At the 2018 observation of the day, the Executive Governor of Taraba State, Arc. Darius Dickson Ishaku, was quoted as saying "My administration recognizes the position of Tourism as a potential source of Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) for the State, given the vital role it has been playing in the economies of such countries like Kenya, Brazil, France and a host of others that are not as blessed as Taraba in the diversities of their flora and fauna.

> *Permit me to emphasize from the onset that this Administration considers it a matter of deliberate and conscious policy to promote the ideals of tourism by opening up the State to Nigerians and indeed, the international community by officially opening the Jalingo Airport to commercial flights. The ultimate goal is to put in place the enabling environment to encourage tourists and business people to visit the State to see the vast potentials that abound here and to key into the socio-economic development blueprint of the Rescue Mission, aimed at not only reducing the level of poverty, but also create employment opportunities as*

> *well as empower the people. The Tourism resources which the State has in abundance are also reliable means of attracting the foreign visitors, hard foreign currency and the much-needed Foreign Direct Investment FDI". Ishaku [24].*

The United Nations World Tourism Organization has the following priorities:
Mainstreaming tourism in the global agenda: Advocating the value of tourism as a driver of socio-economic growth and development, its inclusion as a priority in national and international policies and the need to create a level playing field for the sector to develop and prosper.

Improving tourism competitiveness: Improving UNWTO Members' competitiveness through knowledge creation and exchange, human resources development and the promotion of excellence in areas such as policy planning, statistics and market trends, sustainable tourism development, marketing and promotion, product development and risk and crisis management.

Promoting sustainable tourism development: Supporting sustainable tourism policies and practices: policies which make optimal use of environmental resources, respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities and provide socio-economic benefits for all.
Advancing tourism's contribution to poverty reduction and development: Maximizing the contribution of tourism to poverty reduction and achieving the MDGs by making tourism work as a tool for development and promoting the inclusion of tourism in the development agenda.

Fostering knowledge, education and capacity building: Supporting countries to assess and address their needs in education and training, as well as providing networks for knowledge creation and exchange.

Building partnerships: Engaging with the private sector, regional and local tourism organizations, academia and research institutions, civil society and the UN system to build a more sustainable, responsible and competitive tourism sector.[25]

The UNWTO has therefore made concerted efforts to promote tourism and this is more evident in the special day set aside as World Tourism Day often celebrated every year. It is a known fact that tourism fosters unity among the committee of Nations and captures the three basic elements of development which are reflected in economic, social and

environmental protection.

The Yandang day celebration (Hera Yawetti Festival) offers a unique opportunity for the State to showcase her endowment by raising awareness on the value of sustainable tourism for development. There are other important positive impacts often associated with the staging of events, many of which may directly benefit the local population. These include the development of facilities and infrastructure, entertainment and social opportunities, and a sense of pride and identity brought about by playing host to a major event (Getz, Hall, Ritchie, Shone & Parry.26 Bassey). Tourism has therefore been recognized as an important instrument in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), geared towards eliminating poverty and fostering sustainable development and peace worldwide.

The rich traditions of the Yandang which include traditional dances can attract foreign tourists to the State. The attractive tourism sites in the surrounding mountains, hills, streams and rivers that dot the scenery and terrain offer a very good view for lovers of nature with the abundance of games and birds to keep visitors entertained.

It is an opportunity for local entrepreneurs to leverage the festival to launch side attractions like the Mr. and Miss Yandang beauty pageantry, which might help the event attract major sponsors. Multinational firms, such as telecom behemoths, have a long history of supporting important festivals. Such sponsorship will definitely bring much-needed income and other incentives to the community and its environs, empowering the people, especially the young ones.[27]

In sub-Sahara Africa, it is expected that tourism and travel will generate US$75 billion in 2015. While it is estimated that Nigeria will have tourism demand growth of 3.30 million, 7.70% world markets share and 6.40% contribution to employment in the national economy per year between 2006 – 2015 according to Bassey.
The Nigerian High Commission, London, has identified some potential attractions which investors can invest in Nigeria with high returns as follows:

i. Heritage/Cultural Tourism Resources Development of slave trade relics
ii. Establishment of museums and preservation of monuments
iii. Eco-tourism, including Wildlife Tourism Resources
iv. Development of hiking trails and Jeep tracks in the national parks
v. Development of picnic and camping sites at strategic locations within the trail circuit system in the national parks
vi. Building of tourist lodges

vii. Building of reception centres at Natural/Physical Attractions
viii. Provision of cable bus system to take tourist through the very rugged but scenic terrain of the mountains especially in Kanyang, Obudu and Mambilla Plateau Construction of lodge cabins for expedition tourist and rangers.
ix. Establishment of hotels and resorts near waterfalls, springs, caves and temperate climate areas such as Obudu, Jos and Mambila Plateau.
x. Beach Tourism potentials Establishment of boating and sport fishing facilities
xi. Development of water transportation Provision of educational facilities for water skiing and swimming
xii. Establishment of holiday resorts along the coasts.
xiii. Development of Amusement parks, entertainment facilities and shopping services
xiv. Development of arts and crafts which constitute symbol of the people's cultural values and love for nature. [28]

The hospitality industry will receive a tremendous boost with the establishment of standard hotels to accommodate the growing number of tourists who will come to see the festival. We can only imagine the potentials that abound for such a celebration, if properly harnessed and developed. People will also be empowered economically as it will create stability and reduce violence. It is certain that the hosting of festivals generates economic gain to the host community in that people bring their wares or goods for visitors to buy. At this period, people also buy new clothes for themselves and their children, food for entertainment, etc. Consequently; it becomes a beneficial factor to the people. According to Grace, there is a considerable focus on developmental benefits of festivals for the host community.

Jauro and Abubakar rightly observed that Cultural festivities are very important in stimulating the growth and development of industries since culture is highly demanding and involves activity that absorbs a lot of resources produced in other sectors of the economy. However, culture provides a market to a wide range of goods and services namely modern printing, photography, entertainment gadgets, radio and television broadcasting, textile materials, food items, transporters, accommodation providers and many others. This also allows massive production of goods and makes them available as well as at increasingly affordable prices most of the time.

Another area that could be explored by the cultural festival is the introduction of ecotourism. The Sanwi Chiefdom where the annual festival takes place is largely a rural setting with quite a number of games still roaming about. The area could be declared a protected sanctuary for fauna and flora. The uncontrolled destruction of our fragile habitat

for commercial logging, and even farming activities, calls for restraint from both the government and local communities. Ecotourism is the fastest growing aspect of tourism in the last three decades UNWTO.[29]

The festival will also provide an avenue to promote the beautiful traditional fabrics (brown and white tripes) of the Yandang people, popularly called Lantang. It is very similar to the traditional fabrics (black and white stripes) of the Mumuye (the Mumuye and Yandang share similar history of origin and migration) also called Lantang. It is an opportunity to encourage local weavers and dyers to start mass production of the fabrics for sale to tourists and visitors. It will also go a long way in saving this dying art of traditionally hand-woven clothes.[30]

It is encouraging that, of recent, the Taraba State government took the bold and deliberate step to resuscitate the production of traditional fabrics by training several youths to take up such trade. At the graduation ceremony of the first batch of such trainees, the Governor of Taraba State, Arch. Darius D. Ishaku, was quoted to have said

> *"I must also commend the trainers for making the programme interesting enough for the beneficiaries to stay put to the end. My decision to approve the Skills Acquisition Programme to cover tailoring, shoe making, soap making, wood craft, carpentry, weaving "kyadzwe"/"lantang" traditional attires, welding, hair dressing, and computer services was deliberate. This is because I am of the strong conviction that the things that our women and youths can leverage on for self-sustenance are right here at our backyards. I also believe that our culture is one area where we can turn to for the promotion of our traditional values and also as a means of generating income for our well-being. That was why I deliberately instructed that training on the production of the Mumuye traditional attire known as "Lantang" and the Jukun attire known as "kyadzwe" were included in the areas of training. It is interesting to know that the Aku Uka is so excited about the resuscitation of the production of the Jukun attire within his domain through this programme that the trainees had it tough with him trying to keep their training products for display in this graduation ceremony. I must confess that when I visited the training center at Wukari, I could also not help but leave with a memory of my own as I was decorated with the attire I saw being produced by the trainees. One can therefore not blame our Royal Father, the Aku, for finding it difficult to wait until now".*[31]

This was done for all locally produced fabrics of all the tribes in the State that have a recognized and acceptable traditional wear. It is interesting that many ethnic groups in the State have made deliberate and conscious effort to designed and produce their own fabrics.

Conclusion:

The Yandang Day (Hera Yawetti) Festival has over the years attracted enormous interest among the people as they see it as an avenue for cultural renaissance and an opportunity to attract interest of visitors from within and outside the shores of Nigeria. What is now left is for the organizers and, indeed, the newly established SANWI Chiefdom under His Royal Highness, Kpang Sanwi, Pastor Haniel Hinlewheni Banti, Dah Banti I. which automatically becomes the custodian of the rich culture and traditions of the Yandang nations, to explore ways and means of marketing this important source of income for the benefit of the people, particularly, the youths.

Ecotourism is the concept of responsible trips and travel to areas that might be protected and especially fragile. The intent is to create as little detrimental impact on the environment as possible. In some locations (such as Gorongosa National Park) where the wildlife has previously been decimated, rewilding has been done and much of the wildlife has been brought back (along with vegetation, thus allowing the environment to sequester more carbon then what was previously the case). This return of wildlife has created tourism opportunities (wildlife viewing, safari trips) allowing to bring in financial revenue. It also requires personnel such as park rangers, ... to be present, thus creating local employment opportunities.

The Taraba State Ministries of Environment and that of Culture and Tourism have a very crucial role to play in this respect. There is an urgent need for the two ministries to collaborate and identify such potential sites which abound in the State. Many of the probable ecotourism sites are being threatened by human activities and, therefore, government needs to wake up from its slumber and save these natural endowments from extinction. Otherwise, this generation and the ones yet unborn will only read about our once beautiful environment as stories, fables or fantasies on the pages of books.

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