

Community-Based Tourism (CBT), A Study of Itolu Community, Ilaro, Ogun State

Abisola Sokale¹, Solanke Abayomi², Al-Ameen Olalowo³

^{1,2,3} *Department of Tourism Management Technology, Federal University of Technology, Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria*

Abstract- The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to a random sample of 50 respondents drawn from the Itolu community. The instrument employed a five-point Likert rating scale, and data were analysed using descriptive statistics including frequency counts, percentages, and cumulative percentages via SPSS. Findings revealed that CBT in Itolu is at an early but promising stage of development. On the cultural dimension, respondents recorded moderate and divided perceptions of CBT's impact, with the maintenance of traditional practices and customs attracting the highest positive consensus (38% combined agreement), while historical site conservation (36%) and cultural identity awareness (38%) remained contested. High undecidedness across cultural items ranging from 28% to 36% indicated that a substantial portion of the community has not yet experienced or observed sufficient tourism activity to form a definitive judgement on its cultural value. On the economic dimension, the most perceptible benefit was direct financial gain from participation in cultural displays and hospitality services (48% agreement), followed by direct business benefits from tourist visits (42%). However, broader income generation, micro-enterprise stimulation, and demand expansion for local goods and services remained unevenly distributed, reflecting the classic leakage and concentration dynamics associated with early-stage CBT programmes in developing countries. The study concluded that Itolu Community possesses significant cultural assets including the Erifu sacred water confluence, the Ile Odu'a shrine complex, and a rich repository of Yoruba traditional heritage that position it as a viable CBT destination. Yet, the absence of formal governance structures, benefit-sharing mechanisms, community tourism education, and infrastructural investment has prevented these assets from generating widespread, equitable developmental outcomes. The study recommends the formalisation of CBT governance at the community level, the development of structured and authentic cultural tourism products, the expansion of participatory programming, and the establishment of transparent revenue-sharing frameworks. Without these

interventions, CBT in Itolu risks generating pockets of benefit for a few while leaving the majority of community members as peripheral spectators rather than active beneficiaries of the tourism economy.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, Cultural Heritage Conservation, Economic Benefits, Itolu Community, Ilaro, Ogun State, Nigeria, Sustainable Tourism, Participatory Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is acknowledged as one of the largest and most economically vital industries globally, exhibiting resiliency amid global economic recessions (Henama, 2018). Beyond generating foreign exchange and enhancing national balances of payments, tourism promotes entrepreneurship, creates employment in labor-intensive industries, and accelerates socio-economic development (World Tourism Organisation & International Labour Organisation, 2014). These dynamics are particularly prominent in Nigeria. Bankole (2002) noted that tourism yields returns on capital investment, enhances agricultural output, provides foreign exchange, and funds infrastructure development, results pertinent to a nation aiming to diversify from oil dependency. Notwithstanding this potential, Nigeria continues to be a persistently underachieving tourism destination, positioned 129th worldwide on the 2019 World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (Dike, 2015).

Traditional tourism development has primarily adhered to a top-down approach governed by external organizations, frequently to the detriment of local populations living in and near tourist areas (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006). This structural exclusion has resulted in population displacement, the degradation of

indigenous cultural practices, and the unsustainable use of natural resources. Ayeni and Ebohon (2012) contend that, despite the country's abundant natural and cultural tourism resources, only developing nations with robust supporting infrastructure have effectively capitalized on the economic prospects presented by tourism. Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a people-centric, sustainable alternative that redefines local communities as active participants rather than passive subjects in tourism development.

The Role of Local Communities in Sustainable CBT

Local communities occupy a central and irreplaceable position within the CBT framework. Their role transcends passive participation; it encompasses active collaboration, co-management, and shared stewardship of tourism resources (Hiwasaki, 2006). Host communities possess unique repositories of indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage, and ecological familiarity that cannot be replicated by external tourism developers. When harnessed appropriately, these assets generate authentic and meaningful travel experiences increasingly demanded by contemporary tourists seeking alternatives to mass tourism.

Iorio and Corsale (2020) argue that CBT's transformative potential lies in cultivating a sense of community ownership, pride, and collective responsibility. Research by Adeniyi, Olugbamila, and Olajide (2018) on Idanre in Ondo State illustrates this dynamic: community participation in managing local tourism attractions was found to positively correlate with both visitor satisfaction and the preservation of traditional culture. Similarly, Eja and Ajake (2005) demonstrate from the Niger Delta region that where local communities are meaningfully involved in tourism planning, environmental stewardship improves and local economic gains are more equitably distributed. The findings of these Nigerian scholars are consistent with the broader theoretical framework in which community involvement in tourism fosters intergenerational stewardship, ensuring that cultural traditions, natural environments, and community resources are preserved for future generations (Iorio and Corsale, 2020).

Economic Dimensions of CBT

The economic rationale for CBT is compelling. Tourism functions as a service export, tourists import

foreign currency into host economies, generating what Henama and Sifolo (2017) describe as "new money" that, if effectively retained, reduces economic leakages and strengthens local economic cycles. Bankole (2002) notes that in Nigeria, tourism is a sector capable of yielding returns on invested capital, improving employment, generating foreign exchange, financing infrastructure, and increasing citizens' welfare, all critical to an economy historically over-reliant on crude oil exports. Ayeni and Ebohon (2012) reinforce this view, arguing that tourism has become a major source of economic diversification globally, and that Nigeria, richly endowed with natural and cultural resources, must develop effective supporting infrastructure to unlock these benefits.

CBT amplifies these economic benefits by channelling revenues directly to local communities rather than allowing profits to be captured by external corporations. Akpan and Obong (2012), studying Cross River State, Nigeria, identified tourism as a viable strategy for sustainable economic development, particularly where community-led models enable job creation, cultural exchange, and the promotion of indigenous goods. Adebayo, Jegede, and Eniafe (2014) similarly found, through their investigation of Ile-Ife in Osun State, that community-rooted tourism development generated measurable positive economic impacts for host populations. These Nigerian case studies reinforce the global evidence base for CBT as an instrument of inclusive local economic development (Nyaupane et al., 2016).

Community-Based Tourism in Nigeria

Nigerians are increasingly engaging with CBT to foster sustainable development. Adepoju and Salawu's (2021) research in Osun State shown that CBT programs significantly influenced local economies by enhancing the profitability of small enterprises and elevating the standard of local craftsmanship. The report proposed that the government should provide financial incentives to support CBT enterprises. Okonkwo et al. (2022) conducted a study in Cross River State examining the impact of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) on cultural preservation. The findings indicated that tourism activities contributed to the preservation of indigenous festivals and practices while simultaneously providing employment for people. The study indicated that inadequate infrastructure remains a significant

obstacle to comprehensively understanding the advantages of CBT.

Community-Based Tourism Initiatives in Itolu Community of Ilaro,

The concept of community-based tourism (CBT) rests fundamentally on the premise that local communities must be positioned as primary actors in the planning, execution, and beneficiary structure of tourism development within their localities (Murphy, 1985; McGehee and Santos, 2015). In contexts where communities possess distinctive natural, spiritual, and cultural endowments, CBT initiatives serve as the principal mechanism for translating those endowments into sustainable socio-economic outcomes while simultaneously safeguarding their integrity (Okonkwo and Odey, 2017; Habiba and Lina, 2023). Itolu community in Ilaro, Ogun State, represents precisely such a context, a community whose tourism assets are simultaneously its most defining cultural inheritance and its most neglected economic opportunity.

The Erifu Water Pilgrimage as an Informal CBT Initiative

The most discernible and historically sustained form of community-based tourism activity in Itolu is the informal pilgrimage economy centred on the Erifu sacred water confluence. As documented by the Daily Sun (2017), the Erifu formed by the meeting of three rivers, namely Osun, Yewa, and Erifu has for generations attracted a diverse stream of visitors: Christian pilgrims, traditional religion practitioners, herbalists, and foreign visitors, many of whom are directed to the site by spiritual consultants who recommend the water for its purported healing properties. This visitor influx constitutes what scholars of indigenous tourism would classify as a form of faith-based or spiritual tourism, a growing niche internationally recognised for its capacity to generate sustainable community income flows (Timothy and Olsen, 2006). In Itolu's case, however, the pilgrimage economy remains entirely unstructured: there are no formal entry protocols, no guided tour systems, no visitor management infrastructure, and no community levy mechanism to capture economic value from the visitor traffic. The result is that tourism occurs in Itolu without yielding the developmental dividends that CBT frameworks are designed to generate.

This pattern of resource-rich but benefit-poor community tourism is well documented in the Nigerian literature. Orelaja and Ajayi (2024), studying the Bilikisu Sugbon Sacred Grove in Ijebu North-East LGA, Ogun State — a site bearing structural similarities to Itolu in terms of its sacred water and shrine complex, found that communities with remarkable ecotourism potential were frequently unable to convert visitor presence into measurable economic gains due to the absence of community-organised management frameworks. The Itolu case aligns closely with this finding. Without a formal CBT structure, community members are neither systematically employed as guides, custodians, or artisans, nor do they participate meaningfully in decisions about how visitors engage with the sacred site. This absence of structured community involvement constitutes a fundamental gap that CBT initiatives could address.

The Ile Odu'a Shrine Complex and Cultural Heritage Tourism Potential

The Ile Odu'a shrine, the sacred site in Itolu at which all incoming Olus of Ilaro must perform propitiatory rites as a precondition of their installation, represents a site of constitutional and spiritual significance of extraordinary magnitude within the Yewa kingdom. The 201 deity shrines distributed across the community compound this heritage significance, constituting one of the largest concentrations of Yoruba traditional religious sites within any single community in Ogun State. Oladeji, Oyeniran, and Ayodeji (2022), in their landmark study of community participation in cultural heritage conservation across Yoruba communities in southwest Nigeria, establish that the sustainability of cultural heritage resources is intrinsically linked to the structured participation of indigenous communities in their conservation and management. Their findings demonstrate that communities with active custodial roles not only preserve heritage more effectively but also derive greater tourism-related socio-economic benefits from visitor engagement.

In Itolu, the community's custodial relationship with the shrine complex is maintained through traditional institutional channels, specifically, the hereditary custodians of individual deity shrines and the community's elder council — rather than through any formally recognised CBT governance structure. Ijise

Akinyemi, identified as a shrine custodian of Ohori descent, plays a critical stewardship role in maintaining ritual obligations to the deities (Daily Sun, 2017). However, this custodial function operates outside any tourism development framework and receives no institutional or financial support from either the Yewa South LGA or the Ogun State Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Internationally, comparable sacred site communities that have institutionalised community-based management frameworks, such as the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005, demonstrate that structured CBT governance substantially amplifies the economic and conservation outcomes for host communities (Orelaja and Ajayi, 2024; Asifat, Samotu and Awe, 2025).

Ogun State Tourism Policy Framework and Its Implications for Itolu

The policy environment within which any CBT initiative in Itolu would operate is shaped significantly by the tourism development trajectory of Ogun State. In 2024, the Ogun State Government and the Federal Government of Nigeria formalised their commitment to cultural tourism development through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding under the Renewed Hope Cultural and Creative Projects initiative (TVC News, 2025). This agreement, signed in Abeokuta, brought together the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy and the Ogun State Government in a strategic partnership explicitly designed to revive cultural heritage sites, empower community-level creative industries, and promote domestic tourism. At the World Tourism Day celebrations held in September 2025, Ogun State Commissioner for Culture and Tourism, Hon. Sesan Fagbayi, publicly affirmed that the Abiodun administration had advanced tourism through community-based initiatives, cultural heritage promotion, and infrastructure investment, describing tourism as a powerful engine capable of creating jobs, building human connections, and driving inclusive change (Platform Times, 2025).

These policy commitments at both state and federal levels create a potentially enabling environment for the formalisation of CBT initiatives in Itolu. The Renewed Hope initiative's explicit emphasis on uplifting rural communities, preserving cultural legacies, and unlocking economic potential from state

cultural assets speaks directly to Itolu's situation (TVC News, 2025). However, translating high-level policy commitments into concrete CBT outcomes at the micro-community level requires institutional mechanisms that the Nigerian policy framework has historically struggled to deliver. Hart (2024), in an examination of institutional frameworks for sustainable community engagement in Nigeria, argues that the gap between national and state tourism policy rhetoric and community-level implementation reflects deep structural deficits in local government capacity, participatory planning, and resource devolution. In Itolu's case, the absence of a functioning Local Government Tourism Committee mandated under the Nigerian Tourism Development Master Plan (2006) but widely non-operational means that policy-level commitments have not translated into visible CBT programming within the community.

Challenges Confronting CBT Development in Itolu

The development of structured CBT initiatives in Itolu community faces a constellation of interrelated challenges. First, the community suffers from severe infrastructure deficits the absence of electricity, potable water, motorable access roads to key tourism sites, and basic visitor accommodation facilities fundamentally limits the community's capacity to host tourists and monetise its heritage assets (Daily Sun, 2017; Orelaja and Ajayi, 2024). Moreover, decades of governmental neglect have generated deep community scepticism towards external actors, including researchers, government representatives, and tourism developers, as evidenced by the hostile reception documented during field visits to the community (Daily Sun, 2017). This trust deficit constitutes a significant social barrier to the participatory processes that underpin effective CBT governance. Worimegbe, Worimegbe, and Abiola-Oke (2019) identify precisely this pattern in their analysis of how political and economic risks have impaired Nigeria's tourism sector, noting that marginalised communities are the most acutely affected by the tourism system's structural failures.

Additionally, the monetisation of sacred cultural resources poses a complex ethical and governance challenge in Itolu, as it does in comparable Yoruba sacred site communities. Nwagbara (2024), in a study of the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove, notes that the commercialisation of cultural rituals has sparked

concerns among traditionalists about the loss of authenticity and the desecralisation of spiritual heritage. In Itolu, where the Erifu water's spiritual power is contingent on observance of customary taboos, any CBT initiative must be designed with careful attention to the community's cultural and spiritual protocols. Oladeji, Oyeniran, and Ayodeji (2022) specifically warn that where communities feel that their cultural resources are being appropriated for commercial gain without their meaningful participation, resistance and disengagement follow, a pattern that would prove deeply counterproductive in Itolu's context. A sustainable CBT model for Itolu must therefore balance economic development objectives with the community's role as the authoritative custodian of its own cultural heritage.

Statement of the Problem

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a credible alternative framework, positioning local communities as active stakeholders in tourism development rather than passive recipients of its consequences (Murphy, 1985; Hiwasaki, 2006). CBT initiatives are widely advocated for their capacity to redistribute economic benefits, promote cultural heritage, and foster sustainable resource management. Despite a growing body of international and Nigerian scholarship affirming the value of CBT — including studies from Cross River State (Akpan and Obong, 2012), Ondo State (Adeniyi et al., 2018), and Osun State (Adebayo et al., 2014) — empirical investigations into the specific role and impact of CBT initiatives at the micro-community level remain insufficient, particularly in South-West Nigeria.

Itolu community in Ilaro, Ogun State, is endowed with a distinct cultural identity, traditional heritage, and tourism resources that hold considerable developmental potential. However, it remains largely unexamined in the tourism literature. Like many rural communities in Nigeria, Itolu risks marginalisation in the face of unplanned and externally driven tourism pressures that threaten to commercialise its cultural heritage without adequately engaging or compensating its residents. The absence of documented evidence on the nature, scope, and impact of CBT initiatives in the community constitutes a significant knowledge gap, leaving policymakers, tourism planners, and

community stakeholders without the empirical foundations needed to make informed decisions.

Specifically, it is not yet established to what extent CBT initiatives in Itolu community contribute to the promotion and conservation of local cultural heritage. Research in comparable Nigerian contexts has shown that, without structured community participation, cultural assets are frequently commercialised or neglected, leading to irreversible losses (Bankole, 2013; Okonkwo and Odey, 2017). Furthermore, the economic benefits, if any, accruing to residents of Itolu community from existing or emerging tourism activities remain unquantified and unanalysed. The lack of this evidence makes it impossible to assess whether tourism is serving as a genuine vehicle for local economic empowerment or whether, as documented elsewhere in Nigeria, its proceeds continue to bypass host communities (Worimegbe et al., 2019; Mustapha, 2001).

Hence, this study seeks to examine the role of Community-Based Tourism initiatives in Itolu community, Ilaro, Ogun State. The study specifically investigates the role of CBT in promoting cultural heritage and conservation, and assesses the economic benefits that CBT activities generate for the community.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the role of community-based tourism initiatives in Itolu community, Ilaro, Ogun state with specific objectives being:

1. To investigate the role of Community Based Tourism initiative in promoting cultural heritage and conservation
2. To assess the economic benefits of Community Based Tourism in Itolu community, Ilaro.

III.METHODOLOGY

Study area

Itolu is an ancient community located in Yewa South Local Government Area of Ogun State, situated in very close proximity to Ilaro along the Oja-Odan Road and directly opposite the second gate of the Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro (Daily Sun, 2017). The community shares its boundary with Ita Waya and is accessible primarily by road, consistent with the broader pattern

of road-based transportation that characterises Ilaro and its environs. Despite its geographic nearness to the urban centre of Ilaro, Itolu presents a stark contrast in terms of infrastructure and amenity provision. As of the time of documented field visits, the community lacked electricity supply and potable water, and several other basic social amenities were absent, a condition that community indigenes attribute to prolonged governmental neglect (Daily Sun, 2017). Physically, the community is characterised by dense vegetation, swampy terrain near its river systems, and mangrove growth around its waterfronts, which together create a distinctive ecological landscape of both environmental and spiritual significance.

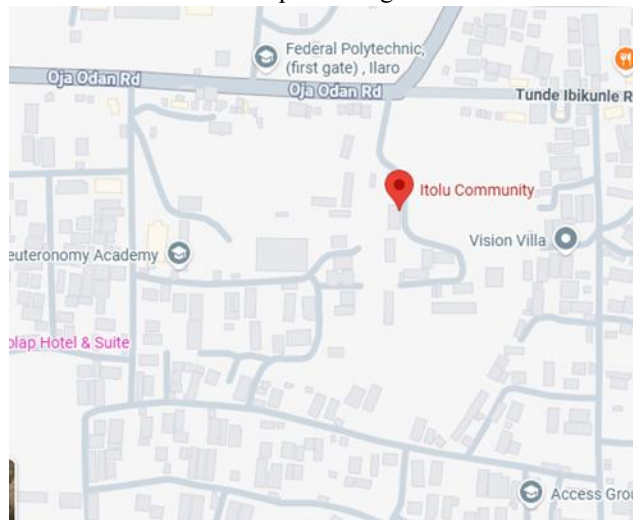


Figure 1. Geographical sketch of the study area
Source: Google Map (2026)

Sources, Types and Methods of Data Collection

The study used a survey design with the purpose of generating and analysing data on the role of community-based tourism initiative on local community, with the case study being Itolu Community, Ilaro. There were two main sources of data for this research work. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used for this study. The primary data were obtained through oral interview and well-structured point questionnaire with a 5-point Likert rating scale (in rankings of agreement and approval, where applicable), which was premised on relevant literature and survey models of past researchers. The researcher also adopted necessary information via secondary data such as textbooks and other publications as well as the internet.

Questionnaires with closed-ended questions were distributed to the tourists in the study area.

Sampling Techniques

The population for the study was targeted at the residence and indigene of Itolu community. A random sample of 50 was determined using Taro Yamane’s method 1967.

Methods of Data Analysis

Inferential statistics was used to analyze data to determine the means and standard deviation of the responses and the descriptive statistics method was used to analyse the data collected for this study using quantitative techniques (SPSS 6.0) the results were presented using tables, figures and charts.

IV.RESULT

Table 1: Demographic data of the respondents

Total= 50

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percent	SD
GENDER				
Male	26	52.0	52.0	
Female	24	48.0	100.0	
Age				
20-25	4	8.0	8.0	
26-30	14	28.0	36.0	
31-40	13	26.0	62.0	
41-50	16	32.0	94.0	
>50	3	6.0	100.0	
Marital Status				
Single	24	48.0	48.0	
Married	26	52.0	100.0	
Educational Level				
OND	22	44.0	88.0	
HND/BSc	14	28.0	44.0	
Post	8	16.0	16.0	
Graduate	6	12.0	100.0	
Others				
Occupation				
Student	7	14.0	14.0	
Employees	17	34.0	48.0	
Civil	20	40.0	88.0	
Servant				
Trader	6	12.0	100.0	

Table 2: The Role of Community Based Tourism initiative in promoting cultural heritage and conservation

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent	SD
Community-based tourism in Itolu helps preserve the local cultural heritage				
Strongly Agreed	5	10.0	10.0	
Agreed	11	22.0	32.0	
Agreed	18	36.0	68.0	
Undecided	9	18.0	86.0	
Strongly Disagreed	7	14.0	100.0	
Traditional practices and customs are better maintained through community tourism efforts				
Strongly Agreed	10	20.0	20.0	
Agreed	9	18.0	38.0	
Undecided	14	28.0	66.0	
Strongly Disagreed	11	22.0	88.0	
Disagreed	6	12.0	100.0	
Tourists visiting Itolu show interest in the community's culture and traditions				
Strongly Agreed	7	14.0	14.0	
Agreed	11	22.0	36.0	
Undecided	15	30.0	66.0	
Strongly Disagreed	10	20.0	86.0	
Disagreed	7	14.0	100.0	
Community tourism has contributed to the protection and conservation of historical sites in Itolu				
Strongly Agreed	8	16.0	16.0	
Agreed	10	20.0	36.0	
Undecided	14	28.0	64.0	
Strongly Disagreed	15	30.0	94.0	
Disagreed	3	6.0	100.0	
Residents are more aware of their cultural identity because of tourism activities				
Strongly Agreed	3	6.0	6.0	
Agreed	16	32.0	38.0	
Undecided	15	30.0	68.0	
Strongly Disagreed	11	22.0	90.0	
Disagreed	5	10.0	100.0	

Table 3: The economic benefits of Community Based Tourism in Itolu community, Ilaro

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent	SD
Local businesses benefit directly from tourist visits				
Strongly Agreed	6	12.0	12.0	
Agreed	15	30.0	40.0	
Agreed	14	28.0	70.0	
Undecided	9	18.0	88.0	
Strongly Disagreed	6	12.0	100.0	
Community-based tourism has increased income opportunities for residents of Itolu				
Strongly Agreed	6	12.0	12.0	
Agreed	11	22.0	34.0	
Agreed	18	36.0	70.0	

Undecided	10	20.0	90.0	
Strongly Disagreed	5	10.0	100.0	
Tourism initiatives has encouraged the growth of small businesses (e.g., crafts, food stalls)				
Strongly Agreed	3	10.0	10.0	
Agreed	12	34.0	44.0	
Agreed	13	26.0	70.0	
Undecided	17	24.0	94.0	
Strongly Disagreed	5	6.0	100.0	
The presence of tourists boosts demand for local goods and services				
Strongly Agreed	3	6.0	6.0	
Agreed	18	36.0	42.0	
Agreed	10	20.0	62.0	
Undecided	12	24.0	86.0	
Strongly Disagreed	7	14.0	100.0	
Community members benefit financially from tourism through participation in cultural displays or hospitality services				
Strongly Agreed	6	12.0	12.0	
Agreed	18	36.0	48.0	
Agreed	12	24.0	72.0	
Undecided	9	18.0	90.0	
Strongly Disagreed	5	10.0	100.0	

V.RESULTS DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents which reveals that the study sampled 50 respondents of the Itolu community, Ilaro. The age range showed that the largest cohort was the 41–50 age group (32%), followed by the 26–30 group (28%) and the 31–40 group (26%). Together, these three groups account for 86% of respondents, indicating that the majority of participants are working-age adults. Married respondents slightly outnumbered single respondents (52% vs. 48%), suggesting a broadly settled and community-rooted sample. Also, the table revealed respondents educational attainment with 44% of respondents holding OND certificates, 28% holding HND/BSc degrees, and 16% holding postgraduate qualifications. Only 12% fell into the "others" category. With respect to occupation, civil servants formed the largest group (40%), followed by employees (34%), students (14%), and traders (12%). The dominance of civil servants and formally employed individuals implies that a significant proportion of the community is engaged with institutional structures.

The findings from Table 2 reveal mixed but generally moderate levels of agreement regarding Community-

based Tourism contribution to cultural heritage preservation and conservation in the Itolu community. 10% strongly agreed and 22% agreed, giving a combined agreement rate of 32% whether CBT in Itolu helps preserve local cultural heritage. However, 36% were undecided, while 18% strongly disagreed and 14% disagreed, amounting to a 32% disagreement rate. The near-equal split between agreement, undecidedness, and disagreement suggests that while some community members perceive tourism as a force for cultural preservation, a significant proportion remain unconvinced or skeptical. Also the question that traditional practices and customs are better maintained through community tourism attracted stronger positive sentiment, with 20% strongly agreeing and 18% agreeing (38% combined), against 22% who were undecided and 34% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Likewise, 14% strongly agreeing and 22% agreeing (36% combined), with 30% undecided and 34% disagreeing that tourists visiting Itolu show interest in the community's culture and traditions. The relatively high undecided proportion here may reflect inconsistency in tourist behaviour or a perception that tourist visits are not sufficiently oriented towards cultural immersion. Majority (36%) agreed and disagreed respectively that community tourism has contributed to the protection and conservation of historical sites in Itolu, while 28% were undecided. The relatively high disagreement on this item points to a gap between CBT's potential for heritage site conservation and its actual impact as perceived by residents. Lastly, 38% agreed that residents are more aware of their cultural identity because of tourism activities

Table 3 presents a moderately optimistic picture of CBT's economic contributions. On whether local businesses benefit directly from tourist visits, 42% agreed while 28% were undecided and 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Majority 36% of the respondents being undecided and negative 30% with 34% agreed that CBT has increased income opportunities for residents. This response indicates that the income-generating potential of CBT has not yet been broadly felt across the Itolu community. Also, respondents' 44% strongly agreed to 'tourism initiatives have encouraged the growth of small businesses such as crafts and food stalls and 42% further affirmed by revealing that the presence of tourists boosts demand for local goods and services.

Majority 48% strongly agreed that community members benefit financially from tourism through participation in cultural displays or hospitality services.

VI.DISCUSSION

This study examined the role of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Itolu Community, Ilaro, with specific focus on its contributions to cultural heritage conservation and economic development. The findings, drawn from a sample of 50 respondents, present a picture of a community that is at an early but transitional stage of CBT development. The overall picture is one of a community at a crossroads: possessing the human capital, cultural assets, and geographic conditions to support a thriving CBT programme, but lacking the institutional infrastructure needed to translate those assets into tangible, community-wide outcomes.

The most positively received cultural item was the maintenance of traditional practices and customs (38% combined agreement), while cultural identity awareness (38% agreement) and historical site conservation (36% agreement) attracted the weakest consensus. Crucially, undecided responses ranged from 28% to 36% across all five cultural items, a pattern indicating that a large segment of the community has not yet experienced or observed sufficient cultural tourism activity to form a definitive view. These findings align closely with Mearns (2012), who observed in a study of South African community tourism that informal cultural reinforcement such as the staging of traditional performances for visitors tends to emerge as the first visible cultural benefit of CBT, well before formal heritage conservation outcomes materialise.

On the economic dimension, the study found that the most perceptible benefits of CBT in Itolu are those generated through direct, face-to-face engagement between tourists and community members. The item recording the highest positive response in the entire study was whether community members benefit financially from participation in cultural displays and hospitality services (48% agreement), a finding that speaks to the primacy of active, participatory income generation over passive economic spillovers. Direct business benefits from tourist visits also attracted 42% agreement, reflecting the visibility of commercial

gains at the frontline of tourist activity. These findings are strongly consistent with Mitchell and Ashley (2010), whose landmark study on tourism and poverty reduction in developing countries demonstrated that direct tourist expenditure at the community level through hospitality, cultural performances, and local retail is the most immediately felt and most equitably distributed economic benefit of CBT in early-stage programmes.

Additionally, the limited growth of crafts, food stalls, and small enterprises further reflects what Ijeomah and Ogar (2013) described in their Nigerian CBT study as the 'enabling conditions gap': the absence of regular tourist flows, a marketable cultural tourism product, and skills and capital support for community entrepreneurs. More recently, Chirenje, Chitotombe, and Mago (2022), studying CBT enterprise development in Zimbabwe, found that micro-enterprise growth in tourism-adjacent communities was directly correlated with the availability of structured business development support a resource that remains limited in most rural Nigerian and West African CBT contexts, including Itolu.

VII.CONCLUSION

The study's findings converge on a conclusion well-established in the CBT literature: the transformative potential of community-based tourism is not automatic. It is conditional on institutional capacity, community empowerment, equitable participation, and sustained external support. CBT in Itolu Community demonstrates the cultural and economic promise of the model but has not yet overcome the structural constraints that prevent its benefits from reaching the full community. As Scheyvens (1999) observed in her foundational work, a position reaffirmed by more recent scholarship including Mtapuri and Giampiccoli (2013) and the UNWTO (2020), community ownership and active participation are the non-negotiable preconditions for CBT to deliver on its development mandate. The path forward for Itolu lies in formalising governance structures, expanding participatory programming, developing authentic cultural tourism products, and establishing transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms that ensure all community members, not merely those at the tourism frontline become genuine beneficiaries of the industry.

REFERENCES

- [1] Adebayo, A., Jegede, O., & Eniafe, T. (2014). Community-rooted tourism development and economic impact on host populations in Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria. *Journal of Tourism and Heritage Research*, 3(1), 56–71.
- [2] Adeniyi, A., Olugbamila, B., & Olajide, O. (2018). Community participation in managing local tourism attractions in Idanre, Ondo State: Visitor satisfaction and cultural preservation outcomes. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 7(4), 1–14.
- [3] Adepoju, A., & Salawu, B. (2021). Community-based tourism programs and local economic development in Osun State, Nigeria: Evidence from small enterprise profitability and craft quality. *Nigerian Journal of Tourism Studies*, 5(2), 23–41.
- [4] Akpan, U., & Obong, L. (2012). Tourism as a strategy for sustainable economic development in Cross River State, Nigeria: A community-led assessment. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 14(6), 179–194.
- [5] Asifat, T., Samotu, I., & Awe, B. (2025). Structured community-based management at the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove: Lessons for heritage tourism governance in Southwest Nigeria. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-2024-0031>
- [6] Ayeni, D. A., & Ebohon, O. J. (2012). Tourism as a tool for economic diversification in Nigeria: Infrastructure challenges and strategic opportunities. *Developing Country Studies*, 2(5), 44–53.
- [7] Bankole, A. S. (2002). Tourism as an economic development tool in Nigeria: Returns on capital, employment, and foreign exchange generation. *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies*, 44(1), 1–20.
- [8] Bankole, A. S. (2013). Cultural assets and tourism commercialisation in Nigeria: Risks of neglect and the imperative of structured community participation. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 11(3), 215–229.
- [9] Chirenje, L. I., Chitotombe, J., & Mago, S. (2022). Community-based tourism and enterprise

- development in rural Zimbabwe: Opportunities and constraints. *African Journal of Development Studies*, 12(1), 45–63.
- [10] Choi, H. C., & Sirakaya, E. (2006). Sustainability indicators for managing community tourism. *Tourism Management*, 27(6), 1274–1289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2005.05.018>
- [11] Daily Sun. (2017, March 5). *Itole community: The ancient Yewa kingdom with sacred waters and shrines*. Daily Sun Nigeria. <https://www.sunnewsonline.com>
- [12] Dike, E. (2015). Tourism competitiveness in Nigeria: An analysis of the 2019 World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index ranking. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 17(4), 389–401.
- [13] Eja, E. I., & Ajake, A. O. (2005). Community involvement in tourism planning and environmental stewardship in the Niger Delta region. *Global Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(2), 89–97.
- [14] Habiba, U., & Lina, A. (2023). Community-based tourism and the translation of cultural endowments into sustainable socio-economic outcomes: A theoretical review. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 23(1), 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584221078413>
- [15] Hart, J. (2024). Institutional frameworks for sustainable community engagement in Nigeria's tourism sector: Bridging the policy-implementation gap. *Journal of Policy and Development Studies*, 18(2), 101–118.
- [16] Henama, U. S. (2018). Tourism as a resilient industry amid global economic recessions: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 7(1), 1–12.
- [17] Henama, U. S., & Sifolo, P. P. S. (2017). The economic function of tourism as a service export and generator of new money in host economies. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 6(2), 1–13.
- [18] Hiwasaki, L. (2006). Community-based tourism: A pathway to sustainability for Japan's protected areas. *Society & Natural Resources*, 19(8), 675–692. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920600801090>
- [19] Ijeomah, H. M., & Ogar, D. A. (2013). Tourism and community development in Nigeria: The enabling conditions gap. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 6(4), 45–58. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v6n4p45>
- [20] Iorio, M., & Corsale, A. (2020). Community-based tourism, ownership, and collective responsibility: Transformative pathways for local development. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 28(9), 1397–1414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1751946>
- [21] McGehee, N. G., & Santos, C. A. (2015). Social change, discourse and volunteer tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 32(3), 760–779. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2004.12.002>
- [22] Mearns, K. F. (2012). Community-based tourism and peace in South Africa: The role of local communities. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 1, 28–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2011.12.007>
- [23] Mitchell, J., & Ashley, C. (2010). *Tourism and poverty reduction: Pathways to prosperity*. Earthscan.
- [24] Mtapuri, O., & Giampiccoli, A. (2013). Towards a model of community-based tourism: Angling for a comprehensive and inclusive model. *South African Geographical Journal*, 95(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03736245.2013.847889>
- [25] Murphy, P. E. (1985). *Tourism: A community approach*. Methuen.
- [26] Mustapha, S. B. (2001). Tourism proceeds and host community bypass in Nigeria: A structural analysis. *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 7(1–2), 157–168.
- [27] Nwagbara, G. C. (2024). Commercialisation, desacralisation, and authenticity concerns at the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove: Perspectives of traditional custodians. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 19(1), 78–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2023.2198451>
- [28] Nyaupane, G. P., Morais, D. B., & Dowler, L. (2016). The role of community in tourism development: A review of the literature. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 19, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2016.03.006>
- [29] Okonkwo, E. E., & Odey, S. A. (2017). Community-based tourism and cultural resources management in Nigeria: Planning imperatives. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 23(7), 647–660. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2017.1289389>

- [30] Okonkwo, E. E., Udunze, U., Nwosu, C., & Chibuike, A. (2022). Cultural preservation and employment through tourism activities in Cross River State, Nigeria: Opportunities and infrastructure challenges. *African Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure*, 11(2), 567–581.
- [31] Oladeji, A., Oyeniran, S., & Ayodeji, T. (2022). Community participation in cultural heritage conservation across Yoruba communities in Southwest Nigeria: Sustainability outcomes and socio-economic benefits. *Journal of Cultural Heritage*, 55, 298–307. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.culher.2022.03.014>
- [32] Orelaja, O. A., & Ajayi, O. T. (2024). Ecotourism potential and community management deficits at the Bilikisu Sugbon Sacred Grove, Ijebu North-East LGA, Ogun State, Nigeria. *Tourism and Heritage Journal*, 6(1), 34–52.
- [33] Platform Times. (2025, September 27). *Ogun Tourism Commissioner Fagbayi affirms community-based initiatives and heritage promotion at World Tourism Day celebrations*. Platform Times Nigeria. <https://www.platformtimes.com>
- [34] Scheyvens, R. (1999). Ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities. *Tourism Management*, 20(2), 245–249. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(98\)00069-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(98)00069-7)
- [35] Timothy, D. J., & Olsen, D. H. (2006). *Tourism, religion and spiritual journeys*. Routledge.
- [36] TVC News. (2025, January 10). *Federal Government and Ogun State sign Memorandum of Understanding under the Renewed Hope Cultural and Creative Projects Initiative*. TVC News Nigeria. <https://www.tvcnews.tv>
- [37] United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). (2020). *Community-based tourism guidelines*. World Tourism Organization. <https://www.unwto.org>
- [38] Worimegbe, P. M., Worimegbe, T. M., & Abiola-Oke, E. (2019). Political and economic risks, marginalised communities, and Nigeria's tourism sector: A structural critique. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 21(4), 477–488. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2277>
- [39] Yamane, T. (1967). *Statistics: An introductory analysis* (2nd ed.). Harper & Row.
- [40] World Tourism Organisation (WTO), & International Labour Organisation (ILO). (2014). *Measuring employment in the tourism industries: Guide with best practices*. UNWTO. <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284416158>.