

THE AFRICAN YOUTH IN VOLUNTEER AND PHILANTHROPIC TOURISM

NIGERIA AS A CASE STUDY, CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS.

BY ASEMOTA JOHN JAY

1. The African youth today is neither smiling nor laughing. He is torn between the material things (making money through every possible means, fair or foul in a global society that is calling for co-operation of individuals who would volunteer to create a better future for the growing generation of mankind) and the spiritual dictum that compels us to be our brothers' keeper.
2. His beloved society is fraught with wars, political chaos, unrest, unemployment, poverty, lack of proper medical care facilities, theft identity; the list is endless.
3. Tourism, the new orientation, should be seen as a way of bringing home as well as creating any industry that should stimulate foreign interest in our way of life, culture, values, artifacts and tourist sites endowed with the security of the visitors
4. Here, I am standing before you, first as a Nigerian, an Africa Youth, a volunteer and a crusader through philanthropic tourism. My qualification is stimulated by my:
 - i. Twenty two years (22yrs) of life as a Boy Scout, so I know where the shoe hurts in volunteering.
 - ii. My parents are volunteers themselves; my father is a Scout Commissioner and educator while my mother is a nurse, an educator, a lawyer and also a member of the International Action Volunteer Effort. We are our brothers' keepers in our family.
5. Volunteering stimulates leadership, and leadership according to Peter Senge implies, "the capacity to hold a clear picture of the future we seek to create." The "clear pictures" (vision) is the key to sustainable growth with strong hearted commitment. This is different from imitation of playing at what others wish they could be.
6. Unfortunately, apathy towards volunteering amongst the Youths today in Nigeria is its apparent no reward and no money gain status at the end of a service. African Youth in volunteering is still trying to make a stride in volunteering in a society that is yet to cultivate the virtue of giving freely.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

7. Let us take a scenario from my country Nigeria. I come from one of the oil producing states, Edo in Nigeria. Am from Benin, a city visited in the 14th century by the Portuguese explorer Ru de Sequeira before Christopher Columbus dared cross the Atlantic Ocean to America. The Binis are warriors and the city was the first slave trade centre in West Africa.
8. In the year 1999-2000, there were series of adulterated cooking Kerosene products explosions which set many houses on fire in the city. More than five thousand (5,000) people suffered various degrees of burns; some died and the survivors marred.
9. A three man volunteer team which included a medical doctor, and administrative officer and my humble self, then a public relation student (marketing) in the Nigerian school of journalism, was on the ground to help. We started a campaign in Six media houses including radio, television and prints to sensitize the public on our actions and to raise money for the affected families.
10. Guess what? Only a privately owned media outfit out of the six we have bargained with, agreed to partner with us. To ensure transparency, we kept records and details of every donation made with pictures of the donors shown on live television and a standby photographer to get details of each presentation.
11. On another occasion, this time, a visit to a Benin based businessman and a petrol dealer who resided in the area where the disaster took place, to solicit for financial assistant from him on behalf

of the victims, proved abortive. He looked at us cynically and asked "Of what benefit would the fund be to me"? I was shocked seething with rage and revulsion at him for regarding us as busybodies with no better jobs to do than begging for money to solve other people's problems. He impolitely asked us to leave his office, saying that he has a better thing to do with his time.

12. However, we got help from the Red Cross, Boys Scout, Girls Guide, some churches and some market women who gave out freely. And we are happy that our efforts yielded dividends because over four hundred of them are alive till today with scaly bodies, noses, ears and amputated hands or legs while others are still undergoing surgery to correct their shapes where necessary.
13. Lastly on this issue, while I would not want to sound like a preacher, I heard that, the businessman hung himself some couple of months ago leaving a note behind saying that "He" could no longer cope with living and that he was fed up! He has left everything he had acquired behind, without even receiving a thank you from any of those who would use them!
14. Recently, and precisely last year 2006, I volunteered to be a member of the United Nations Environmental Projects (UNEP), tree campaigner in Nigeria with the purpose of mobilizing the people of my area-Edo State, to plant trees in their environments. Getting sponsorship for the campaign to plant five thousand (5,000) teak trees was daunting to say the least. This was a big challenge to me! I like challenges provided I am committed and with a vision and determination to succeed. No turning back!
15. I had a follow-up visitation to some corporate organizations in the state. I was almost met with brick walls! In one instance, a C.E.O of a bank told me in confidence that they were less than 15 years in the Banking Industry and that there was no place for such social pursuit in their business diary. With an appealing look, I asked him if he didn't need oxygen to breathe! I followed this question up with others "what do you do eighteen (18) times a minute? What do you do one thousand and eighty (1080) times an hour?, what do you do twenty five thousand nine hundred and twenty (25,920) times a day Which you rarely noticed?" He kept quiet. I answered "you breathe", and at forty (40) years old, you would have already taken in more than three hundred and seventy eight (378) million breaths! Each of these breaths was a measured (nature) gift from the hand of God! Your lungs are amongst the most important parts of your body, they furnish your blood with oxygen and get rid of carbon dioxide and water. A few minute without breathing, one would loose consciousness and die. You cannot survive much longer without oxygen!
16. Oxygen is life, therefore tree planting is a must for our survival because trees absorb the carbon dioxide emitted by man and other members of the ecosystem and give out oxygen as emission for our intake and survival. Hence planting trees is life for human race and its survival, for economic growth, retards desertification encroachment as well as regulating climate conditions. In other words, trees mitigates climate change.
17. Finally, ladies and gentlemen, this campaign will need all efforts from the government, industries and private individuals, stretching from the urban through the local governments as well as the villages. I will need nothing less than thirteen thousand dollars (\$13,000) to put my campaign plans into action. My campaign no doubt affects all and sundry, big or small in the society.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

18. The future for the African Youth Volunteer and philanthropic tourism is a road paved with redeemable gold coin found in the smiles, joys, peace and love of global brotherhood. With trust, monitoring and burning desire for philanthropy. Individuals and corporate organizations should remember that we all live for tomorrow and not only for today.
19. Partnership and co-operative strategies and alliances should be formed at all levels to create ideas and solutions to make society and indeed the world at large a more sane place to live in.

21. Indeed the future is bright I say. Currently I am working with a Public Relations Consultancy firm Primus Global Resources Ltd in Lagos Nigeria, to develop and effectively Marshall out plans to help spread the joy of philanthropic tourism in more active roles in Nigeria, Africa and globally. Success without a successor is a failure. Be my successors! Let's lobby our various governments to legislate laws that benefit the society and the Environment.

22. Fellow African Youths we are undeniably the leaders of tomorrow, we should continually see ourselves as the successors of our elders. We should participate in decision making in everything that affects our lives not only in Africa but globally. We should not only be thinkers but doers as well.

23. African youths from Uganda, please visit Nigeria and see wonders such as;

- i. The Aruku Wildlife Park, the pandam park, the Wuse Rock Hotel. There are species of animals ranging from Hippopotamus, antelopes, water bugs, elephants, gorillas, lions, Kangaroos and snakes of different colours in Plateau State of Northern Nigeria.
- ii. The hot spring of Ikolosi of Ondo State of South – Western Nigeria.
- iii. The Obudu Cattle Ranch (OCR) in Cross Rivers State of the South – South part of Nigeria, which is the centre of attraction to mountain climbers from different parts of the world. It is a great centre of tourist attraction.
- iv. In Edo State, the Benin moat and the Igun street bronze caster at work
- v. There are different types of waterfalls all over Nigeria that are similar to Iguazu falls (classified as a top wonder of the world) which stretches along a three kilometer (nearly two miles) rim that is shared between Argentina and Brazil.

24. There are a lot more Panoramic scenario that cannot be mentioned here. However, there are some villages in Nigeria where people have not seen the light of civilization as a result of their not being exposed to things outside their traditional surroundings which they see as the only way of life. There are some deities which they worship periodically and discuss with through various mediums such as trees, carved and molded images all in the form of shrines they adore. Besides there are lots of tourist attractions which you will be delighted to see.

25. It is no wonder therefore, a British tourist Mr. Morris Brook who was returning with his family last week in late January 2007 from their week-long stay at the Obudu Cattle Ranch (OCR) in Cross River State, challenged the Federal and State governments to pump in more resources to the tourist sector development so as to generate more foreign exchange earnings from the industry. He made this remark at the Departure Hall of the Murtala Mohammed International Airport Lagos during his interview with a National tabloid The Mirror of 31st January 2007 shortly before boarding the plane. Said he “ my visit to the Ranch has become an eye- opening experience to the possibilities that abound in a well developed tourism state in Nigeria.” He further revealed that the Ranch offers the visitors comfortable accommodation and many beautiful attractions. Amongst them “beautiful scenery of Obudu, interesting values, the waterfalls, the scattered hamlets in the environs, the animals and the nature structured rocks adorning the area in its entirety”

26. The visitor's wife Mrs. Evelin Brook in her comment had this to say “the success recorded from the Ranch should be emulated in turning all the country's numerous parks and resorts into joy away from home.”

Mr. Brook summed it up again by saying “ this will definitely place Nigeria's quest for tourism on a pedestal that can attract more visitors that will boost the employment, foreign exchange earnings and related spin – off that may not be immediately contemplated.”

27. Currently in Nigeria, Obudu cattle Ranch has remained the highest tourist attraction by virtue of its high records of foreigners visiting every year.

28. Please ladies and gentlemen come and visit us in Nigeria and see for your selves.

Submitted by

JOHN-JAY JESUOROBO ASEMOTA