



The Potential Influence of Ecotourism on Nigeria's Foreign Policy and International Relations in a Changing Global System

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Abstract

This essay examines Nigeria's ecotourism industry through the lens of green theory, exploring its potential to influence foreign policy and international relations. Green theory, which emphasises the intersection of environmentalism and global politics, provides a framework for understanding how Nigeria can leverage its natural and cultural heritage to align with global environmental initiatives like the Sustainable Development Goals. Ecotourism offers opportunities for economic diversification, reducing oil dependence, and enhancing diplomatic relations through cultural diplomacy, poverty reduction, and environmental conservation. By promoting ecotourism, Nigeria can position itself as an eco-friendly, culturally diverse destination, attracting foreign investment, fostering trade, and strengthening international cooperation. Challenges such as corruption, regulatory inconsistencies, and security concerns must be addressed to maximise these benefits. Integrating ecotourism into Nigeria's foreign policy framework not only supports biodiversity and ecosystem protection but also fosters goodwill and collaborative efforts with international partners. Ultimately, guided by green theory, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement, ecotourism can significantly transform Nigeria's diplomatic and economic landscape.

Keywords: *Nigeria, ecotourism, foreign policy, sustainable development, cultural diplomacy, biodiversity.*

Introduction

For the last few years, there has been a discernible shift in the global landscape of foreign policy and international relations toward an emphasis on environmentally responsible and sustainable practices. This transformation is particularly exemplified in ecotourism, a growing industry that promises to bring economic expansion into harmony with preserving the natural environment. The potential impact of ecotourism on international policy and relations has gained significance as nations strive to achieve a balance between fostering economic development and preserving their natural resources. This has led to an increase in the importance of ecotourism.

It is also important to acknowledge the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and Goal 15 (Life on Land), as they highlight the importance of sustainable economic growth and the preservation of terrestrial ecosystems. In particular, Goal 8 emphasises the importance of

decent work and economic development. As a result of an increased focus on the environmental impact of tourism and the requirement for sustainable practices, sustainable ecotourism development has been established as a primary policy objective at the international, regional, and national levels, leading to an increase in the number of ecotourism destinations around the world (Shedenov et al., 2019). Countries such as Norway and New Zealand are developing carbon balance strategies and implementing measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions caused by the tourism industry to address the rising emissions associated with ecotourism, supported by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (He et al., 2021).

Africa, with its rich biodiversity and cultural diversity, stands to benefit significantly from ecotourism. Many African nations are leveraging ecotourism as a tool for sustainable economic development and regional cooperation. Nigeria, also known as the "Giant of Africa," is a country that has been blessed with a rich cultural



heritage and a variety of natural resources, both of which have the potential to be developed into ecotourism destinations (Diminyi et al., 2020). Because tourism is a rapidly growing industry with the potential to bring about economic expansion, job creation, and revenue generation, Nigeria's ecotourism industry can significantly impact its foreign policy and its relations with other nations (Oladele et al., 2018).

The ecotourism industry has been identified as a potentially fruitful path towards diversifying the country's economy, decreasing its reliance on oil, and expanding coastal and marine tourism. Utilising aquatic resources for tourism can result in several beneficial outcomes, one of which is a more diversified economy, making the economy more resilient to economic uncertainty (Oladele et al., 2018). In addition to these advantages, ecotourism can bring in investments from other nations and raise the amount of money the government brings in (Lukman et al., 2022). Like many other nations, Nigeria has pledged its support to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, and ecotourism provides a remarkable opportunity to bring Nigeria's domestic priorities into line with its commitments to the international community (United Nations, 2015).

This paper aims to examine the role of ecotourism as a soft power tool in shaping Nigeria's foreign policy and enhancing its global image, as well as the impact of global environmental and economic changes on Nigeria's ecotourism policies and their implications for international relations.

Theoretical Framework

Using "Green theory" provides a lens to examine how environmental sustainability reshapes global interactions, emphasising ecological considerations in policymaking. Green theory emerged in the late 20th century within International Relations (IR) as a critique of traditional theories like Realism and Liberalism, which overlooked environmental issues. Developed by scholars such as Robyn Eckersley and Andrew Dobson, it advanced with works like Eckersley's *Environmentalism and Political*

Theory (1992) and Dobson's *Green Political Thought* (1980s). Together, their work and similar contributions established green theory as a framework for addressing environmentalism in global politics.

Ecotourism aligns with green diplomacy by positioning Nigeria as a steward of biodiversity and climate action, fostering cooperation with nations prioritising sustainability. It enables Nigeria to influence global discussions on environmental preservation while attracting eco-conscious tourists and investors. Through ecotourism, Nigeria can bolster its foreign policy by showcasing its commitment to global environmental norms, improving its international image. As the global system prioritises green transitions, ecotourism emerges as a tool to integrate ecological objectives with diplomatic strategies, enhancing Nigeria's role in sustainable development.

The importance of ecotourism in the global economy

Ecotourism is a vital sector of the world economy because it helps to foster sustainable development while maintaining a healthy balance between economic expansion and the protection of the natural world. In recent decades, it has become increasingly important to strike a balance between preserving natural resources and ecosystems and pursuing economic development (Guerrero et al., 2020), and ecotourism is a viable alternative to mass tourism, which helps to reduce the adverse effects of tourism on natural environments while also bringing economic benefits to the communities that host ecotourists (Mancini et al., 2018). It has been acknowledged as an essential instrument for accomplishing sustainable development and has been put into practice in several countries across the globe (Rana, 2023). The positive impact of ecotourism on a given area's economy is frequently cited as one of the activity's most important advantages. It does so by bringing in revenue and opening employment opportunities for local communities, especially in rural and coastal regions (Zamzami et al., 2021). Both domestic and international tourists make significant financial contributions to the economy due to the money they spend on



activities such as travelling, eating out, and staying in hotels. For instance, Ecotourism in Indonesia has generated billions of dollars in revenue, which helps to maintain the standard of living in the surrounding communities. This economic stimulus helps improve living standards and alleviate poverty in these regions (Zamzami *et al.*, 2021).

Ecotourism also encourages the preservation of ecosystems, the protection of endangered species and the environments in which they live, and the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity. Its actions are planned in such a way as to reduce negative environmental impacts, such as the disruption of wildlife and the destruction of habitat (Anggraini & Gunawan, 2021). However, to foster a sense of responsibility and stewardship among tourists, it is necessary to increase their awareness of the significance of conservation. It offers financial incentives for conserving and managing protected areas (Tangian & Polii, 2017). In addition to being good for the economy and the environment, ecotourism also positively affects society and culture. Local communities are given more agency due to their participation in the planning, developing, and managing ecotourism projects (Anggraini & Gunawan, 2021). Residents can actively participate in ecotourism activities, such as guiding tours, providing accommodations, and selling local products (Runya *et al.*, 2023). These activities can generate income while also preserving and promoting local cultures, traditions, and heritage. It can also enhance community pride and identity, increasing social cohesion and well-being (Henri & Ardiawati, 2020).

Ecotourism plays an essential role in the economy of the entire world by fostering sustainable development, preserving natural resources, and providing economic opportunity to local communities. It maintains cultural heritage while generating economic benefits and supporting efforts to conserve the environment. However, for ecotourism initiatives to be successful over the long term and to be sustainable, careful planning, engagement of relevant stakeholders, and monitoring are required.

Overview of Nigeria's foreign policy goals and objectives

Several factors, including geopolitical considerations, economic interests, regional stability, and national security concerns, shape Nigeria's foreign policy goals and objectives. The overarching goals of the nation's foreign policy are to advance the country's national interests, bolster the country's standing in the international community, and constructively contribute to promoting global peace and development. The upkeep of peace and order throughout West Africa is the primary objective of Nigeria's foreign policy, which is primarily due to its membership in both the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU), which both play a significant part in the nation's participation in regional security and peacekeeping efforts (Ogunnubi, 2018). Actively mediating conflicts, promoting peace in neighbouring countries, such as Liberia and Sierra Leone, and fighting against Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin are two of Nigeria's many recent accomplishments (Ogunnubi, 2018). The country's foreign policy helps the nation's economic progress. It seeks to strengthen its economic ties with other nations, mainly through trade and investment agreements (Tiku & Bullem, 2015), actively engaging in economic diplomacy, participating in regional and international economic forums, and seeking partnerships with other countries to enhance economic growth and diversification. This is how it attracts Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) (Tiku & Bullem, 2015). In addition, the government works to safeguard the rights and interests of its citizens who travel outside the country. As a result of the country's sizeable expatriate community, Nigeria prioritises protecting the health and happiness of its citizens living abroad (Ogunnubi, 2018) by providing consular assistance, fostering cultural exchange programs, and advocating for their legal rights (Ogunnubi, 2018). The country aspires to be a voice for Africa, advocating for the continent's interests and representing its concerns in international forums. It plays a leadership role in Africa and on the global stage. Nigeria has held leadership positions in various international organisations, including the United Nations (UN)



and the Non-Aligned Movement (Ogunnubi, 2018).

In addition, Nigeria's foreign policy aims to address global challenges such as climate change, terrorism, and transnational crime. The country recognises the importance of international cooperation in tackling these issues and actively participates in global initiatives and agreements. Through its participation in regional and international partnerships, Nigeria has contributed to the fight against terrorism, the mitigation of the effects of climate change, and the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices (Dioha & Kumar, 2019).

Respect for international law, sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts are some of the guiding principles of Nigeria's foreign policy, which is designed to help the country achieve the goals and objectives outlined above. The government seeks to build partnerships based on mutual respect, equality and shared interests while safeguarding national security and territorial integrity (Ogunnubi, 2018). Nigeria's foreign policy goals and objectives are multifaceted, encompassing various aspects, including regional stability, economic development, citizen welfare, African leadership, and global challenges. The country seeks to promote its national interests, enhance its international standing, and contribute to global peace and development through diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and regional integration.

The Rise of Ecotourism in Nigeria

In recent years, much focus has been placed on Nigeria's growing ecotourism industry. Nigeria has much-untapped potential for developing ecotourism thanks to its varied ecosystems, wildlife, and cultural heritage (Oladele *et al.*, 2018; Orimaye and Anifowose, 2023). It provides opportunities for tourists to experience and appreciate the country's natural beauty while also contributing to preserving that beauty and supporting the economies of the local communities.

Before the pandemic, tourism in Nigeria had been experiencing a significant improvement in recent years, with an increasing number of visitors exploring the country's diverse landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and vibrant cities. Over the past ten years, Nigeria has seen an unbroken rise in the number of tourists arriving from other parts of the world. According to the Nigerian Ecotourism Development Corporation (NTDC), the country welcomed 1.8 million international tourists in 2019, representing a notable increase compared to the years prior (NTDC, 2020). As a result, ecotourism has become a significant contributor to Nigeria's economy. In 2019, the travel and tourism sector contributed 4.2 per cent to the country's GDP, which amounted to NGN 4.79 trillion (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020). These figures highlight the increasing economic significance of the sector.

Also, domestic ecotourism within Nigeria has significantly increased, reflecting Nigerians' rising interest in travelling throughout their country. It was reported by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) that domestic expenditures related to ecotourism reached NGN 3.64 trillion in 2019, which demonstrates the potential of the local ecotourism market (NBS, 2020). Nigeria has various places to visit, ranging from national parks (with an additional ten new national parks established, bringing the total number of national parks in Nigeria up to 17) and wildlife reserves to historical sites and cultural celebrations. For example, the annual Calabar Carnival draws tens of thousands of people worldwide, which helps expand the ecotourism industry (Ololade, 2019). The Federal Government of Nigeria has publicly stated its intention to foster the growth of ecotourism in the country by making infrastructure improvements and advocating for tourist-friendly policies. The country's appeal to tourists has been boosted by recent efforts like the "Tour Nigeria" marketing campaign and the improvement of airport facilities (Hassan, 2022). To strengthen its ecotourism industry, the government has been very active in forming international partnerships. Promoting tourism through cooperative efforts with other nations, such as China, has improved the rate of international visitors (Ekeinde, 2019). In



addition, the advent of the digital era has been beneficial in advancing ecotourism in Nigeria. Travellers are now better able to discover and book accommodations thanks to the proliferation of online travel agencies and social media platforms, leading to an increase in ecotourism activities (BusinessDay, 2020). The thriving film industry known as Nollywood has significantly influenced tourism in Nigeria. Locations featured in well-known Nigerian films are attracting a growing number of visitors from around the world, which is helping to fuel the expansion of film-driven tourism in the country (Eloka, 2018). Ecotourism is becoming increasingly popular in Nigeria as many domestic and foreign tourists are venturing into the country to experience its many varied attractions (Ijeomab *et al.* 2019). The growing significance of the ecotourism industry in Nigeria is demonstrated by its contribution to the country's economy, various government initiatives, and global partnerships.

Initiatives taken by the Nigerian government to attract tourists

The government of Nigeria has implemented several different programs to boost tourism. The development of coastal and marine tourism (Oladele *et al.*, 2018; Ateme, 2021), the promotion of cultural activities (Leanza *et al.*, 2016), the improvement of infrastructure, the attraction of talent, the addressing of security concerns conservation (Oladele *et al.*, 2018), and the implementation of favourable economic policies are all included in these initiatives. The tourism industry in Nigeria has the potential to use the country's abundant aquatic resources, which would positively affect the country's economy through revenue generation, job creation, and resource conservation (Oladele *et al.*, 2018). The government recognises the potential of coastal and marine tourism in diversifying the economy and reducing dependence on oil (Oladele *et al.*, 2018). Nigeria stands to gain economically and environmentally if it takes advantage of these resources and encourages using them in an environmentally responsible manner.

The government of Nigeria encourages various cultural pursuits to draw in tourists

(Leanza *et al.*, 2016). For example, cities like Calabar, Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Abuja host various cultural events that bring in tourists from all over the country and the world (Umukoro *et al.*, 2020). These events, which include plays, music festivals, and cultural carnivals, highlight the diverse cultural traditions of Nigeria and provide visitors with a one-of-a-kind experience to take home with them (Leanza *et al.*, 2016). In addition to these, the government has made infrastructure a priority to attract tourists. This prioritisation is evident from the challenges identified in Bukola & Olaitan (2018), highlighting inadequate infrastructure as a significant hurdle to developing tourism in Nigeria. Specifically, this prioritisation is evident from the fact that there is a lack of hotels. To solve this problem, the government has prioritised constructing road networks, enhancing water and sewage systems, and implementing efficient waste management practices at tourist destinations.

Furthermore, the government of Nigeria understands the significance of cultivating a talented workforce to improve the country's tourism industry. To accomplish this goal, they have implemented policies and programs that support the education and professional growth of individuals working in the tourism industry. For instance, the government has established training programs and scholarship opportunities for young people to encourage them to pursue careers in the tourism industry (Buzinde *et al.*, 2018). Similarly, the government has made it a top priority to address security concerns to offer tourists a safe and secure environment. As part of this initiative, they have been working to improve security infrastructure, strengthen law enforcement agencies, and enhance emergency response systems. In addition, Eyisi *et al.* (2023) posited that the government of Nigeria has instituted tourist-friendly economic policies to draw in more visitors. These consist of financial incentives, such as tax breaks and grants for investments, that are offered to investors in the tourism industry. They have also worked towards creating an environment conducive to business by simplifying the procedures that must be followed to obtain permits and licenses for companies



involved in the tourism industry (Abe et al., 2014).

Additionally, the government of Nigeria has acknowledged the significance of marketing and promoting the country as a tourist destination. It has done so by recognising the necessity to effectively showcase the images and characteristics of the country that its citizens admire and value. As a result, the government has also implemented other promotional strategies, such as inviting travel agents to visit Nigeria, compiling statistics on the international market, and organising tourism exhibitions and fairs both domestically and internationally. These efforts have increased awareness and visibility of Nigeria as a tourist destination, attracting tourists from within Nigeria and around the world (Oguchi & Luo, 2021).

Economic implications of Ecotourism on Nigeria's foreign policy

Nigeria is a country that is abundant in both natural and cultural varieties of diversity. In recent years, Nigeria has placed an increased focus on ecotourism as a result of the country's promising financial prospects. It has significant potential in Nigeria due to the vastness and diversity of its landscape, which includes savannas, rainforests, wetlands, and a wide variety of wildlife. The Gashaka-Gumti National Park, the Okomu National Park, the Cross River National Park, and the Yankari Game Reserve are all excellent places to visit. Over the past few years, one area that has seen an increase in focus is the promotion of ecotourism as a means of achieving sustainable development and improving Nigeria's reputation in the international community (Oladeji et al., 2022)). Furthermore, ecotourism development can significantly impact Nigeria's foreign policy objectives of poverty alleviation and social development. Ecotourism projects create jobs, particularly in rural areas with limited employment opportunities. This reduces unemployment and enhances living standards, which aligns with Nigeria's foreign policy goal of promoting human development (Iroham & Okorji, 2020).

It is only through an examination of the diplomatic history of Nigeria that it is possible to understand the impacts that ecotourism has had on Nigeria's foreign policy, which is being influenced by many factors, such as the country's commitment to African unification and cooperation, its oil wealth, and the country's military governments that came to power after the country's civil war (Fayomi *et al.*, 2015; Dauda *et al.*, 2021; Ogunnubi, 2016). Nigeria pursued a bellicose approach to its foreign policy because of its increasing wealth from oil exports and its membership in OPEC (Fayomi *et al.*, 2015; Onoja, 2019). However, due to the international recognition of South Africa as a significant actor in Africa, Nigeria's influence on the continent has been reduced (Ogunnubi, 2016). Despite these challenges, Nigeria remains committed to advancing its national interests and taking the lead in several political and economic struggles across the African continent (Ogunnubi, 2016; Ubi & Akinkuotu, 2014).

Promoting ecotourism affects Nigeria's foreign policy as it can improve Nigeria's standing as a destination for ethical and sustainable tourism worldwide, thereby increasing trade, drawing in foreign investment, and strengthening diplomatic ties with other nations (Njoku & Nnam, 2020). Nigeria's dedication to environmental preservation and sustainable development through ecotourism aligns with international initiatives to combat climate change and promote ecotourism, eventually improving its reputation in international forums and solidifying its status as an upstanding member of society.

Ecotourism represents a promising avenue for Nigeria to achieve economic diversification, enhanced diplomatic relations, and poverty alleviation foreign policy objectives. However, successful implementation requires careful planning, investment, and commitment to environmental conservation. By leveraging its rich natural and cultural heritage, Nigeria can harness the economic potential of ecotourism while strengthening its position in the global arena.



Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

Ecotourism is a valuable instrument that may be used to showcase Nigeria's rich cultural and historical traditions. Tourists can experience the country's natural beauty, and they can also participate in the country's diverse cultural practices. The preservation of Nigeria's cultural legacy and the creation of economic prospects for the country's inhabitants are both made possible when ecotourism is encouraged (Kimengsi *et al.*, 2019). Protecting cultural resources is essential to using ecotourism as a platform to exhibit Nigeria's rich culture and history. The COVID-19 epidemic has profoundly impacted Nigeria's cultural heritage materials, stressing the necessity for coordination among stakeholders and digitising these resources to maintain long-term viability (Elochukwu *et al.*, 2023). In addition, ecotourism is essential in developing and enhancing indigenous communities. Providing chances for local communities to participate in tourism activities and benefit from those activities encourages economic growth as well as social and cultural advancement. For instance, ecotourism has had a beneficial effect on the sociocultural aspects of the local populations in the Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary in the Indian state of Odisha, which has contributed to the overall growth of those communities (Das & Chatterjee, 2015).

Rural communities in Nigeria are dependent upon their cultural heritages and have the potential to play an essential role as stakeholders in the expansion of tourism. Tourists can be drawn in by festivals and cultural activities, such as the twin wrestling festivals held in Adamawa State. This helps to increase the involvement of local populations in rural tourism. It is vital to have participatory roles and management frameworks in place to guarantee the active participation of local people in the tourism development process (Tagowa & Hunohidoshi, 2015).

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that occurs in natural and cultural settings and focuses mainly on the former. It encourages new educational opportunities and an understanding of the natural environment in the context of its

cultural background. Constructing a cultural preservation system that considers the place's history, culture, and biological characteristics is necessary for ecotourism's environmentally responsible development. This approach can contribute to the overall success of ecotourism activities by assisting in developing and selling locally produced sustainable and valuable goods (Chrastina *et al.*, 2020; Huang *et al.*, 2022).

There is a strong connection between ecotourism, the protection of natural areas, and the involvement of neighbourhood communities. It blends the interests of tourists with the maintenance of the natural environment and the cultural traditions of the locations they visit. Activities related to ecotourism help educate tourists about the Amazon rainforest's natural and cultural history, which in turn contributes to the region's continued protection of this heritage (Quezada-Sarmiento *et al.*, 2018).

There are many different ways in which ecotourism can affect the communities it visits. It can act as a driver of economic development, resulting in the production of new employment possibilities, the redistribution of previously earned revenue, and the promotion of the export of domestic goods to foreign markets. Ecotourism is also essential to managing biological variety and ecosystem services, providing high-quality tourism experiences, and adjusting local cultures to the demands of visiting visitors (Upadhaya *et al.*, 2022). The country of Nigeria's natural riches, cultural heritage, and the one-of-a-kind events it hosts all contribute significantly to its competitiveness as an ecotourism destination which attracts international communities. These aspects help make the country more appealing as a potential location for expanding ecotourism. Ecotourism development needs collaboration between various stakeholders and acknowledging the significance of the area's natural and cultural resources (Abdullah *et al.*, 2022). Preserving and disseminating Nigeria's rich cultural history and heritage can also benefit from translation worldwide. Even if the government of Nigeria does not actively encourage translation exchanges, the translation of Nigerian literary works into French has the potential to contribute



to cultural diplomacy and promote Nigerian image and culture (Madueke, 2020).

Misunderstandings regarding ecotourism's meaning and purpose have likely played a role in China's slow but steady embrace of the industry. On the other hand, ecotourism has the potential to encourage the preservation of natural areas and the growth of environmentally responsible businesses in less developed regions. A positive correlation exists between China's gross domestic product (GDP) and the country's total population, indicating similarities between the general tourism and ecotourism models (Li *et al.*, 2019). Film is a highly effective medium for maintaining and propagating cultural norms and standards. Films can be utilised in Nigeria to display historical events and local customs, which contributes to a greater appreciation of Nigerian culture both within Nigeria and worldwide (Dairo, 2021).

Local indigenous cultures have the potential to benefit from ecotourism's revitalisation and preservation efforts. Seating some sites as customary villages and developing ecotourism activities can help the surrounding community economically while maintaining their cultural legacy (Hasanuddin *et al.*, 2023).

Ecotourism has the potential to be an effective instrument for presenting Nigeria's rich cultural and historical traditions. Nigeria can attract visitors while protecting and promoting its cultural legacy if it takes steps to preserve its cultural treasures, empower local people, and promote sustainable development. It is essential for the success of ecotourism programs in Nigeria to have stakeholder collaboration, the digitisation of cultural resources, and awareness of the significance of natural and cultural assets.

Building International Goodwill and Cooperation through Ecotourism

Ecotourism promotes cultural interchange, environmental conservation, and economic growth. Building worldwide goodwill and collaboration through ecotourism is worthwhile. If responsible tourism is encouraged, it may benefit local communities and foreign visitors (Choi *et al.*, 2017). Transformational planning of

ecotourism systems promotes worldwide goodwill and collaboration by promoting responsible tourist practices and cooperative governance frameworks to improve local community capability (Choi *et al.*, 2017). When residents operate ecotourism businesses, they feel like they belong. These initiatives help disperse tourism advantages more widely in the community.

Improving educational and interpretive programs and developing ecotourism awareness may foster goodwill and collaboration worldwide (Choi *et al.*, 2017). Ecotourism destinations must have geographically varied patronage to attract international visitors and build collaboration. Nigeria's many ecotourism attractions might make it Africa's top ecotourism base (Amalu *et al.*, 2018). If the government develops and promotes these sites, it can attract tourists globally and boost cooperation with other nations. Successful collaboration and partnerships improve ecotourism. Effective decision-making and sustainability need constructive alliances between public and private stakeholders, natural resource agencies, corporations, governmental authorities, and communities (Feyers *et al.*, 2019). Ecotourism may be developed responsibly and sustainably by fostering stakeholder participation and cooperation, resulting in worldwide goodwill and collaboration. For ecotourism to expand sustainably, government authorities, commercial tourist enterprises, and community people must collaborate to ensure project success and environmental responsibility (Anup, 2016). Ecotourism stakeholders must collaborate, tourism sector firm owners must get ecotourism-specific training, and effective management laws must be enforced to encourage global goodwill and collaboration (Anup, 2016). Ecotourism promotes international friendship and collaboration but requires education. Learning about ecosystem organisms can assist locals, especially those near game reserves and national parks, protect wildlife and the environment (Mohammed, 2022). Ecotourism may teach locals and tourists about biodiversity and conservation, fostering environmental responsibility and international cooperation to protect natural resources. Transformation



planning, geographical distribution and patronage of ecotourism attractions, collaboration and partnership development, stakeholder cooperation, awareness and education, and ICT are needed to generate worldwide goodwill and cooperation via ecotourism. Responsible tourism, stakeholder participation, and sustainable development may increase ecotourism, international goodwill, cultural exchange, environmental conservation, and economic prosperity.

Challenges and limitations

Encouraging visitor safety and addressing security issues are essential to the prosperity and long-term viability of the tourism sector. Travelers' decisions to visit a destination are heavily influenced by their perception of safety and security (Chen *et al.*, 2017). The economic performance of tourist destinations and the decisions made by travellers regarding consumption can be influenced by geopolitical risks and political environments (Olasehinde-Williams & Akadiri, 2020). Consequently, to safeguard the tourism industry, policymakers must create crisis management plans and implement recovery marketing techniques, which will help to restore the industry's reputation for security and appeal (Olasehinde-Williams & Akadiri, 2020).

Tourism safety refers to the range of safety precautions management teams implement at tourist destinations to guarantee visitors' security (Chen *et al.*, 2017). These include information, hygiene, handling accidents, safety precautions (Petruzzi & Marques, 2022), Closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance, the presence of police, and the frequency of crimes like pickpocketing and snatch theft all impact tourists' perceptions of safety and security (Karabi, 2022). Karabi (2022) states that enhancing security measures, such as deploying more police and improving CCTV coverage, can increase tourists' perceptions of safety and security in the area. Regarding peer-to-peer lodging, safety procedures are essential to guaranteeing travellers' safety. Diverse tourist segments possess differing anticipations concerning safety

protocols in peer-to-peer accommodation (Petruzzi & Marques, 2022). While unconcerned tourists might not give much thought to safety precautions, concerned tourists prioritise information and good hygiene (Petruzzi & Marques, 2022). To improve their perception of safety, organisations in the peer-to-peer accommodation sector should adopt customised safety practices based on the preferences of various tourist segments (Petruzzi & Marques, 2022).

Visitors' perceptions of safety are influenced by their subjective feelings of security and the actual risk (Xu *et al.*, 2018). Their perception of safety greatly influences decision-making and satisfaction among tourists, and destinations should concentrate on making a secure environment to draw tourists and guarantee their satisfaction (Xu *et al.*, 2018). This can be accomplished by instituting safety procedures, crowd management strategies, and technology to instil confidence in vacationers (Salangsang *et al.*, 2022). The growth and development of thriving tourist destinations need to prioritise the safety and well-being of visitors (Imbeah, 2018). It is necessary for both the community hosting tourists and the tourists themselves to have a secure environment for tourism to progress (Imbeah, 2018). It is essential to address safety concerns about hosts, tourism resources, tourists, and visitors to ensure a destination is safe for everyone (Nwankwo, 2020). When it comes to effectively managing tourist destinations, crisis management and destination safety are two of the most critical factors (Nwankwo, 2020).

When addressing concerns about security and promoting the safety of tourists, tourism risk perception is another crucial aspect to consider (Cui *et al.*, 2016). The dangers that tourists anticipate encountering at a destination have a direct bearing on their decision to buy there (Cui *et al.*, 2016). As a result, destinations should concentrate their efforts on risk management and reduction to improve the sense of safety and security they convey to visitors (Cui *et al.*, 2016). After the COVID-19 outbreak, cleanliness and safety have become even more significant for tourists (Roxas *et al.*, 2021). The pandemic has



highlighted how critical it is for locations to develop and adhere to comprehensive health, safety, and cleanliness protocols (Roxas *et al.*, 2021). Standardised protocols and frameworks must guarantee tourists' health, safety, and well-being (Roxas *et al.*, 2021). In addition, the participation of the local community and the involvement of relevant stakeholders is essential in planning and implementing initiatives to guarantee a high-quality and safe environment for tourist activities (Roxas *et al.*, 2021).

Addressing security concerns and promoting tourist safety is essential to achieve success and ensure the tourism industry's continued viability. Geopolitical risks significantly impact tourist destinations' economic performance and purchasing decisions, the political environments in which they are located, and crisis management plans (Olasehinde-Williams & Akadiri, 2020). Tourists' safety depends mainly on implementing various safety practices, including but not limited to safety measures, handling accidents, providing information, and hygiene (Chen *et al.*, 2017; Petruzzi & Marques, 2022). Karabi (2022) states that enhancing security measures, such as deploying more police and improving CCTV coverage, can increase tourists' perceptions of safety and security in the area.

Conclusion

Ecotourism may dramatically impact Nigeria's foreign policy and international relations. Sustainable and ethical tourism may boost Nigeria's reputation as an eco-friendly and culturally diverse destination. This would attract international tourists and foster global relationships.

Ecotourism might boost Nigeria's foreign exchange, which could affect its foreign policy (Matthew *et al.*, 2018). Tourism revenue and foreign exchange gains are linked, according to Ajudua *et al.* (2022). Tourism may boost the economy and generate foreign cash. Increased foreign currency payments might boost Nigeria's economy and international trade and investment. Nigeria's foreign policy aims include sustainable development and poverty reduction, which ecotourism may help achieve.

Tourism is crucial to Sustainable Development Goal 11, which promotes sustainable cities and communities, according to Agboeze and Nwankwo (2018). Nigeria may improve its global responsibility by fostering community-based ecotourism. These actions may empower locals, enhance their lives, and promote sustainable development.

Ecotourism may also aid Nigeria's cultural diplomacy. Since Nigeria has many traditions and customs, ecotourism initiatives may highlight its rich cultural heritage, according to Anyanwu (2019). Promoting cultural tourism and conserving cultural traditions may boost Nigeria's cultural diplomacy and increase cultural exchange with other nations, which fosters mutual understanding and collaboration.

Nigeria's foreign policy prioritises wildlife and environmental protection, which ecotourism may help with. Nigeria's natural riches might make it a leader in ecotourism and wildlife conservation, according to Mohammed (2022). This potential is detailed throughout the book. Nigeria may improve its environmental reputation by promoting ethical ecotourism and boosting community awareness. This will aid global biodiversity conservation and ecological sustainability.

Hurdles must be addressed to fully exploit ecotourism's potential effects on Nigeria's foreign policy and international relations. These issues must be addressed. Olusola *et al.* (2021) and Anatusi and Nnabuk (2013) highlight how corruption and regulatory changes have hurt Nigeria's tourism industry. Both concerns hurt the industry. Nigeria must solve these issues through effective management, openness, and policy consistency to maximise ecotourism's foreign policy benefits.

In conclusion, ecotourism may greatly impact Nigeria's foreign policy and international relations. Sustainable and responsible tourism can boost Nigeria's image, generate foreign cash, promote sustainable development, showcase its cultural legacy, and safeguard the environment. Corruption and policy consistency must be addressed to realise these potential benefits. Ecotourism might profoundly affect Nigeria's foreign policy and international relations. Nigeria



can improve its image, create foreign money, promote sustainable development, display its cultural legacy, and save the environment by fostering sustainable and responsible tourism. Corruption and policy consistency must be addressed to realise these potential effects.

Recommendations

Nigeria's foreign policy and relations can change drastically with ecotourism. Here are several ways to use ecotourism to boost Nigeria's worldwide standing, environmental protection, and economic prosperity.

1. Nigeria's foreign policy should incorporate ecotourism to signify its dedication to sustainable development and environmental stewardship.
2. Governmental agencies should collaborate with international organisations to promote Nigeria's ecotourism destinations and experiences abroad.
3. Community-driven ecotourism initiatives should be implemented to empower local populations, enhance socioeconomic development, and foster resource conservation.
4. To mitigate the environmental repercussions of tourism, the government should advocate for sustainable tourism practices and the protection of ecotourism.
5. Engaging in bilateral agreements and participating in cultural exchange programs could facilitate the government's efforts to fortify international diplomatic relations through ecotourism.
6. By adhering to these principles and leveraging ecotourism to enhance its economy and reputation as a responsible and environmentally aware nation, Nigeria can bolster its foreign policy and international relations.

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