

Full Length Research Paper

Agricultural decline and the need for sustainable tourism alternatives in Ndop Central Sub-Division, North West Cameroon

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Agriculture served as the driver for economic development in Ndop from the 1970's to the late 1990's. This region thrived thanks to the activities of the Upper Nun Development Authority (U.N.V.D.A) in areas like agricultural innovations and infrastructural development. The U.N.V.D.A employed over 7000 workers and developed over 3000 hectares of farmland. However, the economic crisis of 1992 in Cameroon also affected the U.N.V.D.A to a point of bankruptcy. Hence dependence on agriculture and natural resources without other alternatives rendered village communities vulnerable. This research therefore set forth to respond to the following question: What tourism potentials are present in N.C.S.D and how could these be exploited as drivers of sustainable development in this region? To provide an answer, several methods of data collection were applied. A matrix for identifying tourism potentials was designed based on ideographic, cognitive and cross-perspective measures. A transect walk through the study area also enabled a better observation of these potentials. Interviews and consultation of secondary sources also complemented the process. It was observed that Ndop has several untapped tourism potentials based on its physical and cultural resources. These resources if properly exploited could lead to sustainable tourism development in this region.

Keywords: *agriculture, sustainable tourism development, tourism potentials*

INTRODUCTION

Ndop Central Subdivision (NCSD) is an administrative unit found in the North West Region of Cameroon (see figure 1). According to Ngwa (1975) the government created *Bureau de Développement de Production Agricole* (B.D.P.A) in this region with the aim of developing its agricultural potentials and creating employment opportunities.

The B.D.P.A was later transformed into the Upper Nun Development Authority (U.N.V.D.A) in 1970 with the objective of creating over 3000 hectares of rice fields and introduction of other crops like improved maize, soya beans and green beans. Beside agriculture, this organisation was involved in farm to market road construction / maintenance, housing development,

creation of ware houses, granting farmer loans, creation of irrigation canals, ensuring sale of rice products, regulating the rice market, creation of rice hauling mills, provision of tractors for farmers, scientific research and above all creation of employment for many local residents (Koghan, 2004).

According U.N.V.D.A records (2005), by 1977 there were 2500 rice farmers, 824 hectares of developed farmlands, 2,884 tons of rice produced and sold for a total cost of 55,695,000 FCFA. At its prime, in 1986, the U.N.V.D.A employed over 7000 workers, developed over 3000 hectares of farmland and generated over 136,000,000 FCFA (best sale though was 538,838,000 FCFA in 1985). According to Canute (2003, p.223) '*between 1977 and 1995, the UNVDA invested an approximated CFA 3.4 billion into the Ndop economy through payments to farmers for their paddy rice*'. However, looking at table 1, it is striking to see how the

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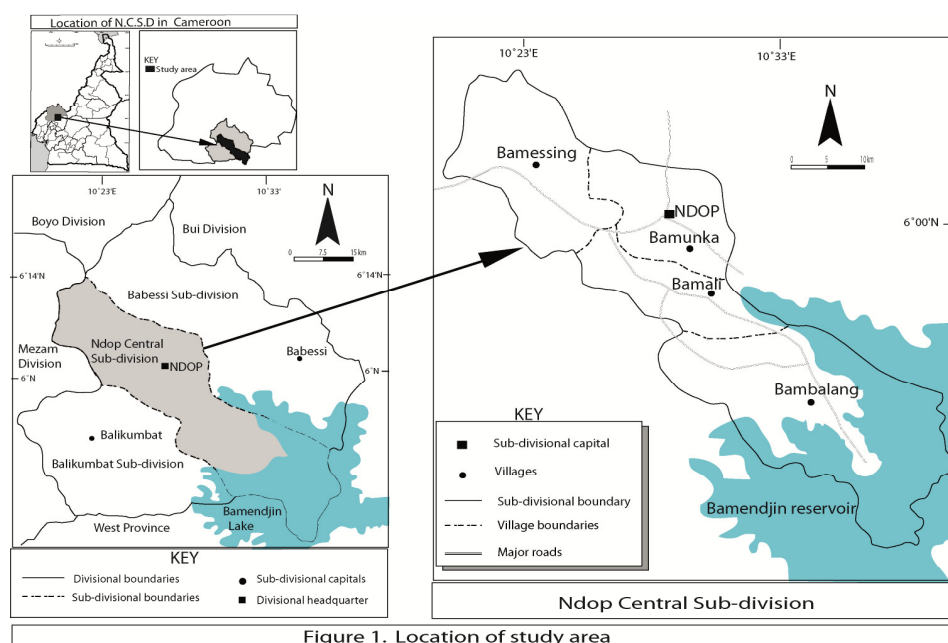


Figure 1: Location of Ndog Central Sub-Division

Table 1: Employment records and rice production by the U.N.V.D.A. from 1977 to 2005

Production year	Number of rice farmers	Surface cultivated (ha)	Average area per farmer (ha)	Estimated production (t)	Tonnage purchased	Purchase cost (F.cfa)	Total cost (F.cfa)
1977/78	2,500	824	0.33	2,884	1,310	42.5	55,695,000
1978/79	2,575	869	0.34	3,041	1,612	42.5	68,510,000
1979/80	2,404	774	0.32	2,709	2,246	42.5	95,955,000
1980/81	2,638	894	0.25	3,129	2,433	55.0	133,815,000
1981/82	3,177	1,273	0.40	5,092	3,162	55.0	173,910,000
1982/83	3,225	1,231	0.38	4,924	3,900	62.0	241,800,000
1983/84	5,542	1,518	0.27	6,092	5,500	62.0	341,000,000
1984/85	6,400	1,753	0.27	7,012	5,753	78.0	386,686,000
1985/86	5,862	2,178	0.37	8,712	6,898	78.0	538,838,000
1986/87	5,687	2,058	0.36	8,232	6,124	78.0	477,672,000
1987/88	4,682	1,612	0.34	6,448	4,937	78.0	385,096,000
1988/89	3,475	1,087	0.31	4,348	1,608	30.0	48,240,000
1989/90	3,350	1,243	0.37	4,972	1,387	36.0	49,932,000
1990/91	3,754	1,215	0.32	4,860	2,448	36.0	88,128,000
1991/92	4,377	1,299	0.30	5,196	2,287	36.0	82,332,000
1992/93	4,386	1,247	0.28	4,988	2,445	36.0	88,020,000
1993/94	4,197	1,245	0.30	4,980	1,830	36.0	65,800,000
1994/95	4,554	1,426	0.31	3,565	0,733	53.0	38,849,000
1995/96	5,715	1,704	0.30	4,260	1,211	83.0	100,513,000
1996/97	5,617	1,744	0.31	4,360	0,578	84.0	48,552,000
1997/98	5,594	1,760	0.30	4,402	0,498	80.0	39,866,640
1998/1999	6,741	2,009	0.30	6,966	0,584	80.0	46,727,120
1999/2000	7,026	2,225	0.32	7,787	0,139	80.0	11,131,840
2000/2001	2,195	1,740	0.35	6,091	1,194	80.0	95,520,000
2001/2002	6,930	3,045	0.44	7,613	1,515	90.0	136,350,000
2002/2003	7,689	2,076	0.27	8,304	0,505	90.0	45,450,000
2003/2004	7,474	1,877	0.25	7,508	-	-	-
2004/2005	6,731	1,531.12	0.22	5,575.48	-	-	-

Source: U.N.V.D.A. reports (2005).



Photo 1 and 2: Farm to market road from Bamali to Balikumbat during September (rainy season).

Source: Mphoweh (2000) & Nzembayie (2014).

hangover of the 1999 economic crises hit this sector to a point where in 2003 there were still over 7,447 rice farmers yet the total rice purchase was only 45,450,000 FCFA.

Following the effects of the 1992 economic crisis that hit several sectors of Cameroon, the U.N.V.D.A suffered from a cut in subsidies offered by the government to a point where it almost ran out of business. The demise of the U.N.V.D.A could be felt in almost every sector of development in this region. Road infrastructure dilapidated due to lack of maintenance, unemployment soured especially amongst farmers, income from rice sales dropped significantly, several benefits initially offered to farmers were suspended and rural urban migration increased tremendously as noted by Canute (2003). In addition was the fact that most farm-to-market roads depreciated to the extent that even if farmers resorted to alternative forms of agriculture, getting goods to the market was a great challenge (Forgwe & Patience, 2014). Photo 1 and 2 are a glimpse of the difficulties farmers tend to face on bad roads moving from one area to another within this region.

Although Susan Whelan, Canadian Minister of International Cooperation once said in 2003 that *'agriculture is central to rural development, agriculture in rural development can help us meet the Millennium Development Goals'* (Canadian International Development Agency, 2003), it is worth noting that high dependence on agriculture over the years has rather rendered N.C.S.D. vulnerable; hence alternative sources of development are needed to improve resilience among rural communities in this region. This also corroborates the opinion by Lee & Neve's (2009) that dependence on agriculture alone is precarious due to climate variability and high potential for low crop yields in some years which further exacerbate the vulnerability. Hence according to Szabo (2005) and Covarrubias (2009) making a community more resilient should entail seeking alternative forms of development like rural tourism, trade, arts and handicraft etc.

Problem statement

In terms of tourism potentials of N.C.S.D, Knopfli (2001), Ghogomu (2000), Koghan (2004) and Ngwa (1979) have carried out researches which reveal that this area has physical characteristics, biodiversity, cultural and administrative components which make it an attractive tourism destination. Also given that rural exodus (marked by the migration of the young active population to the other cities and far beyond from this region) has occurred for a long time in N.C.S.D. (since the economic crisis of 1992) there is a huge potential for visiting friends and relative (VFR) tourism. Uriely (2010), Pearce (2012) and Shani & Uriely (2012) opine that people tend to feel the urge to return to familiar places where they have family and friends or places which they associate part of their lives and childhood memories to. However, little has been done towards branding N.C.S.D as a tourism destination.

In addition, little effort is being made towards seeking other alternatives for sustainable development in this region. Farmers continue being stuck in agricultural activities in spite of the high fluctuations and decline they have experienced over the years. It is on these bases that this research seeks to identify tourism potentials in N.C.S.D and examine how these are or could be drivers of economic development. The aim is to provide answers to the following question: What tourism potentials are present in N.C.S.D and how could these be exploited as drivers of sustainable development in this region?

Situating tourism as a potential driver for sustainable development in N.C.S.D

It is worth noting that high dependence on agriculture over the years has rather rendered N.C.S.D. vulnerable; hence alternative sources of development are needed to improve resilience among rural communities in this region. This also corroborates the opinion by Lee & Neve's (2009) that dependence on agriculture alone is

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Sustainable development issues and a background on N.C.S.D

Harris (2003) highlighted the conflicts around this relatively new paradigm and notes that a final definition to solve this issue was provided by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 as follows: *Sustainable development is development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs* (p.1). Heinburg (2010) observed that this concept is so complex that searches on Amazon for the term in April 2010 yielded 8,875 books and 108,000 journal articles. However, Holmberg, (1992), Reed, (1997) and Harris (2003) are consensual about three essential aspects of sustainable development as follows: *Economic*: A sustainable system should produce goods and services continuously so as to prevent imbalances that could burden agriculture and industrial production. *Environmental*: a sustainable system to maintain stability such that its renewable resources are not depleted.

They should naturally be regenerated in a manner that avoids depletion. Renewable resources to note are biodiversity, ecosystems and the atmosphere. *Social*: the system should function in such a way that there should be equality and fairness in the society as regards access to health, education, resources and other facilities. In line with the current case, N.C.S.D was economically sustainable when the U.N.V.D.A was at its prime, but contrarily its bankruptcy during the 2000's highlights an opposite view of the concept. Also, environmentally, Koghan (2001) and Akendo (1998) have observed that the wetlands of this region have been degraded over the

years, leading to a loss of biodiversity and several ecological functions. Finally, the fact that rural exodus has been reported to be high in this region over the years (Canute, 2003), highlights the fact that there is a lack of equality in terms of opportunities amongst different segments of the society. These arguments usher in thoughts of a region suffering from *unsustainable development*.

Tourism within the context of sustainable development

According to the Office of National Statistics of the UK (ONS, 2010 p.4), tourism is defined as “a movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence, pleasure being the usual motivation.” Several definitions exist for this concept but what are of relevance in this section are the different emerging concepts like sustainable tourism, rural tourism and VFR tourism. The German Forum on Environment and Development (1999) defined sustainable tourism as that which ‘has to meet social, cultural, ecological and economic requirements. Sustainable tourism holds a long- term view, for present and future generations, ethically and socially just and culturally adapted, ecologically viable and economically sensible and productive’ (retrieved from Baumgartner, 2008). Another relevant concept to sustainable tourism is that of ecotourism.

It is defined by the World Conservation Union (IUCN, 1996) as “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations”(retrieved from UNEP, 2002, p.9). In view of a scenario of sustainable development in N.C.S.D, sustainable tourism and ecotourism are two approaches that need to be considered. Also, this region is a rural area and the concept of rural tourism is handy in understanding alternative practices to agriculture as implied by Szabo, (2005). Furthermore, VFR tourism already has great potentials in this region given that it is a hub for rural exodus (Canute, 2003). This form of tourism refers to travelers whose motive of travelling is mainly to visit friends and relatives (Uriely, 2010), (Pearce, 2012) and (Shani & Uriely, 2012).

How the notion of centrality underscores development potentials of N.C.S.D

Heinrich von Thünen and Walter Christaller are pioneers of theories that highlight the centrality of places, Fujita & Thisse (2012) and Hall & Hite (1970). The former focused

Table 2: Matrix for identifying tourism attractions

Perspective and category	Typology and form of evaluation
Ideographic	Mythification
Nature, Nature-human interface	Recreation and entertainment (combined)
Participatory, leisure superstructure	Romanticized tradition versus realistic portrayal
Settlement infrastructure	
Cognitive	Exploration – Escape – Education
Tourism experiences, tourist activities	Enjoyment – Familiar or comfortable (implied in association with ideographic types)
Tourist experiences, tourist activities	Authenticity (implied in association with mythification)
Attraction character	Association with famous other places.
Cross-perspective measures	(Comparisons of advertisements for different places)
Locational	

Source: Robert B. (1979)

on an agricultural land use pattern around a central city, arguing that the type of agricultural products cultivated over different areas were in function of their distances from a central city. This meant that perishable products like vegetables were closest to the city so that they could reach the market faster while non-perishable goods like cereals and cattle could be located further.

This theory revealed the polarizing importance of a central place in shaping its periphery. Walter Christaller on his part argued that towns simply functioned as central places which provide goods and services to their surrounding areas. These surrounding areas tend to be small villages or hamlets which in spite of being at a lower hierarchy also tend to offer goods and service to even much smaller settlements. Hall and Hite (1970) related this theory to the gravity model of flow analysis in order to explain how a central location exerts a force of attraction on its surrounding environments. Elements of these theories will be used to understand the centrality of N.C.S.D. This is so because N.C.S.D. is the administrative headquarter of all the villages considered in this study and beyond. Its administrative and agricultural advantages as will be seen later are important aspects of its centrality.

Methods and approaches

This section will detail methods and techniques of data collection that were used in the current research. The following are discussed in the following sections: framework for identifying tourist attractions, transect walk, sample and interviews and secondary sources.

Framework for identifying tourist attractions in N.C.S.D

According to Lew (1987.pg. 554), “a tourist attraction consist of all those elements of a “non-home” place that

draw discretionary travellers away from their homes. They usually include landscapes to observe, activities to participate in, and experiences to remember. Yet it can sometimes be difficult to differentiate between attractions and non-attractions. Transportation (e.g.,cruise liners), accommodations (e.g.,resorts), and other services (e.g.,restaurants) can themselves take on the attributes of an attraction, further complicating the distinction’. Gunn, (1972) opined that without attractions, there will be no tourism. In this regard, MacCannell (1976) opines that for a phenomenon to be considered a tourism attraction it should have three components as follows: a tourist, a site to be viewed and a marker or image that defines the site. Robert (1979) outlined some key elements for consideration during identification of attractions, clustering them around *ideographic, cognitive* and *cross-perspective measures* (see table 2 for more details).

This matrix will be used in identifying potential tourism attractions in N.C.S.D and its environs.

Transect walk

A transect walk is a tool for describing and showing the location and distribution of resources, features, landscape, and land uses along a given transect ([www.siteresources.worldbank.org/\[09/11/2014\]](http://www.siteresources.worldbank.org/[09/11/2014])).

According to the latter source, it can be used in identifying and explaining cause and effect relationships vis-a-vis topography, soils, natural vegetation, cultivation, production and human settlement patterns and above all can be used for triangulation of data from other sources. By using this tool, knowledge about the present land use patterns, vegetation, farming practices amongst communities could be studied. In line with this research, this approach was adopted. It entailed a walk from the North West part of Bamunka village right down to the southern part over a road stretch that starts from a hilly terrain down towards the swamps in the south (about 10

km stretch). The choice of this section was made based on the fact that this is a much representative portion of N.C.S.D and has similar physical characteristics found in all other villages nearby (hilly to plain terrain). During the walk, observations were made on different land use / land cover phenomena and photographs punctuated the process. On return, the same procedure of data collection was repeated.

Sample and interviews

The aim of interviews was to obtain in-depth understanding of relevant issues in order to generate sufficient qualitative data. It is worth noting that an interview entails a conversation between one or more people in a bid to get their opinion on an issue as implied by Boyce & Neal (2006). The credit of interviews being that they provide forum for asking a lot of questions that are self – generated following responses from previous questions (Raymond, 2006), was an advantage in this study during one-on-one and / or focus group discussions. A sample of 20 local residents, 5 from each village were considered. The target group were people who lived in N.C.S.D through the period from the 1970's to the 1990's when the U.N.V.D.A. was at its prime and are still living there today. An interview guide containing relevant open-ended questions was used during the process of asking questions and responses were recorded on an ipod recorder. The choice of open-ended questions was necessary in order to collect qualitative data. These were later transcribed and coded as per the themes of interest.

Secondary sources

Consultation of secondary sources entailed reading research papers, reports and articles relevant to the theme online and in libraries of the university of Yaounde 1 (Cameroon), U.N.V.D.A. archives and Aalborg University (Denmark). These provided the theoretical and methodological framework needed to respond to the research question earlier stated. Information emanating from this source was also cardinal in guiding analysis of data from other sources. It is worth mentioning this was not only a key source of data, but was also needed for triangulation with data from other sources.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

By now, the choice of the area of survey in this study might have already been understood. As a recap, N.C.S.D was chosen since it offers a great opportunity for observation of dynamics within an entity that once thrived in natural resources but its inhabitants later made a

transition to agriculture. Unfortunately agricultural dependence revealed limitations and vulnerabilities whose solutions could only be perceived in line with sustainable practices. Tourism was chosen within this context given that some potential were identified in NC.S.D. Hence, this section constitutes an identification of items that could serve as drivers for sustainable tourism development in N.C.S.D. Furthermore there is an examination of other issues that could have an impact on such development. The first section will identify attractions under different categories, the second will examine other relevant opportunities and the final section will examine some challenges related to applying a sustainable development approach within the study area.

Natural tourism attractions within an ideographic perspective

The symbiotic relationship that exists between a rich biodiversity and Wildlife tourism in a given location (Okellio & Yerian, 2009 and Higginbottom, 2004) opens vistas of thought about N.C.S.D offering such opportunities. Up until the early 1980's, N.C.S.D had a luxuriant fauna and flora biodiversity constituted of large to small terrestrial mammals and a diverse aquatic life. Evidence from past research by Akendo (1998) and Koghan (2001 & 2004) revealed that hunting and fishing activities practiced in this plain were mainly because of this luxuriant animal diversity. Furthermore, Nzembayie (2007) in a study of the fauna diversity in this plain conducted interviews with elderly local residents and hunters, and based on their stories and relics of animal body parts constituted a list of animals which exists or once existed in this plain. It was evidenced (based on this list) that large mammals like buffaloes, civet cats, monkeys, antelopes etc were once common in this region. There was also a multitude of other small mammals that made up a rich ecosystem in terms of species. Photo 3 shows some relics of animals that were hunted in the past from this region.

It was observed that most of these animals are extinct from the wild; hence the concept of wildlife tourism might not exactly apply in this case. However, the idea of participation at a location being under the ideographic criterion of an attraction (Robert 1979) reveals some potential for tourism in this region. A lot of animal relics are in the palaces of the chiefs of these villages as well as in the keeping of local hunters. Seeking ways of creating a museum containing these relics or simply identifying and mapping location of individuals who own these relics would be a great way of ensuring that a younger generation would learn about their past. Such museums will also be great places for kids to learn about why it is important to protect the environment. Such a concept could generate income through museum entrance fees. This falls in line with the concept of



Photo 3: Large mammal species that once existed in N.C.S.D.
Source: Mphoweh (2009)



Photo 4. Eko hill *source: Mphoweh (2014)*

sustainable tourism that was evoked earlier (German Forum on Environment and Development, 1999).

Furthermore, in line with natural attractions, Nouvelot et al, (1971) in a study revealed the highly contrasting relief in this region punctuated by plains and hills that reach up to 1,111 m. The unique nature of these often volcanic mountains has often defined the myths, legends and local belief systems that characterise the mindsets of most people living in this region. Ngoketunjia hill (height hill 1,111 m) is where the central administrative unit got its name from; an appellation which in the Bamunka local language means 'a rock on top of a house' (Ngo = rock, ke = on top, tunjia = house). Some elements of the myth from local sources go that it was once a house in which people lived but one day a rock fell and covered its exit, trapping and killing people underneath. Besides this hill, other spectacular volcanic plugs imbedded in the myths of this region are: Eko hill seen on photo 4 (believed to talk back to people) and Ngo Mbi hill (sporadic hill of rocks in the heart of the Bamunka village).

Also, N.C.S.D falls within the Upper Nun basin whose contrasting relief of hills and plains is interrupted by a dendritic drainage pattern of rivers. The combinations of tributaries culminate to the River Nun. In 1972, a hydroelectric dam was built on the river Nun with water surfaces occupying over 1873 km³. A study by S.E.D.A (1974) and Koghan (2001 & 2004) however revealed that

this dam led to undesirable environmental and socio – economic changes in the region. But on the bright side, it led to new economic and recreational activities like fishing, boat riding and adventures in and around the lake. These also add to the list of tourism potentials in this region.

Sacred forests are also natural attractions found in N.C.S.D. The role of forest areas that were protected based on traditional beliefs tend to be the last bastions of ecological relics in most communities around Africa (Ylhaisi, 2006) and (Byers et al. 2001). The merit of this practice is also relevant in the villages of N.C.S.D which still practice traditional African religions that uphold the value of maintaining sacred forests in their natural state for use during traditional rites and ceremonies. Such practices according to Wana (2003) are a means of reconnecting with ancestors, preparing for a New Year and/or funeral services. This practice is very relevant to visiting friends and relatives tourists who most often return during holidays to spend time with family or reconnect with lost ones.

Activities as potentials tourism attractions within a cognitive perspective

As a recap, cognitive attractions should entail tourism

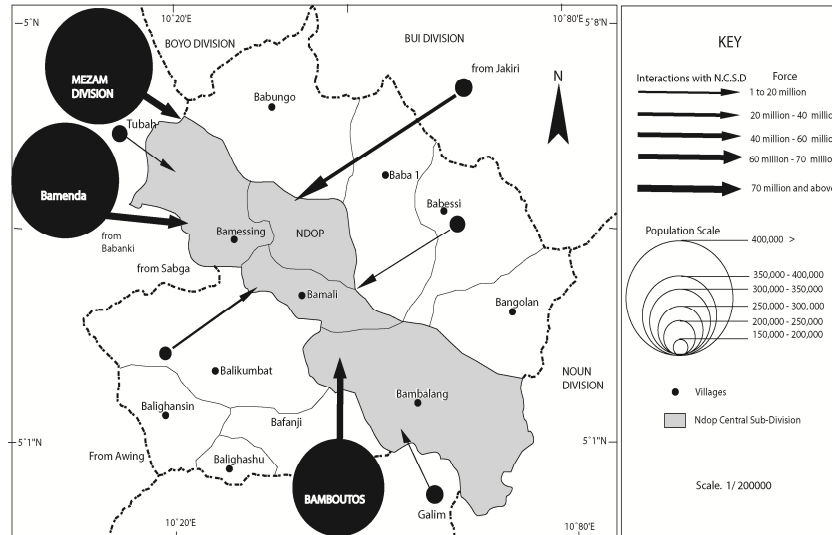


Figure 2: Centrality of N.C.S.D evaluated with the gravity model

experiences and activities that allow for: exploration, escape and education (Robert, 1979). Within this framework, some aspects of N.C.S.D. reveal such potentials for tourism. For example, triathlon could be carried out in this region the reason being that the hills which dominate the Northern part have hiking tracks which are most often used by cattle graziers (Pangmashi, 1999). The plains which almost begin abruptly from foothills are easy to ride through by bike. Finally the southernmost parts contain massive expanses of water from the Bamendjin Lake which could serve for boat riding and fishing. This varying combination of relief features makes it feasible to organize triathlon activities in this region which could be practiced on an individual bases or as a team sports.

In addition to the potential sporting activities, rivers and lakes are favourable fishing grounds. These could be practiced off canoes on the Bamendjin Lake or river sides and canals in rice fields. Also, hunting is still practiced but is no longer as remarkable as it was during the 1970's to 1980's (Nzembayie, 2007). The reason for this is the extinction of many animal species mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, the handicraft sector is well developed and the skills of weaving bags, making baskets, beds and other household equipment were passed on from generation to generation (Wana, 2003). These tools were used before the arrival of modern metal and plastic equipments. This activity still exists although it is mostly practiced by an older generation. Building interest once more in the sector will entail creating centers which offer training for enthusiasts. This could revamp the sector and create an interest for tourists.

Another attraction in this region is its wine industry. There is the white wine (locally called 'white mimbo') that is extracted from oil and raffia palm trees and consumed

without any additional chemical process. In addition there is a locally brewed whisky (called 'afofo') and fermented corn beers that are unique products of this region. As Presenza et al (2010 .p.46) opine, '*the phenomenon of wine tourism is growing and is considered to be a driver for the economic and social development of many rural areas*'. This is a scenario worth considering in the current context.

Bird watching is another potential for tourism in this region. This is an ecotourism activity that is reputed especially in wetland regions around the world (Jones & Buckley, 2001). This plain is characterized by a multitude of migratory bird species that come in at different times of the year (Akendo, 1998), (Koghan, 2004) and (Nzembayie, 2007). Envisaging bird watching as a form of tourism here is therefore possible.

In addition, another human attraction in this region is the annual cultural week of each village during which many performances are staged. Dance groups and traditional rites are performed around the palace of the chiefs and each time, elites return from all around the country to partake in such festivities. This is a strong pull factor for VFR tourists and people from other neighboring villages. Finally, another important aspect to consider when envisaging tourism activities in N.C.S.D is its centrality. Figure 2 is a map that shows how its centrality exerts a pull factor on neighboring villages based on the gravity model.

The centrality of this region is an important determinant of the attraction it exerts on other surrounding towns and villages. This is a cross-perspective measure of a potential attraction (Robert, 1979). Perhaps more striking than the data on figure 2 is the fact that this region contains administrative, health, security and educational facilities that are not found in neighboring villages. These

tend to attract migrants from other areas. The cosmopolitan nature of the central town area also offers unparalleled opportunities for migrant workers. A combination of these factors lends potentials of this region in accommodating diverse tourism activities.

Opportunities and challenges for sustainable tourism development

Sustainable tourism was seen earlier as “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (retrieved from UNEP, 2002, p.9). In this vein, the natural environment of this region has been greatly affected by land use dynamics such that talking of ‘undisturbed natural areas’ is almost farfetched. However, what is left of nature could be preserved further under conservation schemes.

There is hope with sacred forests which have been maintained in their nearly undisturbed form thanks to traditional beliefs. Visiting such areas could be a good ecotourism opportunity in this region. Tourists could also learn about the past vegetation cover of the region thanks to relics found in such sacred forests. From a cultural perspective, there are several aspects in this village that have been preserved and passed on from generation to generation.

A few worth mentioning are the traditional dressing style, locally made utensils, the local wine industry, local meals, cultural dances and above all the traditional religions and laws that govern the land, maintained and controlled by the traditional council led by the chief. In view of sustainable tourism for local involvement in this region, there is need to monetize some attractions which could lead to more participation of the local population and income generation in the short and long run. However, it is worth mentioning that N.C.S.D like most rural areas in Cameroon is facing severe problems of underdevelopment, poverty and insufficient infrastructure. These could also affect development efforts in different aspects. Caution is therefore needed when considering priority areas for tourism development.

Two case studies of potential tourism projects in N.C.S.D

The idea of a museum in N.C.S.D could be conceived around culturally related artifacts collected by individuals in this region over many years. It could also contain relics of animals that were hunted from the region. A registry containing unique items could be drawn up, assigning

names of owners and stories / historical representations to them. In addition to these, there could be a handicraft center that teaches people how to draw or fabricate some of these artifacts. These could be displayed in a Community center that is run either by the local council or a rural development center. After creation of the museum, there should be aggressive marketing to different target groups. Income could be generated through the sale of tickets from entrance fees and from training in the handicraft center. This center will create jobs and generate income which could be distributed to stake holders on quarterly or yearly bases.

Another case is based on the palm wine produced in this region. It is usually consumed on the same day it is extracted because there are no preservation means in place. After a day, it gets sour and is thrown away or loses its market value. In addition, its sometimes seasonal nature of production leads to ruptures in stock in spite of the high demand. Furthermore wine tapping is an activity that seems to be disappearing with aging of the elderly generation. A means of rescuing this sector is to make it more economically potent and sustainable by creating local storage, preservation and distribution units. From such units it could be distributed to other sale networks beyond N.C.S.D. If the income generated through such means increases, there is a chance that the industry will survive. Consuming palm wine is common during traditional ceremonies like funerals, marriages and traditional religious rites. VFR tourists are also attracted to local wine shops while on occasional visits to this region. These highlight the fact that there is a pre-existing market for such products.

The two examples are just a few out of many tourism projects which could be developed in this region. There are other options and opportunities which could further be looked into. The examples reveal aspects of economic sustainability because they could ensure constant income generation over many years to come. Also, such alternatives will reduce over dependence on natural resources and coupled with the idea of creating an ecological museum containing animal relics, there is a great chance of imparting the idea of environmental sustainability in this region.

DISCUSSION

The physical and agricultural potentials of N.C.S.D. partly explains why previous studies in the region sort to expatiate on these aspects as for example seen in works by Akendo (1998), Nzembayie (2007), Koghan (2001) and Ghogomu (2000). However, this study revealed trends in agriculture that have declined over the years and shows how this affected the region negatively. Due to this, rural urban migration increased significantly (Canute, 2003).

This is evidence that over reliance on agriculture (that tends to fluctuate due to external factors) increases the vulnerability of societies that directly rely on it. On this basis, this study built an argument around the fact that tourism could serve as an alternative practice towards sustainable development of the region. Sustainable from a social, economic and environmental perspective as stated in the very definition of the concept by Holmberg (1992), Reed, (1997) and Harris (2003). Based on an identification matrix for defining tourism attractions (Robert, 1979), cross-perspective, ideographic and cognitive tourism potentials were identified. Equally, some tourism aspects that could easily be developed such as museums, the local wine industry and handicraft centers were seen as an easy way to begin tourism activities that could be beneficial for the local communities in this region in the long run. The potentials of tourism in this region are enormous based on the attractions identified earlier. However, some constraints could be envisaged if developing tourism in this region. Given that local municipalities always chase different political agendas during their terms of office, it might be hard to start with a tourism project from start to finish without interruption. Also, the negative impact of tourism in some local communities might make it an unattractive option for some people.

Finally, there were some limitations in this study. It is worth mentioning that the matrix for identifying tourism attractions used for this region might not exactly reflect what a tourism attraction really is. Equally, tourism although being economically potent could also attract negative consequences that are hard to envisage at this point in time. A study on the potential challenges of developing this region as a tourism destination is also important in the future.

CONCLUSION

N.C.S.D. as seen in this study thrived in agriculture prior to the 1970's. Its agricultural potentials coupled with its centrality and administrative functions enabled it to attract a large population from neighbouring villages. However, the thriving economic situation of this area experienced challenges following the economic crisis that affected Cameroon in 1992, forcing the government to cut back on subsidies.

In the particular case, the U.N.V.D.A. which operated as a major agricultural actor in this region experienced cuts in subsidies and later crumbled to near bankruptcy in the early 1990's. Most farmers involved directly or indirectly with the cooperation also abandoned their activities. Rural / urban migration especially among the youthful population soured as a consequence.

In this vein this study identified overreliance on agriculture as exposing the local population to the vulnerability of external fluctuations. The need to resort to

alternative and sustainable practices like tourism was envisaged. It is against this background that the following principal question was asked: What tourism potentials are present in N.C.S.D and how could these be exploited as drivers of sustainable development in this region? In response, it was observed that this region has a lot of physical and cultural potentials which already attract tourists on a small scale but have not been fully exploited. It is on these bases that this study proposed developing such potentials as an alternative form of development in local communities in this region.

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