

Benefits of Golf Tourism to a Suburban Settlement: The Case of Ilara-Mokin in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Sports and associated facilities form a major tourist attraction and contribute to the development of host communities across the globe. This includes the benefits accruing from golf tourism to host settlements. This research focused on the benefits of Smokin Hills Golf Course which is located in a suburban settlement, Ilara-Mokin, in Ondo State, Nigeria. It investigated the benefits of the existence of the golf course to the community at large and to its residents. It equally obtained the negative sentiments of residents of the community about the existence of the golf course. Clustered and stratified sampling techniques were employed to obtain data from a purposive sample size of 150 residents in a culturally and economically homogenous Ilara-Mokin. A structured questionnaire and an interview guide were utilised to obtain relevant data from selected residents and the golf course officials. Among other findings, it was discovered that social benefits outweighed economic benefits accruing to the community while the economic benefits were dominated by sales of consumables such as foods, drinks and farm produce. Recommendations include further infrastructural development of the town and an improved wage for workers at the golf course as indicated by residents.

Keywords: benefits, golf course, sports, suburban settlement, tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

The impact of tourism activities on local communities is far reaching with the possibilities for growth in physical development and the social and economic life of local residents. This appears in form of development of local infrastructure, opening of host communities to the outside world, social integration evolving from interactions (between visitors and host individuals) and the boost to local businesses and job creation. This is not to mention the addition to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a nation's economy.

Golf tourism falls under the umbrella of sport tourism, one of the fastest growing areas in the tourism industry. Golf tourism has been simply defined as travel away from home to participate in or observe the sport of golf, or to visit attractions associated with golf (Hudson, 2009). Within the last few decades, sport and tourism professionals have begun to recognize the significant potential of sport tourism, and they are now aggressively pursuing this attractive market niche (Hudson, 2003). Golf in particular, not only attracts holiday makers globally but also contributes over \$20 billion dollars annually to the economy (Hudson, 2009). Some disadvantages have been associated with golf tourism particularly those relating to ecological or environmental concerns and issues of increasing property values to the disfavour of local residents (Barcelona Field Studies Centre, n. d.). But the benefits would always attract attention. Whether the benefits far outweigh the ills of golf tourism development or vice versa will continue to be a worthwhile debate.

Nigeria boasts of several golf courses. Some of these are found in the south-western part of the country. Of recent, the development of a Golf resort in Ondo state, Nigeria had premiered through the initiation of a government project at Alade-Ilanre town. Transition from one government administration to another had truncated the project. However, the commissioning of Smokin Hills Golf Resort (a private sector project) in Ilara-Mokin town of Ondo state in 2012 brought another dimension of Tourism to the State. Before now, the state could boast of renowned tourist attractions such as Idanre Hills, a mountain resort on UNESCO tentative list of notable tourist sites. The fact that this new golf course is presently ranked the best in Nigeria by certain organisations is a justification for investigation into its development and the benefits it has offered to its host community in social and economic terms.

Residents' assessments of benefits accruing from the golf resort were obtained while the management of the resort also provided relevant information on its contributions to the host community and the existing facilities and competitions organised on routine basis.

2. ABRIDGED LITERATURE REVIEW

Though the origin of the game of golf has been known to be a subject of debates, the Scots were recognised to have created the concept which is that the game starts with the ball situated at a point above ground and later disappears to a location below the ground (Campbell, 1994 in Hudson, 2009). The first reference to golf was when the Scots declared in 1457 that it was interfering with the defence of the realm practice of archery (Brasch, 1972). Despite the declaration, it was still a popular game among the Scots and English; starting with the royalty and later spreading to the common people. This resulted in golf courses springing up all over the United Kingdom. As the British Empire spread in the 19th century, golf courses spread beyond Britain (Readman, 2003 in Hudson 2009).

Outside Britain, the first golf courses were built in India followed golf courses in Asia and Australia in the latter part of the 19th Century. By 1885, golf was well spread across the globe but not in the USA until the middle of the 20th century where it was refined and defined. The contribution of John Reid, a Scottish expatriate businessman in the USA was instrumental to this development of golf in the USA. The expansion of the game worldwide coupled with increase in international travel after the Second World War led to the development of golf tourism.

International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO) in its Golf Tourism Report 2013 document informed that golf tour operator sales grew by 9.3% in the year 2012 (IAGTO, 2013). This was the first report of its kind by the Association. In 2012, the IAGTO operators handled travel arrangements of 1.6 million people which yielded an estimated amount of over US\$2 billion. There is need to be reminded of the fact that not all golf courses or operators belong to the IAGTO; implying that the whole of golf tourism travels and income are not even accounted for by the above statistics. With reference to the experience of golf tourism in Africa (particularly in South and East Africa), the report informed that the growth of tourism in South Africa was not in line with its potential. Coordinated international promotion was suggested as a tool to draw golf tourists to this part of the African continent. This no less applies to golf tourism in other parts of Africa.

In Nigeria, only one golf tourism operator is listed with IAGTO. Recognition of golf courses and easy attraction of golf tourists can be enhanced by such membership, thereby increasing revenue to operators of such golf courses. A more elaborated survey conducted by Sports Marketing Survey Incorporated revealed that within the 2011/2012 survey year, golf tourism contributed 15.1 billion euros to the economy of Europe. This income was a summation of proceeds from direct industries (facility operation, capital investment, golf equipment and supplies, and events/associations) and associated industries (real estate and tourism). 89% of this income was direct industries earnings (Sports Marketing Surveys Inc., 2013).

While considering the case of South Africa, golf course development and golf estates offer new benefits to developing countries by increasing local property values and attracting higher spending social groups. This could contribute a great deal to the economic situation of semi-rural settlements or growing cities. However, loss of biodiversity, heavy water usage and pollution could be major problems. This necessitates the need to consider availability of resources and mitigation plans to support the continual development of golf courses in a country that could boast of more than 500 golf courses (The LiveEco Team, 2011). Keeping the "greens" well and green consumes much volume of water and requires the use of pesticides and fertilizers all both of which greatly impact the ecosystem; hence the need for a balanced assessment of benefits and cost of golf tourism development.

Referring to UNESCO estimates, Barnett (2011) mentioned tourists visiting Granada in Spain use seven times more water than local people while a golf course in Thailand uses as much water as 60,000 rural dwellers. He further affirmed that local and foreign business people, politicians and military leaders form alliance to support lucrative business leading to dispossession and environmental hazards. In South-east and East Asia where golf is big business it is reported that governments often ignore land rights and environmental concerns. Poverty is further aggravated as resorts, hotels and golf courses often divert water, energy and access away from poor communities thereby making life difficult for women and young girls who need them for household use.

Despite the above concerns, certain benefits of golf tourism have been found to include direct and indirect employment and income benefits, tax benefits to local, regional and national governments, attraction of new firms to region, and social benefits through networking. Others include increasing local property value, protection of valuable fragments of coastal

habitat from encroaching urbanization and the opportunity for waste recycling (Barcelona Field Study Centre, op. cit). Considering planning implications, the need to plan for golf tourism regions with the aim of making social and economic objectives compatible is highly essential. This will eventually contribute to the sustainability of the tourism sector, the product, the territory, the landscape and the local community (Priestly, 2006). Issues of housing and hotel development on one hand and golf development on the other hand, availability of legislative framework for golf development in the context of urban development and the integration of golf courses in the landscape are vital in this respect.

In Nigeria, several golf courses exist across the landscape. Each of the different regions of the country can boast of a few golf courses, a far cry from what a country like South Africa has to offer. According to *worldgolf.com* (2016), golf courses in the Southwest Nigeria have been found to include:

1. Ikoyi Golf Club (Ikoyi)
2. Ikeja Golf Club (Ikeja)
3. Ibadan Golf Club (Ibadan North)
4. Ekiti Golf Club (Ado-Ekiti)
5. Ilorin Golf Club (Ilorin)
6. Abeokuta Golf Resort (Abeokuta North)
7. Blue Elephant Cement Golf Club (Ifo)
8. Green Elephant Cement (Sagamu)
9. Dolphin Golf Club (Ojo)
10. International Institute for Tropical Agriculture Golf Club (Ibadan)
11. Lakowe Lake Golf and Country Estate (Lekki)
12. MiCom Golf and Country Club (Ada)
13. Rosani Golf and Recreation Centre (Erinmope)
14. Global Golf Limited (Ikeja)
15. Smokin Hills Golf Resort (Ilara-Mokin)
16. Royal Valley Golf Resort (Offa)

This research exposes some of the benefits that have been reported to accrue to Ilara-Mokin community which hosts Smokin Hills Golf Resort in Ondo State, Nigeria. Latest ranking of October 2015 by *Top100golfcourse.com* placed Smokin Hills Golf Resort as the Number 1 golf course in Nigeria. *SuperSports* equally awarded this golf resource a certificate as the best golf course in Nigeria as at present. This has spurred the need for the investigation into its contributions towards the welfare of the host community.

3. STUDY AREA

3.1 The Study Town - Ilara-Mokin

Ilara-Mokin is a small town located along the Akure-Ibadan expressway in Ifedore Local Government Area of Ondo State, in the south-western part of Nigeria. It is about 9km from Akure city (the capital city of Ondo State). It has a private university named Elizade University and also a golf course, Smokin Hills Golf Resort. Indigenes are mainly Yorubas who are mostly traders and artisans. Ilara-Mokin, which is a quiet town has recently been made popular by the presence of the university and the golf resort both of which came into existence within the last 5 years.

3.2 Smokin Hills Golf Resort

Smokin Hills Golf Resort commenced operation in 2012. It is owned by Chief Michael Adejo, CON. It covers an expanse of 140 hectares and its total workforce is 50. It provides employment for some members of the host community as more than 90% of its workforce are indigenes of Ilara-Mokin. It has 30 temporary and 20 permanent workers. It is an 18-hole golf course with facilities such as a practice range, club house, workers' shed, changing bays and travellers' lodge. Since inception, it has attracted over 500 golfers from within and outside Nigeria. While visitors on sight-seeing pay a fee of N500 each, different club memberships attract varying fees (Table 1). Various tournaments are held on monthly basis and about 33 competitions are held in a year. These include West Africa Golf Tour Series, Mini Golf Tournaments and Golf Tour from L. N. G. Bonny Island among others. The golf resort has favoured the development of Ilara-Mokin by exposing it to the larger world and improving its land value and through the provision of employment to its citizens.

Table 1: Membership Categories at Smokin Hills Golf Resort

Category	Entry Fee	Annual Subscription
<i>Groups</i>	<i>in Naira (₦)</i>	<i>in Naira (₦)</i>
1. Platinum (max. of 10)	800, 000	400, 000
2. Diamond (max. of 6)	500, 000	250, 000
3. Gold (2 members)	250, 000	100, 000
<i>Individual</i>		
1. Silver	150, 000	50, 000
2. Bronze/Non-resident (outside 50km radius)	100, 000	50, 000
Social (uses only clubhouse and practice range)	50, 000	50, 000

Source: Smokin Hills Golf Resort, 2015

3. METHODOLOGY

Both cluster and stratified sampling techniques were employed to obtain data from a predetermined sample size of 150 respondents. The economic and cultural homogeneity of the town encouraged the selection of only 150 respondents and a cluster of residents at the city centre. The stratification was based on the use of the streets at the city centre; comprising the three (3) major streets (Wuraola Adejo, Mokin and Hospital Roads) in the town and five (5) other streets adjoining them. An adult respondent (age of 18 and above) was selected from consecutive buildings on same side of the selected streets (and both sides on the 3 major streets) starting from road intersections. Eight (8) to ten (10) respondents were targeted on the selected streets by 17 pairs of field assistants, making a total of 34 field assistants (Table 2). The respondents who were graduate year students of the Federal University of Technology, Akure were paired to ease interaction with the residents, especially where language barrier could occur. The 150 questionnaire copies were administered and retrieved immediately from respondents (see Table above). Some pairs of field assistants administered questionnaire on same street but at different sections.

Table 2: Distribution of questionnaire copies to respondents

Number of Questionnaire Copies	Pairs of	
	Field assistants	Total
10	3	30
9	8	72
8	6	48
Total	17	150

Source: Author's Compilation, 2015

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Socio-economic Characteristics

The respondents encountered in gathering the data were more of male than female respondents (Table 3). Furthermore, the highest percentage of respondents are young adults in the age range of 18-30 (48%) followed by those above the age of 50 years (23%). The dominant group found here are naturally the most active adults in any community, going by their ages. This comes as a surprise as it is expected that such population distribution should be in the tertiary institutions or in city-based jobs of proximal higher order settlements like Akure city. Two likely scenarios (that are linked) are responsible for this. First, the bulk of those in this group are more disposed to being available to provide response to social research; and second, some of these respondents are at home on holiday. The percentage of those who are students (22%) among the respondents coupled with the artisans (20%) could almost cater for the percentage of those in this young adult age group as presented on same Table 2. However, the total percentage of respondents who are not students is still reliable to obtain feedback on the social and economic benefits of Smokin Hills Golf Resort. In all, it was discovered that only 44% of

the total respondents have not visited the Golf Resort and this was due to lack of interest and partly due to cost of access to the resort which is ₦500 (about 2. 5 dollars at the time of data gathering).

Table 3: Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	85	57
Female	65	43
Total	150	100
Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-30	72	48
31-40	27	18
41-50	17	11
Above 50	34	23
Total	150	100
Education	Frequency	Percentage
None	19	13
Primary	21	14
Secondary	66	44
College of Education	14	9
Technical Education	4	3
University/Polytechnic	24	16
Others	2	1
Total	150	100
Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Civil service	12	8
Trading	46	31
Farming	24	16
Artisan	30	20
Schooling	33	22
Others	5	3
Total	150	100

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2015

5.2 Contribution to Life of Residents

The contribution of the Resort to the life of residents in the community was assessed on the basis of contribution to the life of the respondents and also to that of their relatives as observed by the respondents. The sum of responses in favour of personal benefits (since an individual might have benefited in more than one form) directly or indirectly from the establishment of the Resort is 61% of total responses as presented on Table 4. Those responses in support of relatives' benefits amount to 58% of total responses. These two percentages are close and the responses were dominated by economically related helps (rather than social) such as employment, improved business and financial assistance. It is not a surprise that there was low response on the financial assistance to relatives when compared with personal financial assistance as most individuals would definitely keep such as secrets from their relatives. Socializing was more of a personal thing, hence it was difficult for respondents to inform about how that has benefited their relatives. But for personal benefits, it still ranks higher than those economic benefits which are directly linked to the Resort such as employment and financial

assistance. In both cases, the percentages of responses for “none” benefits, though less than half, are still considerable in value.

Table 4: Contribution to Life of Residents

Contribution Type	Personal Life		Family Member	
	Frequency	Percentage of Total Response	Frequency	Percentage of Total Response
None	63	39	66	42
Improved business	48	29	23	15
Socializing	27	17	-	-
Employment	14	9	61	39
Financial Assistance	8	5	1	1
Others	2	1	4	3
Total	162	100	155	100

Source: Author’s Fieldwork, 2015

5.3 Observed Economic Benefits to Community

The economic benefits to the community as observed by respondents are presented on Table 5. The dominant improvement in the economic life of the community manifested in the sales of consumables such as foods, drinks and farm produce. 63% of the responses favoured this indication. The next major benefit was in the sale of art, craft and textile. The data obtained and earlier presented on the occupation of the residents/respondents (Table 3) confirm this outcome, since the actively working ones (not considering the students) are mainly traders, farmers and artisans. The items involved are also the major needs of tourists and visitors and they usually complement the provision of tourist attractions in any settlement. Tourists must feed and at times, they want to have a feel of the local cuisine. This is in addition to special interest in the items that portray the culture of the tourist destination as depicted in the local art, craft and textile. They take away such as souvenirs from the tourist attraction environment. Small hotels are equally upgraded due to increase in patronage while new ones begin to spring up.

Another important addition to the town is the increase in land and rental value. About 64% of the respondents indicated that land and rental value had increased since the Golf Resort started operation. However, this could be both a blessing and a curse in analytical terms. More money is being made by some persons but at the expense of losing cultural ties to land and also forcing out the poor who could not keep up with affordability of such increased rent and cost of land.

Table 5: Observed economic benefits to community

Benefits	Frequency	Percentage of Total Response
Sales of Food and Drink	84	43
Sales of Farm Produce	40	20
Sales of Art, Craft & Textile	28	14
Building of New Hotel	22	11
Others	23	12
Total	197	100

Source: Author’s Fieldwork, 2015

5.4 Observed Social Benefits to the Community

The intensity of responses to social benefits was higher than that of economic benefits as could be seen in the total number of responses (see Tables 5 and 6). This gives an indication of a greater consciousness and intensity of social benefits than the economic benefits in Ilara-Mokin. On the social benefits, the fact that the town has become more popular than it was before the advent of the golf course attracted highest response; followed by increase in number of visitors. These two are not mutually exclusive but influence each other. The more popular a settlement is (for a particular purpose), the higher its

likelihood to attract visitors (for same purpose), especially if the factor in question is a positive factor. The case of entertainment generated by the existence of the resort and the improvement in the beauty of the town attracted virtually same response. The roads in the town particularly towards the Resort have been improved upon and construction work was still going on at the time of data gathering. This has truly added to the beauty of the town while some form of entertainment also needed to be provided for visitors.

Table 6: Observed social benefits to community

Social benefits to community	Frequency	Percentage of Total Response
Popularity	84	36
More visitors	63	27
Entertainment	41	17
Greater Town Beauty	37	16
Sight-seeing to Golf Resort	10	4
Total	235	100

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2015

5.5 Combined Benefits of Golf Resort to the Community

The very high total response here does not come as a surprise as this was expected to combine and compare the benefits to the community in both economic and social terms (Table 7). The data also confirms the aforementioned findings on greater social benefits than economic benefits. Responses in favour of social benefits (more visitors and town popularity) topped Table 7. The response on improved infrastructure which falls below the economic benefits (employment and improved business patronage) could as well have both economic and social benefits. The "others" benefits (attracting just 4%) were small indications of such things as improved health and donations to the community. The very few that have been opportuned to visit the Resort as indicated by "sight-seeing to the Golf Resort" (on Table 6) are of the opinion that the such exercise has contributed to their health. As could be observed at this point, attraction of more visitors ranks higher than town popularity (when compared with the presentation on Table 6). It was difficult insinuating why respondents' perception changed at this point in time. But as equally noted earlier, these two factors reinforce or complement each other. Also, the presence of a private university in this town could have equally contributed to at least one of these high responses. For example, more persons outside Ilara-Mokin town are aware of the existence of the private university in town than they are aware of the Golf Resort. Seekers of higher education are more than players of golf.

Table 7: Combined benefits of resort to the community

Contribution to Community	Frequency	Percentage of Total Response
More Visitors	91	33
Town Popularity	60	22
Employment	44	16
Improved Business Patronage	38	14
Improved Infrastructure	29	11
Others	13	4
Total	275	100

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2015

5.6 Areas Needing Improvement by the Golf Resort

Respondents freely commented on what they would want improvements on. Due to the economic status of most residents, they still felt that it was too expensive to pay just 2. 5dollars to sight-see on the Golf Course. Most of them were of the opinion that the Resort was meant for the elites and the rich. They also felt that it was not directly contributing to the development of the town and so would prefer better involvement in the infrastructural development of the town. The need to make further efforts towards town beautification was particularly mentioned. These two observations corroborate earlier presentations on this subject. Some equally observed that the security personnel were too strict in the manner of attending

to visitors while the need to increase the wages of workers was equally mentioned. The residents would appreciate improvement by the management of the Resort in these areas mentioned.

In summary, it was observed that the residents of Ilara-Mokin observed greater social benefits at community level than the general economic benefits that have accrued to the community. Whereas, at personal level, the economic benefits were valued higher than social benefits. In this sense, the type of social benefits to the community is different from social benefits that are connected to the individuals; whereas the communal economic benefits were viewed as same type and are aggregates of what individuals have gained from the Golf Resort. This is responsible for greater appreciation of the social benefits at community than on personal level. The social excitement of seeing and interacting with a few visitors at personal level was not as valuable as the social benefit of town popularity and attraction of more visitors to the community.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from this research, relevant recommendations are needed to promote the contribution of resorts to the development of host communities, particularly as it relates to golf resorts.

Golf resorts provide certain benefits to host communities. Such benefits include employment of indigenes as workers at the particular resort. However, the need for such tourist attractions to pay good wages to such employees is paramount in the developmental process of host communities. With the low infrastructure development of some communities, as reflected in Ilara-Mokin, provision of certain facilities by the resort to meet community needs will be appreciated by residents. This gets tourist attractions involved in the social responsibility of community development in host communities.

Furthermore, as observed from the findings that communal social benefits outweighed personal social benefits, governments need to partner with operators of tourist attractions to provide opportunities for improving the social life of host communities. Organisation of competitions and provision of sport facilities could be useful in this sense. This provision will also complement the major tourist attraction in the community. Indigenes have the responsibility to improve the local souvenir industry through improved production and packaging. This will equally improve the economic situation in the host communities. Special markets and shopping outfits for souvenirs which are customized with the name of the host community will add to community branding.

This paper has revealed the kind of benefits gained by a local community from the existence of a golf resort. It has revealed that the structure of the benefits gained by individuals in the community could vary from that of the general benefits to the community. It exposes the need for the souvenir industry to improve in the quantity and quality of its production towards adding to the economic benefits that can accrue to a community from the existence of tourist attractions. It also encourages a sustainable provision of local cuisine. Wage structure of indigenous workers at tourist attractions will need to improve in addition to community development efforts. Issues of town beautification and improved entertainment through the provision of good road access and effort to meet visitors' fun demand respectively have equally added to the benefits gained by communities from tourist attractions.

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