

# Native Craft and Tourism: A Study of Ushafa Pottery

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**Abstract**— *The main thrust of the paper was to discuss the relationship between indigenous craft and tourism development using Ushafa pottery as the focus of inquiry. Adopting the qualitative approach to enquiry, the study sought to, among other things, study the processes of pottery making, ascertain the challenges which confront potters, and investigate the contributions of pottery to the development of Ushafa. Findings show that the processes of pottery production include collection of clay, breaking of clay into small particles, sun-drying and soaking of clay in water as well as sieving to produce fine clay. Other stages are kneading for plasticity, moulding, application of designs and finally, firing or baking of clay item. Pottery which leads tourism growth in Ushafa has made the following contributions such as improvement in local economy, provision of basic amenities and self-esteem among community members. Challenges of Tourism Development in Ushafa include the deplorable condition of the road leading to the clay mining area; the need for increased marketing outlets for pottery products, corruption and community poor hygiene.*

**Keywords**— *Craft, Pottery, Tourism Potentials, Ushafa.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Craft is the artistic practice of using hand and simple tools in making objects through the skillful manipulation of resources such as clay, wood, glass, textiles, metals and leather. Craftsmanship, on the other hand “is a form of production, a form of social organization and also a material basis for symbolism” (Andrea Rusu 2011).

In Nigeria, several cultural groups had well-established traditional craft practices before coming intact with western civilization. Oloidi, F.J. (2014), for instance, makes reference to the Ekiti people of south-western Nigeria who had well-developed smelting, smithing, pottery and weaving technologies before colonialism. In their book titled ‘*Tourism in Nigeria*’, Okpoko, A.I and Okpoko, P.U. (2002:63-64) remark that Awka and Nkwerre people in south-east and south-south Nigeria respectively are acknowledged masters in blacksmithery, the Annangs in Akwa-Ibom State are noted for producing amazing variety of cane and raffia crafts while in Kano, Sokoto and Borno states, high quality leather goods are

produced. They also mention the people of Benin kingdom as high quality brass workers and the Nupe people as acclaimed glass ware producers.

Pottery is among the most enduring crafts known to human race.

*In most places it is the oldest and most widespread art; primitive peoples the world over have fashioned pots and bowls of baked clay for their daily use. Prehistoric remains of pottery have proved of great importance in archaeology and have often supplied a means of dating and establishing an early chronology. Pottery has also been of value as historical and literary records, for instance, ancient Assyrian and Babylonian writings were inscribed on clay tablets (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th (Ed.) 2016).*

As tourists crave to experience the material culture of tourism host communities such as their artistic ingenuity and purchase authentic and exquisite hand-crafted ware as souvenirs, pottery is also relevant to tourism. In the small community of Ushafa in Bwari Area Council of Abuja, Nigeria, pottery is spearheading the development of tourism. The general aim of the paper was to study the craft of pottery in relation to tourism development in Ushafa community. The specific objectives were to:

1. Study the processes of pottery making,
2. Ascertain the challenges which confront potters,
3. Investigate the contributions of pottery in the development of Ushafa, and
4. Identify other tourism resources in the area.

The study was based on the qualitative or naturalistic methodological foundation. One-on-one interview, focus group discussion (FGD) and field observation were the techniques used in gathering primary data; these methods were complemented by secondary data sourced from books, journals and public library.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In tourism business development, Richards (1999a), cited in Rogerson and Rogerson (2011) observes that “culture, crafts and tourism are rapidly becoming inseparable partners; local crafts are important elements of

culture and people travel to see and experience other cultures, traditions and ways of living". As noted by Timothy (2005), crafts often represent an important element in the shopping activities undertaken by tourists.

Okonkwo and Oguamanam (2013) studied the traditional crafts of Etim Ekpo people in Akwa Ibom State which include carving of mask and drums, making of mortar, building of canoe and figurine production. These traditional crafts, they argued, have contributed and still contribute immensely to the economic well-being of the people by way of purchasing or renting of carved objects.

Okonkwo and Oguamanam (2013) believe that proper harnessing of the traditional crafts can spearhead cultural tourism development in Etim Ekpo; however, they identified certain issues which have to be addressed. These include poor government attitude towards promoting and encouraging the production of local crafts, lack of incentives, grants, seminars and workshops to encourage and facilitate the production of traditional crafts, lack of preservation and conservation measures for carved items, and the adverse influence of Christianity whereby many view indigenous crafts with religious values as fetish. Another key issue raised elsewhere in the literature is the need to create adequate marketing outlets for folk crafts.

Indeed, Redzuan and Aref (2011) remark that craft producers are confronted by various marketing challenges which make it hard to attain market size in terms of product quality and bulk production. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2008), core issues for handicraft enterprise development are the existence of small and insecure markets as a result of low rural incomes, seasonality, poor access to external markets and severe competition among producers. For the reason that tourists always seek to purchase items considered 'typical' or 'authentic' cultural products of destination area, indigenous crafts must have recourse to tourism as one of the major ways of resolving these issues. This raises the need for strategic alliance between tourism and craft.

In a study by UNESCO it was found that "handicraft production in developing countries now depends in large part on the demand generated by the tourism industry and by the business activities of intermediaries" (Richard 2007). In Morocco, for instance, it was averred that the craft sector garnered as much as 54% of tourists' total daily expenditure (Berriane 1999). The aforementioned confirms that tourism is a key avenue of reviving and sustaining traditional crafts. Thus, as Lacher and Nepal (2010 in Rogerson and Rogerson 2011) have duly argued, a promising area for policy intervention may enhance craft producers' access to markets is that of strengthening the linkages between craft makers and tourism value chain (Ashley 2006, Lacher and Nepal 2010).

### III. USHAFI: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

#### Geographical Location

Ushafa is a small Gbagyi community in Bwari Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory. Created on October 1, 1996 by the regime of late military head of state, General Sani Abacha, Bwari Area Council is an embodiment of tourist attractions. Bwari Area Council represents an investor's delight in the area of tourism; several studies on tourism development in Nigeria have constantly placed the area council as one of the areas with the greatest potentials of tourism development in Nigeria.

The village of Ushafa is located on a valley surrounded by mammoth rocks of possibly Precambria age. Its beautiful landscape is complemented by rich and attractive vegetation. Its neighboring villages include: Jigo, Payi, Znibepe, Bmuko, Kutalu, Baupa, Gudupe, and Panda. Ushafa is bounded on the south-eastern corner by the Lower Usuma Dam, a major source of water to the Federal Capital Territory. A drive from Abuja City to Ushafa takes about 20 minutes using a sound vehicle.



*Plate 1: A View of Ushafa Community*

#### Historical Background

According to the community leader of Ushafa, Alhaji Baba Muhammed Akwanga, Ushafa people originated from Kano as hunters. As time passed by, they migrated to a place known as Keteyin south of Zaria, then to another village called Yaupe before settling in their present abode – Ushafa. It is believed that the people of Ushafa started their occupation of Ushafa land at about the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

On arrival at Ushafa, the people dug a pit for cloth dying, a stick was tied at the centre of the pit for turning dye. The Esu of Ushafa remarked that during Colonialism, white men paid courtesy visit to the community leader and they (the white men) were taken to the pits where clothes were dyed. Unfortunately, the researcher could not photograph the Ushafa ancient dye pits because of certain rituals that must be performed before one is taken to the pit.

As a community rich in pottery tradition, the ancient Ushafa people needed to carry their pots to the market for sale. The pots were put in a sack, but there was a problem of how to tie the sack. 'Ushafa' was the

original name of this community, but as a result of wrong pronunciation, the first white men to visit the area changed it to 'Ushafa'. 'Ushafa' means 'show how to tie', thus, the community derived its name from the question that was asked concerning how to tie the sack that contained pots: 'show how to tie it?'

### The People and their Socio-Cultural Setting

Ushafa people belong to the Gbagyi Culture, and it is the largest ethnic group in the Federal Capital Territory. The local language is also called gbagyi, but when the people interact with other northern ethnic groups in Nigeria, the medium of communication is Hausa. Gbagyi, according to the Esu of Ushafa means to 'carry load on the shoulder'. Because the chief agricultural produce of the Gbagyi people is yam, Gbagyi indigenes are also called gwari, which means 'yam'. The Esu of Ushafa remarked that the idea behind the tradition of carrying load on the shoulder instead on the head is to avoid any damage to the brain, which is the centre of co-ordination. From observation, however, this practice is gradually going into extinction with more enlightenment through formal and informal education. As was observed, carrying load on the shoulder is more unpopular among the younger generation.

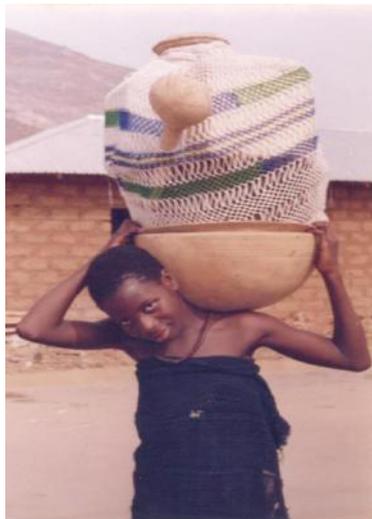


Plate 2: Ushafa Girl with Load on Shoulder

The people of Ushafa are very hospitable, this accounts for the presence of different ethnic groups in the community. An interviewee from Zango Kataf, Kaduna State noted that the hospitality of Ushafa people has led to the transformation of the community.

Ushafa traditional technology (arts and crafts) includes: the legendary pottery works, weaving of mats, hats and bags, dying of cloth (tie and dye). Among these crafts, the pottery tradition is the most popular and has brought much fame to the community. Ushafa pottery is simply amazing, many prominent personalities like former US president Bill Clinton, have visited Ushafa because of

the pottery tradition and other natural and cultural heritage of the community.

Ushafa has an annual traditional festival known as *Zhibaje* in which sacrifice are offered to the spirits or ancestors of the land. *Zhibaje* is a masquerade festival which causes rain to fall. It takes place between October and December of every year accompanied by frenzied dances such as *akakayi*, *amadawada*, and *amoaknu*. The masquerades are prepared on top of the rocks which surround the community.

### Traditional Political System

The community leader of Ushafa takes the title of Esu meaning chief. The community leader is chosen through the decision or verdict of elderly men in the society. In this election, the old men would evaluate the suitability of the intending community leader in managing the affairs of the community. According to the Esu of Ushafa, Ushafa community has a ruling cabinet of ten members headed by the community leader – Esu. The remaining nine members are all assistants, but three out of these nine stand out. Their titles are Gikwo, Sarkin Padan, and Galadimma. The Sarkin Padan ranks highest among the three.



Plate 3: Esu Palace, Ushafa

### Economic Activities

Ushafa indigenes are hard working people, they engage in certain economic activities to keep body and soul together. Economic activities of Ushafa people are: production of pottery items, cloth dying, weaving of mats and bags, farming, honey production and trading etc. The people market goods within and outside Ushafa village. Within Ushafa, there is a market square known as Ushafa Market Centre where people sell their goods; those who do not want to go to the market square have individual shops where they do their marketing.

Ushafa community has large arable expanse of land for agriculture. The chief farm produce of the community are yam, maize, and guinea corn. The presence

of locally made granary (*dobwi*) for storage of cereals like guinea corn and maize depicts the community as a typical agrarian society. Realizing its agricultural potentials, the

Bwari Area Council has constructed modern granaries to support locally made ones thereby encouraging local farmers.

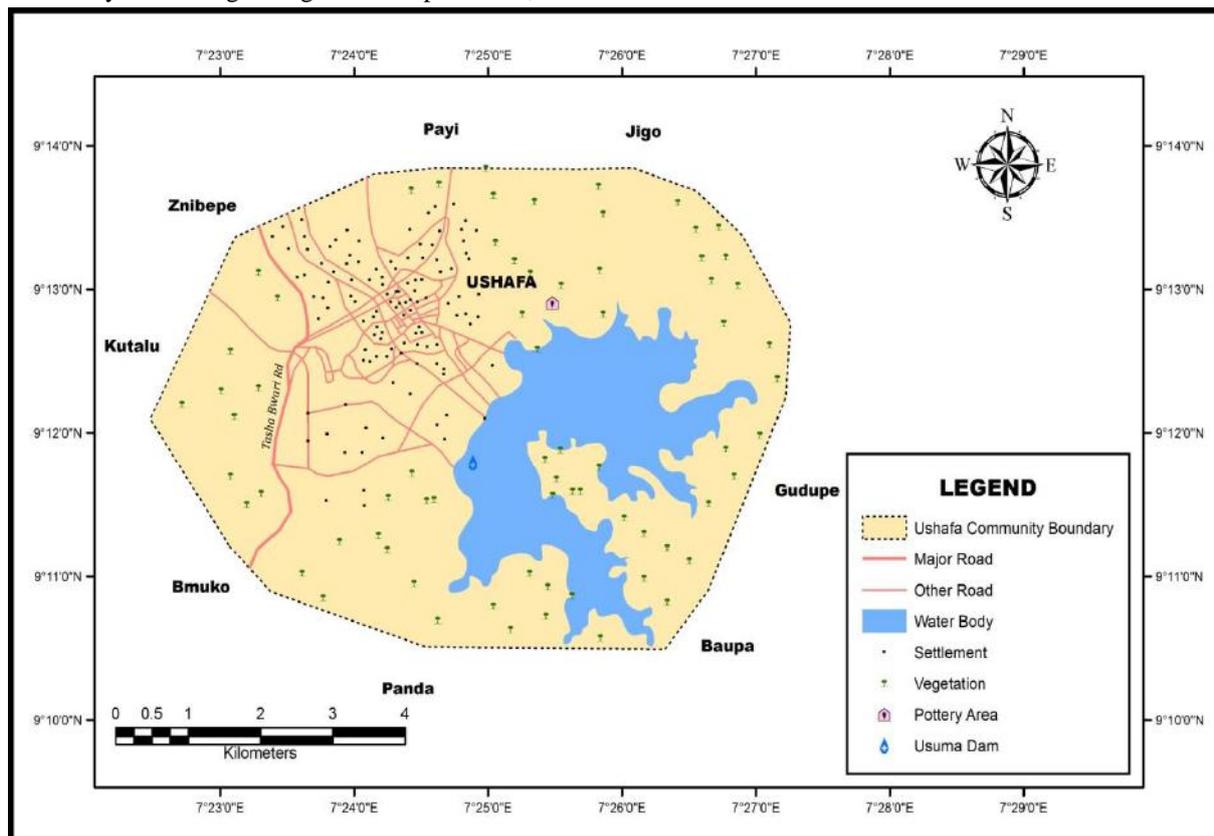


Fig. 1: Map of Ushafa showing the Usuma Dam

#### IV. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### Ushafa Pottery Centre

Ushafa Pottery Centre was established in 1991 during the “Better life Programme for Rural Women” by former first lady, Late Mrs Mariam Babangida, as a women skill acquisition centre. The centre has two sections: modern and traditional sections. The modern or contemporary section is where instruments such as potter’s wheel is used in making pottery, it also serves as a research centre and accommodates IT students from various higher institutions all over the country.

Few metres away from the modern pottery section is situated the traditional pottery production square. The section is made up of little round huts depicting the traditional Ushafa house pattern. The huts were constructed by government and given out free of charge to Ushafa women potters as encouragement.



Plate 4: Traditional Section of Ushafa Pottery Centre

##### Stages of Ushafa Pottery Production

The raw material for pottery making is clay. Clay comes from a kind of rock called feldspar. In its purest form, clay is represented by the following formula:  $AL_2O_3.2SiO_2.2H_2O$ . Clay is locally known as *ezun*. This can be collected around rivers, from surface collection, or is deliberately mined. For commercial production, Ushafa women mine clay at a location of about twenty-five minutes motorcycle ride from the Ushafa Pottery Centre.

The road leading to the clay mining spot is not only lonely but also very rugged.

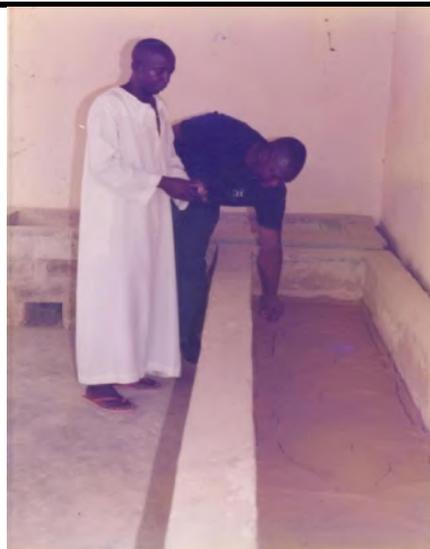
After collecting the clay, the next step is to break the clay into small particles, sun-drying of the clay and then soaking of the clay in water for about two days. The clay is then sieved to remove hard lump and other impurities. This is very necessary because finer particles of clay make for more plasticity. The fine clay is then poured in a clay bed for solidification or setting, and then left in the clay bed for about two days for it to get set.

The next stage is what is called 'kneading'. Kneading makes it possible for the clay particles to become very plastic, this allows the clay to be formed into any shape desired by the potter. To begin moulding, the potter has to cut the kneaded clay into the sizes required for the item to be produced. Potter's wheel is used to enhance moulding in modern pottery making, the wheel turns the clay as the potter forges the clay into desired shape and style.

Application of designs (decoration) is done when the clay item is at the level of what is called 'green ware' (unfired clay). According to Solomon Twani, a staff of Ushafa pottery centre, designs are incorporated on clay materials by the use of brush or cutting blade. It was observed, however, that the local women use their fingers, potsherds, brooms and the liquid from the bark of locus bean (*dawadawa*) to incorporate designs on pottery items.

The final phase is 'firing'. Firing is a process of treating clay or other plastic ceramic materials with heat to produce a hard, durable but brittle material such as pottery (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th (ed.) 2016). Two classes of firing were identified: bisque and glaze firing. The first is referred to as bisque firing because it comes out in a biscuit form; it lasts for about five hours reaching a temperature level of between 600-900<sup>0</sup> Celsius. The second – glaze firing – is for table wares, it lasts for about ten hours, recording a temperature of about 1600<sup>0</sup> Celsius. Glaze is translucent layer that coats pottery to give the surface a finish or afford a ground for decorative painting (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th Ed. 2016).

The modern pottery section at Ushafa pottery Centre makes use of kiln (furnace for firing pottery) supported by chimney in firing clay items, while the local women simply fire their products by burning dry grasses which have been place inside and on top of the pottery items.



*Plate 5: Tour guide, Abubakar Saidu,(left) showing the researcher round the clay bed section.*



*Plate 6: Kiln*



*Plate 7: Modern Pottery Production using Potters wheel*



Plate 8: Local mode of pottery making

### Socio-Cultural and Religious Importance of Ushafa Pottery

Ushafa pottery items, apart from their aesthetic purposes, serve various socio-cultural and religious uses. Ushafa pots are used for cooking, fetching water, storage of water and other edibles. Again, the Ushafa clay pots have some spiritual or religious attachments. Solomon

Twani, an informant, remarks that the Ushafa clay pots are used to cook medicine. People come from afar to buy the Ushafa clay pots for the preparation of medicine. According to Twani, the efficacy of medicine prescribed by native doctors can be assured if the medicine is prepared using the Ushafa clay pots. Finally, the pots in Ushafa traditional society is used in burial as the pots are lined around a dead person filled with sand before interment.

The aesthetic beauty of Ushafa pottery works has today made Ushafa very popular. The Ushafa pottery works are simply scintillating; their finishing touches are very awesome. Saidu Abubakar, the chief potter at Ushafa pottery centre, remarks that most of the pots used for decoration at important places in the capital city of Nigeria are got from the small village of Ushafa. During the researcher's stay at Ushafa pottery centre, Nigerians and foreigners always troop into the pottery centre to admire and buy Ushafa pottery items. Indeed, Ushafa pottery is already a tourist attraction for the federal capital territory of Nigeria.



Plate 9: Clay items depicting the aesthetic beauty of Ushafa Pottery

### The Lower Usuma Dam

The Lower Usuma Dam is another tourism resource in Ushafa. The dam is the chief source of water for the Federal Capital Territory. It is located at the south-eastern corner of Ushafa village. Standing by the Lower Usuma Dam, one could capture a panoramic view of this beautiful community. From the way it is now, the Lower Usuma Dam could be described as a potential tourist attraction, but little tourism activities are already going on there. For example, Julius Berger, a foremost road construction company in Nigeria usually sends visitors to their private vacation camp on the banks of the dam. Apart from the scenic beauty of the dam, local people who go

fishing in their canoes provide additional excitement and attraction.

In developing tourism potentials of the Lower Usuma Dam, fishing activities can as well be incorporated into the overall planning and development of the dam. This is valid because fishing activities would constitute additional attractions for tourists. What is more? Fishermen can also take tourist out for excursion in their canoes as a source of supplementary income.



Plate 10: The Lower Usuma Dam

### Prospects of Tourism in Ushafa

Top on the prospects of tourism development in Ushafa is improvement in the local economy. This can be buttressed using Ushafa women potters whose economic status has been positively affected as a result of pottery, which for now is the chief tourist attraction in the community. As was observed during the research, Nigerians and foreigners who buy pottery works do visit the Ushafa pottery Centre to admire and buy pottery items. Apart from this, most of the clay pots used for decoration at important places in Abuja including religious places are bought from Ushafa. Thus, the economic status of the

producers is enhanced. During an interview session at Ushafa Pottery Centre, one of the potters, Dorcas Titus, remarked that they do not have any other work to do if not for pottery production of which a sizeable number of those who patronize them are tourists. This goes a long way to reducing the number of people who would have been economically incapacitated.

Furthermore, tourism provides the opportunity for Ushafa traders to make profitable brisk sales. Ushafa community always hosts important dignitaries because of its tourism status, and there is usually large influx of people into the community during such visits by prominent personalities. Visitors patronize local traders especially by buying food, drink and snacks. During the field work, the researcher had the opportunity to witness the endurance trek of corps members which terminated at Ushafa community. It was not a coincidence, Ushafa was deliberately chosen so that corps members could witness the rich cultural and natural tourism resources of the community. It was awesome witnessing the magnitude of sales made by local people as corps members were every where, singing, dancing round a potter's statue, and enjoying their money which resulted in good business for local traders.



Plate 11: Corps members dancing and taking photographs around a potter's statue.  
The enjoyment resulted in brisk sales for local traders.

### Provision of Basic Amenities

Another major benefit of tourism to rural communities is the provision of basic infrastructure like roads, pipe borne water, hospitals and electricity. The availability of these and many more will make a tourism destination compete favourably with other destinations. Ushafa's infrastructural development has been spearheaded by tourism, some have been the efforts of Federal Capital Territory Development Authority (FCTDA), others have been the effort of Bwari Area

Council and donations from private bodies. Today, Ushafa community can boast of good roads, pipe borne water, electricity, modern granaries, a junior secondary school, and a small clinic. The presence of these amenities and many more would no doubt serve as a catalyst for a more rapid development of Ushafa community.

### Self-esteem

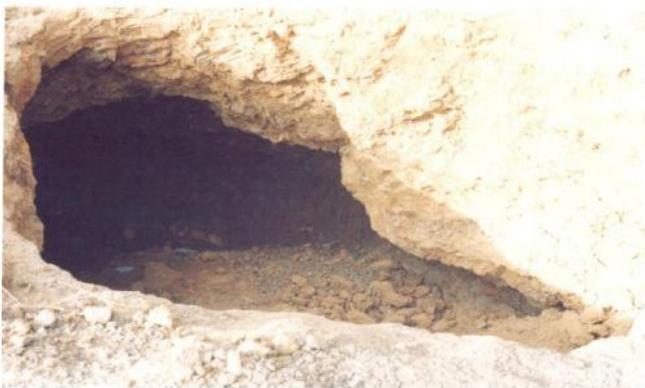
Tourism can be an antidote to inferiority complex usually suffered by local people. Scheyvens 1999 in Sharpley and Telfer 2000 comments that:

*Self-esteem is enhanced because of outside recognition of the uniqueness and value of their culture, natural resources, and traditional knowledge. Increasing confidence in the community leads members to seek out further education and training opportunities. Access to jobs and cash lends to an increase in status for usually low-status residents such as women and youth*

Mohammed Pada, a secondary school student of Government Junior Secondary School, Ushafa, disclosed that tourism has made Ushafa very popular and he is proud to be an indigene of Ushafa village. Chatting with Ushiegbeji Tando, an Ushafa pottery genius and a UNESCO award winner, the over ninety year old woman narrated in a self-esteemed manner how she was taken to Abuja City Centre in a flashy car the day she received the award. Today, information about Ushafa and its rich tourism potentials can be viewed on the Internet.

#### **Challenges of Tourism Development in Ushafa**

The road leading to the clay mining area is in a terrible condition. Neither the federal capital territory administration, nor the Bwari Area Council Authority has deemed it necessary to build the road as a way of advancing the promotion of tourism through Ushafa pottery. An Ushafa potter, Laraba Joseph, disclosed that they have made several appeals to government to bulldoze the clay mining area for easier collection of clay, but government has not made any response. The result is that women are constantly exposed to hazards of deep mining of clay. Unfortunately, three Ushafa potters, in separate incidents, have lost their lives when they got trapped during clay mining.



*Plate 12: In Ushafa, deep mining of clay without adequate safety measures have resulted in casualties.*

#### **Corruption**

Corruption is a major bane of national and community development in Nigeria. A fundamental idea behind the use of tourism in rural community development

is the enhancement of local economy. Judging by the high level corruption in contemporary Nigeria, many are doubtful that the benefits of tourism will trickle down to host communities in an appreciable manner. From what was gathered during the research, some donations in kind or cash made by prominent persons to the community of Ushafa are hijacked by superior authorities. It is perhaps this attitude that has made the Esu of Ushafa to decide that anybody who wants to witness the cultural and natural resources of Ushafa must first make a direct presentation of a gift to the community. Before interview could be granted by the Ushafa council of elders for this study, a mandatory donation of one thousand naira was made. Some of the potters in Ushafa Pottery Centre complain of exploitation, and have resorted to asking questions such as "How much will you give us for this photograph or interview?" From these instances, it is clear that corruption could be a serious challenge to community development through tourism in Ushafa.

#### **Marketing**

Economic benefit is a fundamental reason behind tourism development. Therefore, lack of marketing strategies to promote tourist product will seriously retard tourism development. A major incentive for the women of Ushafa to continue producing pottery items would be to find adequate marketing outlets for their goods. It was observed that Ushafa pottery still needs more marketing outlets and this was confirmed by Dorcas Titus, an Ushafa potter, who requested that government should find more market for their goods. This could be achieved through proper tourism development in Ushafa community.

#### **Poor Hygiene**

Tourism thrives on very clean environment. With special reference to Ushafa community, unclean environment is a challenge to tourism development. The general hygiene condition in Ushafa is poor. The community lacks good toilet system, as such; people defecate on open places close to residential areas. The offensive odour around the small clinic in the community is as a result of defecation around the clinic. This is a problem to tourism development because tourists cannot afford repeat visit to such areas with poor sanitary condition.

### **V. SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION**

Future research in the community of Ushafa should focus on discovering more tourism potentials. It is believed that the community has more to offer than what have been discussed here. For example, attention should be on the Ushafa ancient dye pits and caves, which may have some data of archaeological interest. The researcher was unable to study these sites because of the inability to meet the requirements for rituals which must be performed

before one is given access to the sites. Future researchers should collaborate with government and Abuja Tourism Development board to see how local people could give flexible access to these sites for researchers. In convincing local people, attention should be on what local population stands to gain if such sites are transformed into tourism attractions.

Adjibolosoo (1995) have reasonably averred that one way to attaining economic development in sub-Saharan African countries is to see how traditional technology can be improved and used to enhance the production process. To achieve this goal, sub-Saharan African governments must pursue premeditated policies whose objective must be to help individuals who have the knowledge improve on it. Crafts as an aspect of traditional technology can be encouraged through tourism. In Ushafa, the craft of pottery is immensely being sustained through tourism.

The potters ought to be given incentives to motivate them to reflect on ways whereby they can advance their skills and efficiency. It may be constructive to create funds for local potters that will help them. In addition, annual competition programs involving talent demonstration with attractive prizes will go a long way to challenging crafts men and women to use their ingenious abilities. Seminars and conferences should also be organized so that potters can meet each other to discuss and exchange ideas about how to develop and improve on the acquired technological know-how.

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