

Impact of Religious Tourism on Host Communities: The Case of Awhum Monastery

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Abstract

What are the benefits of religious tourism on host communities? What type of relationship exists between host communities and religious tourism sites like monasteries? Religious tourism has been reputed for its huge economic gains and development of rural communities across the globe. What is the Nigerian scenario like? There is dearth of literature on the impact of religious tourism activities on host communities, especially in southeastern Nigeria. Our Lady of Mount Calvary monastery is one of the religious tourism destinations whose impact has been eclectic on the host community some of which seem undocumented. Using ethnographic method, mainly in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, photographic-documentation, and direction observation of the monastery and its environs was mapped with a Global Positioning System; this is supplemented with documentary approach. The study revealed the following: firstly, the monastery prior to its closure to public visitation and economic activities, it was beneficial to the host community especially in the provision of scholarships, infrastructure, employment opportunities and industries. Secondly, there were cases of unwholesome practices and denial of access to some farm-routes to the indigenes by the monastery authority; the monastery authority claims ownership over the land they reside. Thirdly, there is a land dispute between the host community and the management of the monastery. Furthermore, the closure of the monastery caused a lot of economic loss on the host community. The monastery was closed temporarily based on perceived deviation from monastic life to full-apostolic life style. Conclusively, land dispute seems to be source of the sour-relationship between some members of the community and the monastery authority. We suggest revisiting of the land agreement by both parties, creating access to farms and encouragement of indigenous economic activities in Awhum community that is not dependent on the monastery.

Keywords

Awhum, Community, Religious Tourism, Impact, Monastery

1. Introduction

Mankind from time immemorial travels for different reasons like the quest for food, medication, and knowledge, business etc. one of such travel is based on religious purpose. Religious tourism is mass tourism with the intention to visit places of worship, holy places or shrines and atimes in search of truth and puzzles in life or quest for knowledge [1-3]. It has been argued to be one of the oldest forms of tourism [4-5]. Meanwhile, scholars added that, it is a form of tourism

that generates huge revenue due to its mass tourism nature [6].

Nigeria has different forms of tourism. Religious tourism is one of the least explored types of tourism in this part of the world despite its huge resources, opportunities and attendant benefits. It is a form of tourism that can tap from the natural/cultural resources in remote places/non-urban environments like Awhum in Enugu.

Most of the studies in Awhum have not assessed the impact of the monastery to the host community and it is one of the religious tourist sites in Nigeria. Scholars have carried

out a research in the area by assessing the impact of religious tourism in Nigeria: a comparative study of Awhum monastery and Okunerere catholic adoration ministry (OCAM) in Enugu State. The study anchored on psycho-spiritual benefits of visitors to the religious tourist sites [7]. Other studies explored the tourism potentials of Cistercian Monastery, Awhum, south-east Nigeria. These studies highlighted the different features of the monastery and its tourism merits. A similar study in Awhum monastery anchored on threats to archaeological and cultural heritage in Ojebe Ogene clan in Udi local government area of Enugu State reported that archaeological resources like the cave in Awhum Monastery have been eroded off its prehistoric records due to tourists/visitors presence. A perusal of available literature on this site shows some areas that have not been discussed; secondly, there is a dearth of information about this site in the area of impact of the monastery on the host community [8, 9]. Therefore, this study was born. This study aims to (i) assess the impact (positive and negative) of Cistercian Monastery to Awhum community; (ii) How can this religious tourist site be conserved and sustained (iii) recommendations.

2. Method

Qualitative research method was used for the study: mainly in-depth interview and documentary approach. Key informant interviews (KII), focus group discussion (FGD), direct observations and photographic documentation. The in-depth interview used with semi-structured interview guide to elicit data. The semi-structured interview guide was used because it allows the respondents the opportunity to talk freely in the course of the interview. Meanwhile, the study is part of a continuous research interest of the authors in Awhum community. This study took us four weeks to interview key informants (these informants were selected based on their knowledge and experience in the community, while the monk interviewed has stayed over twenty years in the monastery). Triangulation of information was done especially on the part of the villagers to ascertain the authenticity and reliability of the information. The literature on related topics was equally used in this study (this showed the gap that has not been covered in our study area). The study is limited to Awhum monastery and nearby villages. Furthermore, Global Positioning System (GPS) E-trex10 was used to collect the coordinates of relevant features in the course of the study (especially, the Mt. Calvary and the waterfall). The coordinates were later keyed into Arc. Global Information System (GIS) software version 10.3, was used to develop a map of the site (study area) and other features (See Figure 1).

Scope of the study was within the Ibite Uwenu and Ibite Uwani villages that share close proximity with the monastery where the impact is believed to be high. Secondly, the impact presented here are 'elemental' aspects social, environment, and economic.

3. Definition of Terms

3.1. Community

The word 'community' is derived from a Latin word *communitas* which refers to the very spirit of community, or an unstructured community in which people are equal [10]. He (Beeton) described community used in today's culture which tends to see communities defined geographically as in a valley, mountain range or water catchments, or politically as in towns, cities and countries [11]. The concept of community is complex, and there have been various ways that communities have been contextualized but this is not connected with the observation of other scholars like Telfer, Sharpley, Singh, Dallen and others where they added that is usually a misused term that can invoke a false sense of tradition, homogeneity and consensus [12-13]. Therefore, a community is a group of people living together in an acceptable environment or locality having a common interest with a collective responsibility to make decisions by representative bodies for survival [14]. A community is simply taken here to mean a group of people that share some cultural and ethical values, delineated within specific coordinates, promulgate rules and regulations that is binding to all members. Such a community should be able to decide what is good or bad for them, the type of development they want.

3.2. Religious Tourism

Religious tourism is a form of travel with the main interest of experiencing religious forms or the products they induce like art, culture, traditions, and architecture. Two aspects of this form of tourism can also be listed as: (a) the faith of a tourist, who has a spiritual attachment to the destination in line with his religious belief, and (b) the new spiritual experience of a tourist, belonging to another belief or a different religion and for whom the destination and the religious practices have the dimension of newness. Religious tourism can also be classified as follows: pilgrimages, missionary travels, fellowship vacations, faith-based cruising, crusades, conventions and rallies, retreats, monastery visits and guest-stays, faith-based camps, and religious tourist attraction visits [15].

4. Literature Review

The majority of literature on the impact of tourism on the physical environment has tilted towards negative impacts. Tourism (of any kind) has the capacity to benefit destination communities economically, socially, and ecologically, but at the same time it has the ability to destroy economies, societies and ecosystems [13]. This may not always be the case. Communities and some countries of the world have recorded more of positive impact than negative. It has been used in fragile areas in preservation and conservation of natural landscape, poverty alleviation, and generation of income in countries like Uganda, Zimbabwe, Costa Rica, Belize, Nepal and Kenya [16].

4.1. Tourism Impacts

Tourism impact has been recorded by scholars to have thematic impact viz: environmental, social, and economical. These impacts can be positive or negative depending on the interest of the observer or researcher who might decide to emphasize one over the other or document both. Meanwhile, impact is inevitable in any form of tourist destination but the intensity, location and nature of the impact of tourists activity in the destination although, there are areas where tourism impact has been a win-win situation, especially where it is used to conserve a fragile and pristine environments, like ecotourists destinations [16-17].

Tourism scholars have argued that tourism enhances the social standards of any given community; induce a change in both the environment and lives of members of that community; it can lead to development if the right approach is applied [18]. On the contrary, Eze has accused the tourism industry as being poorly regulated; therefore it has the capacity of ruining local industries [19]. Its benefits have not really “trickle-down” or benefitted indigenous people rather the destructiveness of tourism industry (environmental pollution, and enormous waste management problems, displacement from lands, human rights abuses, unfair labour wages, the commodification of culture etc.) has brought harm to many indigenous people and communities around the world.

4.2. Impacts of Religious Tourism

Pilgrims have contributed to the idea of unification within the same religion; they have contributed decisively to the prosperity of the places of pilgrimage and the immediate and greater area surrounding them, especially along the routes leading to them [20]. He (Beeton) went further to state that “Rome was probably the first world shrine which not only felt the economic impacts of pilgrimage but undertakes certain activities to increase the Impact” [20]. In his conclusion, he maintained that pilgrimage and religious tourism affect the demography in the place of pilgrimage and its immediate vicinity. This influence consists first of all in employment opportunities, which lead to a demographic growth of the settlement. While writing on the impact of Pilgrim Tourism at Haridward, India, [21] noted that “religious tourism generates revenue in a way as no other kind of tourism does”, This as he went further to explain, has a distinctive edge over other kinds of tourism due to the pull of huge crowds in the form of tourists.

Studies in India titled: dissemination of cultural Heritage and Impact of Pilgrim tourism at Gangasaga Island, India showed that Tourism plays a great role towards socio-economic changes (ie it is very lucrative). The local people earn a lot during Gangasagar Mela festival and this in turn is largely invested in their agricultural field. As the impact of tourism, the local people now enjoy some infrastructural facilities, but due to the continuous flow of tourists at the island around the year, there are observed negative changes in their socio-cultural life. For instance, their young boys and

girls now imitate the dressing, style of conversation, fashion etc. of the tourists. Tourism has brought pollution in their physical and social life. Tourists shamelessly defecate in the open roadsides, and this irritates the villagers; some village girls now engage in paid sex with tourists and as a result, they demoralized while the boys in the village are becoming more alcoholics, there is dirt/litter after the festival leading to bad smell or air pollution etc, while on their religion, due to outsiders influence, the truthfulness, honesty, morality etc are all gradually lessened. Other social vices observed include cunning attitude of the people (ie. they are becoming cunning), they have learnt to cheat, while thieves, pick pocketers and other antisocial elements come, who spoil the social atmosphere of the place [22].

There are some studies that have been carried out across the globe based on religion and tourism. A study on Spain anchored on religious tourism and sacred places in Spain: old practices, new forms of tourism. The study discussed what religious tourism in Spain looks like from a dimension that is related to cultural tourism [23]; religious tourism in Batangas, Philippines. It assessed religious tourism in Batangas from residents and tourists perspectives using the following parameters: historical significance, holiness and spirituality, and customs and traditions [15]. And conceptualizing mosque tourism: a central feature of Islamic and religious tourism [24].

There are various forms of religious tourism resources/activities in Nigeria, that is generating a lot of income both accounted and unaccounted for tourism stakeholders and related establishments; it has helped in conservation of flora and fauna in some communities in Nigeria like shrines in rural areas have surrounding environment are feared and respected due to their sacredness, while areas like monasteries has abundant flora around its environment which ordinarily would have been cleared or sold for timber [17]. Religious tourism offers hope for the revival of African religion that is on the brink of extinction due current influence of Christianity and Islam. There a semblance of relationship that exists between African religion and tourism using Eyo festival for instance. Emphasizing religious tourism values of the festival such as social and economic empowerment, boosting the economy of Lagos people, at the same time shift the Yoruba heritage to a certain pedestal [25].

In a related study, positive effects of faith-based travels are yet to manifest in the Nigeria, a country that constitutionally that defines itself as secular and sponsor individuals and some religious group to pilgrimage is unfair, amidst a high level of poverty. Moreover, African traditional religion is a form of religion in the country is not attended to [26].

A look into the literature showed that in religious tourism destinations, it has shown both positive and negative impacts. Most of the positive impact is recorded more in terms of income generation, employment and taxes while the negative implication is on socio-cultural values of host communities like Gangasaga Island in India. The need to document the impact of Awhum monastery to the community is essential in

the following ways: avoid or minimize negative impact as the population to religious sites as usually large; direct

policymakers to have an articulated document that will serve as a guide in establishing religious tourist destinations etc.

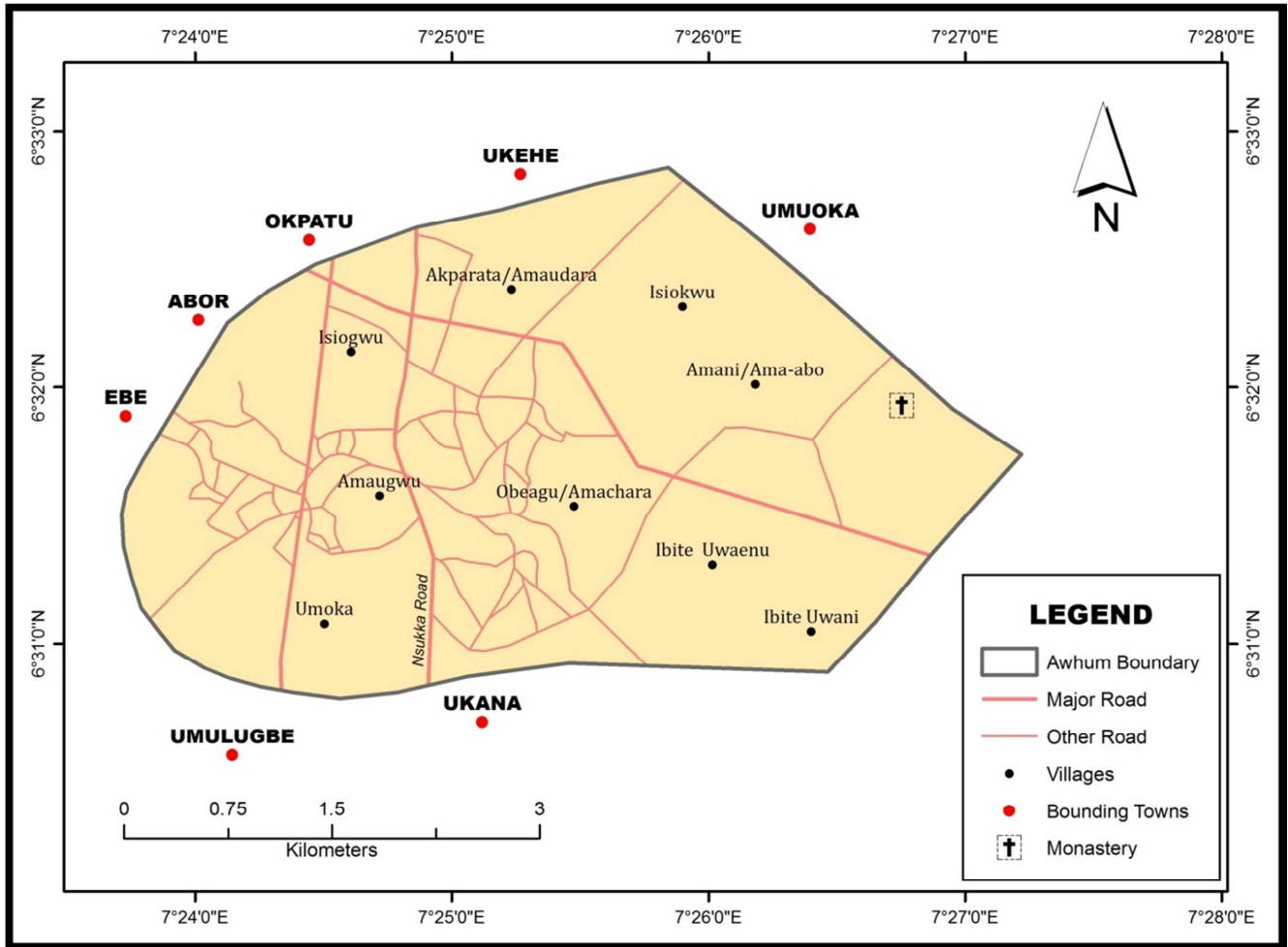


Figure 1. Map of Awhum community denoting the location of the monastery.

Source: Google earth map library and author's fieldwork with modification (2016)

5. Findings

5.1. Historical Background of Awhum

Awhum is one of the eight communities that make up Ojebe-Ogene clan. Ojebe-Ogene comprises the following towns in order of seniority Ebe, Abor, Ukana, Awhum, Okpatu, Umulumgbe, Ukehe and Umuoka. All of them are under Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State. Based on the order of seniority, Awhum is the fourth son of Ojebe-Ogene. The first warrant chief of Awhum was Igwe Igboji who reigned for twenty-one years. His successor is Igwe Charles Onyebuchi Ugwu the present King of Awhum (Ugwu, per.comm. 2016).

Awhum is made up of the following villages viz: Isi-Ogwu, Ama-abo/Amani, Ibite-Uwani, Umuoka, Ibite-Uwenu, Amofia Ibite, Obeagu/Ama-achala, Akparata/Amaudara, and Awhum monastery (recently acquired the status of a village in 2009). Later Ama-abo Okongwu village was created out of Amabo/Amani. Each of these villages has their

representatives in "Igwe in Council" (Ugwu, per.comm. 2016).

5.2. Natural and Cultural Resources in Awhum

Iyi-oku Awhum is a stream that cuts across Ibite-Uwenu, Ibite-Uwani and Isi-Ogwu villages. *Iyi-oku* is also an annual festival attached to the stream and it is celebrated in December of every year. This period of festival usually marks a period of mass return, as all sons and daughters of Awhum, both those living within and outside the country return en-mass for this occasion. Other streams are *Iyi-Ugba* and *Iyi-nevo*.

Awhum cave is located at Ibite-Uwenu village. The cave is center for religious activities especially for pilgrims coming to Awhum monastery. It has a waterfall and different chambers.

Ugwu Awhum, Ugwu-Amajugwu, Ugwu-ozu, Ugwu-Amaenu, Okuja are other natural attractions located in Awhum community.

Odo masquerade festival - Odo (masquerade) festival on the other hand, is celebrated once every two years, usually after Iyi-oku festival. During this period (ie after Iyi-oku festival), Odo will come in and stay till May/June before it goes. But within these months, there is usually Odo (masquerade) display/appearance especially on Eke, Afor and Nkwo market days. During this period, women, especially young girls/ladies are not expected to wear trousers to avoid being harassed by Odo, as it forbids women wearing trousers. Odo masquerade is believed to be the spirit of dead relatives who come into the community once in a while to bring good messages, blessings and sanction evildoers.

Awhum monastery

Awhum monastery came into being in 1970 with nine monks. The first settlement was preliminary Teachers College (PTC) built in 1957 (which is called old site now) by the Awhum people. In 1972, they demanded for a permanent site, then Ibite-Uwenu and Ibite-Uwani gave them a piece of land. They planted Melina trees to mark the boundary. Within a short period, they started bakery (this was the first business the monastery started and their bread is known as "Good health Bread"). Later poultry was introduced. They settled into farming business producing cassava (*Manihot esculenta*), Cocoyam (*Colocasia*), Pepper (*Capsicum*), Lettuce (*Lactuca sativa*), watermelon (*Citrullus lanatus*), Cabbages (*Brassica oleracea*) and palm plantation. All these were distributed to different parts of Udi and Nsukka Local Government Areas of Enugu State and beyond. Subsequently, borehole was constructed and this led to farming without season as well as creating fish ponds, palm plantations, etc.



Figure 2. Sign post leading to the Monastery.

Presently land annexation by the monastery started during the reign of Rev. Fr. Anthony Onuoho. In 1985, the monastery surveyed their land which encroached into the community land that was not given to them. Farmers (indigenes of Awhum community) then pay tax before they farm (ie. five naira ₦5.00) as at 1985, and they will be issued with a receipt. The land crisis started when the monks used tractors and cleared the Melina trees that were used as the boundary between them and neighboring villages, currently beacons were used to replace their boundary. The community (Ibite villagers) removed it and it was reported to Area Command Zone 9 Umuahia. This led to arrest and detention of elders and youth of Awhum. This was the bedrock of the misunderstanding between Awhum people and the monastery. Presently the monastery has first and second fences guiding their residential area and church. This was done without the consent of the community. This was part of the land encroachment.

5.3. Impacts of the Monastery on the Community

The monastery has been beneficial to Awhum community in the following ways.

Academic support, the monastery gives scholarships to the indigenes of the community. Establishment of different businesses like Mt. Calvary sachet water, vegetable oil production, bread, fish farming, palm oil production, poultry, commercial farming, and olive oil production; these businesses have created jobs for the indigenes of Awhum and beyond. The indigenes gain about 40% of the jobs while 60% goes to outsiders. Commuter bus drivers and motorcyclists (*Okada riders*) have benefitted immensely, they convey people to and fro the monastery, and villagers established a miniature market called Biafran market few meters away from the gate of the Monastery (See figure 6). The market serves the daily need of the pilgrims and visitors. Items of trade are usually sacramental, foods and drinks, towels, sponge, soaps, slippers, buckets, etc. All these generate a huge source of income to the people of Awhum.

Secondly, the monastery has made the community to be known across the globe, given it international recognition in both tourism and religious matters. The spiritual life of the indigenes can be said to have been improved since the location of the monastery. Majority of the villagers are Christians (all the respondents were Christians). It led to the closure of traditional sacrifice in Ugwu-Amaugwu (presently it is called Mt. Calvary). Invariably, the faith of the people of Awhum is 'higher' due to the presence of the monastery.

Furthermore, the monastery has contributed to the infrastructural development of Awhum community. In the 70s, the Monastery donated four hundred blocks as part of their contribution in the reconstruction of the Boy's secondary school. They have equally donated one hundred and fifty thousand naira (₦150,000.00) for the reactivation of water borehole/reservoir, sunk borehole for the two Ibite villages and built an overhead reservoir (abandoned because of disagreement over the standard of pipe used for the

construction). The Monastery equally gave the community/village 300KVA transformer.

The vegetation where the monastery is located has a lot of indigenous species of trees and economic trees like Cashew tree (*Anacardium occidentale*) is predominant along the way of the Stations of the Cross to Mt. Calvary. These trees might harbour some species of fauna that might be of biological value, while the value of these flora to the ecosystem cannot be overemphasized. The monastery has equally conserved trees that might have been logged by the host communities because the monastery environment is rarely disturbed and free from anthropogenic activities like logging, the quest for residential buildings, sand mining etc.

The ethnographic investigation revealed that some indigenes of Awhum have seen the monastery as not being a blessing to them anymore rather a curse. There is presently the issue of land dispute between the Ibite village and the monastery. The monks were only nine (9) in number when they came into the community 1970. A permanent site was given to them by Ibite-Uwenu and Ibite-uwani village but they have taken more than 150 hectares and this annexation started during the reign of Rev. Fr. Anthony Onuoho Order of Cistercian Strict Observance (OCSC). This annexation is the nitty-gritty of land dispute between Awhum people and the monastery. People's farms have been destroyed. Example, Mrs. Onuharu Jacinta (a widow), Ngozi Onyiti, Esther Obuta and Obodo Kevin etc.

Most of the informants are of the view that the monastery has more of negative impact for them than positive. They complained that the monastery is main access to Iyi-Ugba and Iyi-nevo streams but presently this access is being blocked by the monastery and access to farmlands within the area will be blocked in due course. The villagers have lost their lands to the monastery and their quest to reclaim the land has been elusive. Their agitation for reclaiming their land has made security operatives (police) to arrest and detained some youths of the community. Most of them spent their income on bails from Police Area Command Zone 9 Umuahia. Ibite-Uwenu and Ibite-Uwani, the entire Awhum community and the monastery have about ninety-three (93) courts cases.

Socially, Awhum Monastery has not affected the community negatively in terms of eroding their cultural values. For instance, the community has continued to maintain their local culture (ie native ways of doing things, like upholding their taboos (*example*), Africa Traditional Religions worship, masquerading, etc.); they have not in any way be discouraged from carrying out their cultural activities (like cultural dances and beliefs in the community), invasion of local residents' privacy among others. Although, the Mt. Calvary (*Ugwu-Amaugwu*-formerly a shrine and place of worship) was the only known traditional center of sacrifice that was closed. Because of the presence of the Monastery in Awhum community, it has opened up the community and made it known both within the country and across the globe. The Monastery has helped to place the community on the International map of the world.



Figure 3. Mt. Calvary (former Ugwu-Amaugwu).



Figure 4. Members of the research team in the first stations of the Cross Pilate washing his hands.

Environmentally, Awhum Monastery can be said to have not in any way contributed negatively to environmental degradation as they have a proper waste management system. For instance, there is a valley in front of the Monastery where all waste generated is disposed. Also, because of the serenity of the environment where it is located, which is far from the residential homes, the people's peace and tranquility has not been disturbed or tampered with. Meanwhile, some of the villagers are of the view that during visiting days and major days of marketing by the monastery viz: Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays are usually days they sale eggs. During these days, there is usually high traffic, even at the dead of the night, this constitutes noise pollution and raise a lot of dust that makes nearby houses dusty due to un-tarred nature of the road leading to the monastery.



Figure 5. Scenic view from Mt. Calvary.

Other impacts of the monastery are as follows: over-dependence of the community on the financial benefits from the Biafran market and the monastery's dependence on the order from Rome. The Biafran market is one of the major markets that community members rely on to generate income, unfortunately, the closure of the monastery lead to all the business men and women in Biafra market to lose their source of income. Some students who rely on the market to generate money to sustain themselves in school dropped from school due to the closure (pilgrims are no longer allowed to visit the monastery anymore).



Figure 6. Sections of the Biafran Market.

Meanwhile, the order on what and how the monastery is to be managed is not within the confines of Awhum, rather from

Rome, which cannot be queried. Therefore, the opening and closing of the Awhum monastery are not within the confines of authorities in Nigeria.

There are cases of harassment of the youth from law enforcement agency, due to the land imbroglio. This caused a demonstration in the community in 2009 and 2010. Some of the youth from Ibite village narrated their ordeal in the hands of the police, while some have lost their jobs. For example, Mr. Ugwuedem Daniel lost his job because of his dentation in police and court cases with the monastery. This made him to always be absent in his office and culminated to his dismissal from his place of work.

There are cases of breach of community peace and tranquility. People come to the monastery for prayers, while other came with ulterior motive. There are cases of snatching of bags and handset along the monastery road, missing persons. Packets of condoms are seen within the environment. The villagers accused the monks and pilgrims of having illicit affair with young girls in the community.

6. Discussion

The Awhum monastery has grown in terms of pilgrim visits, business and its popularity is beyond Nigeria. It has placed Awhum in international religious tourist map and worship center for Christians across the globe. The beautiful scenery and unique environment is conducive for prayers, due to its blend with nature, it is good for meditation [8].

The coming of the monks to Awhum was a welcomed development for all and sundry in the community. The monastery was seen as a bundle of blessing for the community. They have assisted the community in terms of scholarship, provision of infrastructure, creation of jobs and praying for the community. Other than prayers, the monastery engaged in business and produced bread that was distributed around Udi and Nsukka axis (Awhum, Ukana, Okpatu, Umulumbe, Ukehe, Diogbe, Opi, Ede-Oballa, Orba etc.), Olive oil, sachet water, egg production, poultry, etc. This is akin to what happens in order monastery across the globe. Herbs, Jams, Chocolate, candles, books, t-shirts, bags etc. are produced in Saint Mauritius Monastery in Bakonybel [27]. The business aspect of the monastery has created jobs for the people of Awhum and beyond; this tally with findings of other scholars from India and Batangas, Philippines [22&15]. The business in the monastery generates a lot of profits. Oral tradition has it that about three million naira (₦3,000,000.00) is made on each day of business by the monastery (people coming to buy bread, eggs, fishes, fowls, Olive oil etc.) in trucks. About 40% of the employees of the monastery are indigenes, while 60% are for none indigenes. The reason while 60% of the work force in the monastery is for none indigene is because the indigenes believed that the salary that is being paid is not commensurate with the input. One of the oldest staff of the monastery (who is an indigene) and was a driver with the monastery on ₦10, 000.00 (ten thousand naira) as monthly salary; when he retired, he was

given only ₦100,000.00 (hundred thousand naira only, after working for forty (40) years). Meanwhile, the management of the monastery believed that the indigenes are lazy, therefore, they employ more of none indigenes and people from other villages. Furthermore, the monastery was a beehive of activities for it brought money to the hands of the communities like motorcyclists and bus drivers who convey people to the monastery on daily basis. The closure of the monastery has a lot of negative impact on the host community. Most people whose lines of business are related to the monastery have to look for alternative means of survival, since it was closed from pilgrim visit and other business.

The issue of land tussle made the villagers to see the monastery as a curse rather than blessing. The villagers believed that the monastery has taken more than what is given to them. The former traditional ruler of the town who gave (the monks) their portion of land is late. Therefore, there was no evidence to show the size that was originally given to the monastery. The villagers believed that if there was such evidence that Monastery should provide theirs. As a result the Ibite village believed that the monastery is encroaching on the land that was not given to them. Mt. Calvary was not part of what was given to the Monastery but is now taken as part of the monastery. Moreover, the recent fencing of the monastery is seen by the villagers as avenue to block them from having access to what is theirs. They are now blocked from fetching water from Iyi-Ugba and Iyi-nevo that can only be accessed through the monastery. The people of Ibite village that owns the land pay money to get access to farm in their land which is now under the jurisdiction of the monastery. This is no longer acceptable to them and this gave rise to the uprising of land tussle with the monastery.

Socially, the Ibite villagers believed that some of the scholarship given to their people and other indigenes of Awhum are as a result of some monks' relationship with members of families that benefit from the scheme. To them the criteria for selecting beneficiary lacks merit and is politicized. Some elements of local prostitution have been noticed in the area. This is not unconnected to mass influx of people who come there with different motive in mind. Meanwhile, the monastery prays for Awhum community during the celebration of periodic (10 years) age grade celebration that starts with a Holy mass in the Monastery.

The closure of the monastery in the year 2012 was as a result of the activities going on within there. It was gathered that, the superior of the Monastery learnt that the monks are no longer observing monastic life rather engaging in full apostolic work which is against the motive behind the establishment of the monastery. There was an example of a monastery that unknowingly moved from monastic life to full apostolic work in South Africa. This formed part of the decision of the authority to stop people's visit to the monastery.

7. Conclusion

The Awhum monastery was seen as a blessing for the people of Awhum in its early years. With the assistance in infrastructures, the creation of jobs and imagine of the community, the Awhum people were happy with the location of the Monastery in their town. But as the years go by, the people doubted this blessing because of the land dispute it has brought into the community, especially, Ibite village versus the monastery. This has led to demonstration and protest, court cases and detention of indigenes of the community who participate in a protest or challenge the monastery over land acquisition. Secondly, the closure of the monastery from pilgrim visits and closure of business has led to a lot of economic loss in the community. Most houses where workers in the monastery lived are now empty. Commercial public bus drivers, Biafran marketers, and other ancillary businesses surrounding the monastery have closed down. And the revival of the monastery is dependent on the order from Rome which cannot be ascertained when it will be re-opened (as at the point of this report, the monastery is closed). The impact of Awhum monastery is presently seen from negative perspective from the people of Ibite village while to other villagers it is now a mixture of the positive and negative impact. The spiritual aspect of it, economic gain and image of the town is of importance to them, while the land dispute and its closure affecting many businesses in the town is a negative impact.

8. Recommendations

There is need to revisit or re-negotiation the land agreement between Awhum (especially the Ibite village) and the Monastery. Because the use of force to silence a community over what they have known is their right can only be temporal. Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria is a case in point. Adequate compensation should be given to the community to stop further and future agitation.

Moreover, before the establishment of a monastery in any part of Nigeria, there should be a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the community and management of the monastery. The will spell out who gets what at whose expenses, to avoid crisis in future like what is happening in Awhum.

The community should create their own industries and avoid over- reliance on the monastery operated industries; otherwise, if the authorities from Rome whose decision is still unknown should decide to close the monastery permanently or relocate the monastery, the community has no say about it.

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