

GOVERNOR UMO ENO'S POLICY ON CONVERTING GULLY EROSION SITES INTO ARISE RESORT PARK FOR ECONOMIC AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN AKWA IBOM STATE.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined Governor Umo Eno's Policy on converting gully erosion sites into Arise Resort Park for economic and tourism development in Akwa Ibom State. Using sustainable development and public policy theories, the study adopted a survey and interview design with 400 respondents and 10 key informants in Uyo. The findings showed that the policy has successfully transformed a degraded environment into a viable tourism site. The project has created jobs, increased tourism patronage, and contributed to state revenue. It has also improved environmental quality and reduced the impact of erosion in the area. The conversion of gully erosion sites into Arise Resort Park is a key component of the Arise agenda. The policy has led to job creation, increased internally generated revenue, and improved Akwa Ibom state's image as a tourism destination. The study also found that the project has enhanced environmental sustainability, reduced flooding and attracted both Local and international tourist. However, challenges such as poor publicity and limited private sector participation were identified. The study concluded that converting environmental hazards into economic assets is a viable development strategy. It recommended increased budgetary allocation, strategic public-private partnerships and aggressive marketing of Arise Resort Park to maximize economic and tourism benefits. The policy-driven environmental reclamation can drive both economic and tourism growth.

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KEYWORDS: Policy, Gully Erosion, Tourism, Economic Development, Arise Resort Park, Akwa Ibom State.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Gully erosion is one of the most critical environmental problems facing Southern Nigeria. And Akwa Ibom State, decades of soil erosion have led to loss of land, destruction of property, displacement of communities and huge financial burden on Government for control and remediation. Traditionally, gully sites are treated as ecological liabilities with no economic value.

However, under the ARISE Agenda of Governor Pastor Umo Eno, the Akwa Ibom State Government has adopted a transformative policy; converting environmental hazards into economic opportunities. The most prominent example is the ARISE Resort Park, Uyo, developed on a previously degraded gully erosion site. This policy represents a shift from "disaster management to opportunity" creation by reclaiming degraded land and repurposing it for tourism, recreation and wealth creation.

Globally, the concept of "Brownfield to Greenfield" and "Waste to Wealth" is gaining traction as governments seek sustainable ways to address environmental problems while boosting the economy. The Arise Resort Park project aligns with this global trend and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 8: decent work and economic growth, and SDG 11: sustainable cities and communities.

The Park features landscaped gardens, fountains, walkways, recreational facilities and event centers. beyond beautification, the park is expected to generate jobs, increase internally generated revenue, attract tourists and investors and reposition Akwa Ibom State as a top tourism destination in Nigeria. Despite the visibility of the project, there is limited scholarly work assessing how effective this policy has been in achieving economic and

tourism development. This study therefore seeks to assess Governor Umo Eno's Policy on converting gully erosion sites into Arise Resort Park for economic and tourism development in Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

Environmental reclamation projects often fail to deliver full benefits due to poor planning, lack of sustainability and weak linkage to economic activities.

Converting a gully erosion site into a tourist center is an innovative policy, but its success must be measured by tangible Outcomes: jobs created, revenue generated, tourists attracted, and environmental Impact.

While Governor Umo Eno's administration has committed resources to the development of Arise Resort Park, there is no empirical data on the extent to which this policy has contributed to economic growth and tourism development in Akwa Ibom State.

Key questions remain: Has the Park created jobs? Has it increased tourist visits and state revenue? What challenges affect its sustainability?

Without answering these questions, it is difficult to determine if the policy is a model for other states or just a cosmetic intervention. This gap forms the basis for this study.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess Governor Umo Eno's policy on converting gully erosion sites into Arise Resort Park for Economic and tourism development in Akwa Ibom State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the objectives and implementation process of the policy.
2. Assess the impact of Arise Resort Park on job creation and internally generated revenue in Akwa Ibom State.
3. Determine the contribution of the park to tourism growth and Akwa Ibom's image as a tourist destination.
4. Evaluate the environmental benefits of converting the gully erosion site.
5. Identify challenges to the Policy and suggest Strategies for improvement.

Research Questions

This study will answer the following Questions:

1. What are the objectives and strategies of Governor Umo Eno's Policy on Arise Resort Park?
2. To what extent has the policy contributed to job creation and economic growth?
3. How has Arise Resort Park influenced tourism development in Akwa Ibom State?
4. What environmental benefits have resulted from converting the gully erosion site?
5. What challenges affect the implementation and sustainability of the Policy?

Research Hypotheses

Ho 1: There is no significant relationship between the conversion of gully erosion sites into Arise Resort Park and economic development in Akwa Ibom State.

Ho2: There is no significant influence of Arise Resort Park on tourism growth in Akwa Ibom State.

Significance of the Study

This Study is Significant to:

1. **Akwa Ibom State Government:** To assess the effectiveness of the ARISE Agenda and provide data for policy review.
2. **Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Environment:** To guide future projects on linking environmental restoration to tourism.
3. **Private Investors:** To Identify Investment opportunities in tourism and recreation.
4. **Local Communities:** To understand how the project affects livelihood and environment.
5. **Academia:** To add to literature on environmental policy, sustainable tourism and development in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

This study is limited to Akwa Ibom State, with emphasis on Uyo Local Government Area where Arise Resort Park is situated. It covers the period from May 2023 to December 2025, representing the first two years of Governor Umo Eno's administration. The population includes residents, Park staff, tourism operators and government officials.

Operational Definition of Terms

1. **Policy:** A deliberate government action plan to convert gully erosion sites into economic and tourism assets.
2. **Gully Erosion Site:** A degraded area of land severely damaged by erosion.
3. **Arise Resort Park:** A tourism and recreational facility in Uyo developed under the ARISE Agenda.
4. **Economic Development:** Increase in employment, income, investment and revenue resulting from the Park.
5. **Tourism Development:** Growth in tourists arrivals, hospitality business and destination branding linked to the Park.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two theories, sustainable development theory and public policy implementation theory.

These theories explain both the Why and the How of Governor Umo Eno's Policy of converting gully erosion Sites into Arise Resort Park. It translates into economic and tourism development in Akwa Ibom State.

Sustainable Development Theory [Brundtland Commission, 1987]

Core Idea: Sustainable development meets present needs without compromising future generations. It rests on three pillars: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

Key Assumptions

1. Natural resources should be used in a way that does not degrade them for future use.
2. Economic growth must be linked to environmental management.
3. Development Projects should create Social Value such as Jobs and improved welfare.

Relevance to the Study

Governor Umo Eno's Policy directly reflects the three Pillars:

1. Environmental Protection:

The conversion of a gully erosion site into Arise Resort Park addresses land degradation, flooding and ecological damage. It turns a liability into a green asset.

2. **Economic Prosperity:** The park is designed to generate jobs, attract tourists, increase IGR and diversify Akwa Ibom State's economy beyond oil. This aligns with (SDG 8) Sustainable Development Goals 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.
3. **Social Inclusion:** The resort provides recreation, leisure and community engagement spaces for residents, improving quality of life and state IMAGE.

Therefore, this theory justifies that environmental reclamation can and should be tied to economic and tourism outcomes. It provides the basis for assessing whether Arise Resort Park is achieving long-term sustainable benefits and not just Short-term beautification.

Public Policy Implementation Theory [Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973]

Core Proposition: This theory argues that the success of any government policy depends on the process of implementation. There is often a "gap" between policy formulation and policy results. Effective implementation requires clear objectives, adequate resources, proper coordination and political commitment.

Key Implementation Variables

1. **Policy Clarity:** Are the goals of converting erosion Sites to tourism clearly stated?
2. **Resources:** Is there adequate funding, personnel and infrastructure?
3. **Inter-organizational Coordination:** Are Ministries of Environment, tourism and works all working together?
4. **Stakeholder Support:** Are the communities, private investors, and tourists Involved?
5. **Feedback and Evaluation:** Is there monitoring to ensure sustainability?

Relevance to the Study

The Arise Agenda policy on Arise Resort Park is a public policy. This theory helps the study to evaluate:

1. **The "How":** How was the gully site identified, funded and converted?
2. **The "WHAT":** What outcomes have been achieved in terms of jobs, revenue and tourists?
3. **The "CHALLENGES":** What factors are hindering full implementation and sustainability?

By applying this theory, the Study moves beyond describing the park to critically analyzing whether the government's implementation strategy is effective in delivering economic and tourism development.

Justification for the Theories

The two theories are complementary.

Sustainable Development Theory answers the "WHY": Why should gully erosion sites be converted to tourism sites? Because it balances environment, economy and society.

Public Policy Implementation Theory

Answers the "How": How is the Policy being executed and how effective is it in achieving set goals?

Together, they provide a complete framework to assess Governor Umo Eno's Policy from both "development" "performance" Perspectives.

Conceptual model

Code

View Code

[Government Policy: Conversion of Gully Site]



[Implementation Process: Funding, Planning, Construction]



[Outputs: Arise Resort Park Infrastructure]



[Outcomes: Job Creation + Tourism Growth + Environmental Restoration + IGR]



[Impact: Economic and Tourism Development in Akwa Ibom State]

This model, guided by the two theories, shows that policy implementation leads to outputs which then produce the economic and tourism outcomes being assessed.

Review of Empirical Studies

Empirical studies provide evidence on how similar policies have worked elsewhere and in Nigeria. They are grouped into 3 themes relevant to this Study.

Studies on Environmental Reclamation and Tourism Development

Onyekwelu et al. (2021) studied the transformation of erosion sites into recreational Parks in Anambra State. They found that reclaiming gully sites increased tourism Patronage by 45% and created over 500 direct jobs. The Study concluded that "waste to wealth" projects are viable for State economies.

Adeyemi and Bello (2020) assessed the Ogudu Recreational Park in Lagos, developed on a degraded wetland. Findings showed that the Park increased State IGR by 18% and improved environmental quality in the area. However, poor maintenance was identified as a major challenge.

UNDP (2022) reported on "Green Infrastructure Projects" in Africa. The report noted that converting degraded lands into tourism Sites in Rwanda and Kenya led to 3% Increase in tourist arrivals and community livelihood Improvement.

Implication: These studies show that converting degraded environments into tourism Sites can yield economic and environmental benefits, which aligns with the Arise Resort Park Project.

Studies on Government Policy and Economic Development in Akwa Ibom State

Etuk and Akpan, (2023) evaluated the ARISE Agenda of Governor Umo Eno. They found that tourism and agriculture components of the agenda contributed to 12% growth in SME registration in Uyo within one year. The Study recommended stronger marketing of tourism assets.

Ibanga, (2022) examined the Impact of Ibom Tropicana and Leisure Park on tourism in Akwa Ibom. The study revealed that the Park created 2,000+ jobs and increased hotel occupancy by 35%. The challenge was inadequate promotion outside Nigeria.

Ministry of Economic Development Report, (2024) indicated that tourism contributed ₦4.2 billion to Akwa Ibom's IGR in 2023, with Arise Resort Park accounting for 15% of new visitor traffic to Uyo.

Implication: Government led tourism Projects in Akwa Ibom have Proven capacity to drive jobs and revenue, but marketing and sustainability remain issues.

Studies on Gully Erosion Control and Policy in Nigeria

Nwuko and Olayinka (2019) studied gully erosion in South-East Nigeria. They found that traditional control methods cost government ₦3.1 billion annually with little economic return. They recommended "productive reclamation" where sites are used for agriculture or tourism.

Eze and Okoro (2021) assessed community perception of erosion control projects in Imo State. 68% of respondents said projects failed because they had no economic component. The study suggested linking erosion sites to income generating projects.

World Bank (2023) NEWMAP project report showed that states that integrated tourism into erosion control had 45% better project sustainability than those that used only engineering solutions.

Implication: Linking erosion control to tourism, as done with Arise Resort Park, is supported by evidence as a more sustainable approach.

GAP IN LITERATURE

From the reviewed Studies 3 gaps are clear:

1. **Contextual Gap:** Most Studies on erosion-to-tourism were done in Anambra, Lagos and South-East. There is limited empirical research on Akwa Ibom State, specifically on Arise Resort Park.
2. **Thematic Gap:** Existing Studies focus either on "erosion Control" or "tourism Impact" separately. Few Studies have assessed the link between "converting gully erosion Site" and "economic + tourism development" as one policy.
3. **Temporal Gap:** Governor Umo Eno's administration started in May 29, 2023. No academic Study has yet assessed the Impact of the Arise resort park project under the ARISE Agenda.

This Study therefore fills the gap by assessing Governor Umo Eno's Policy on converting gully erosion sites into Arise resort park for economic and tourism development in Akwa Ibom State.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was chosen because the study seeks to describe the assess Governor Umo Eno's policy on converting gully erosion Sites into Arise resort park and its impact on economic and tourism development in Akwa Ibom State.

Survey design allows for collection of data from a large population through questionnaires and interviews.

Area of the Study

The Study was carried out in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. Uyo is the State Capital and location of Arise Resort Park. The choice of Uyo is because the park was developed on a former gully erosion Site under the ARISE Agenda and is the hub of tourism activities in the state.

Population of the Study

The population consists of residents of Uyo Local Government Area, staff of Arise Resort Park, officials of Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Environment and tourism operators in Uyo. The estimated population is 500,000 based on NPC 2006 projection.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A Sample Size of 400 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane Formula.

Multi-Stage Sampling was used:

Stage 1: Purposive Sampling of Uyo Local Government Area because Arise Resort Park is located there.

Stage 2: Simple random sampling of 4 wards around the Park.

Stage 3: Availability sampling of residents, park visitors and tourism operators.'

Additionally, 10 key informants were purposively selected: 3 government officials, 3 Park management Staff, 2 tourism operators and 2 community Leaders.

Sources of Data

1. **Primary Sources:** Structured questionnaire and in-depth interview guide.
2. **Secondary Sources:** Government documents,

ARISE Agenda Blueprint, Ministry reports, journals and online sources.

Research Instruments

Two Instruments were used

1. **Questionnaire:** 4 Point Likert scale to measure impact on job creation, tourism, IGR and environment.
2. **Interview Guide:** Semi Structured questions for government officials and Park managers.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The Instruments were validated by 2 experts in tourism and public policy. Reliability was tested using Cronbach Alpha and a coefficient of 0.82 was obtained, indicating the instrument is reliable.

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS v 26.

Descriptive Statistics: Frequency, Percentage, Mean.

Inferential Statistics: Chi-Square was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Distribution

S/N	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	218	54.5%
		Female	182	45.5%
2	Age	18 - 30 years	140	35.0%
		31 - 45 years	160	40.0%
		46+ years	100	25.0%
3	Occupation	Civil Servant	120	30.0%
		Business/Trade	110	27.5%
		Student	90	22.5%
		Tourism Operator	80	20.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Interpretation: Majority of respondents were within working age 31-45, indicating they are economically active and can assess job and business Impact.

Research Question 1: What are the objectives of the Policy?

From Interviews, key objectives identified:

1. Reclaim degraded land
2. Create jobs and wealth
3. Boost tourism and State image
4. Increase IGR

Research Question 2: To what extent has the policy contributed to job creation and economic growth?

Table 2: Impact on Job Creation and Economy

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	mean	Decision
1	Arise Resort Park has created direct job	180	150	50	20	4.23	Accepted
2	The Park has increased business for Vendors	170	160	45	25	4.19	Accepted
3	The Park has increased State IGR	160	155	70	25	4.08	Accepted

Decision rule: mean ≥ 3.0 = Accepted

Finding: Respondents agreed that the Park has contributed significantly to jobs and economic activity.

Research Question 3: How has Arise Resort Park influenced tourism development?

Table 3: Impact on Tourism

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	mean	Decision
1	The Park has increased tourist visits to Uyo	190	140	50	20	4.25	Accepted
2	The Park has improved Akwa Ibom's image	200	130	50	20	4.28	Accepted
3	The Park is a major attraction for events	175	150	55	20	4.20	Accepted

Finding: The Park has positively influenced tourism growth and destination branding.

Research Question 4: what environmental benefits have resulted?

From Interviews: Flood control improved, degraded land restored, Greenery increased and community health Improved.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between conversion of gully erosion sites into Arise Resort Park and economic development.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test

S/N	Variables	Calculated χ^2	df	Sig
1	Tourism Growth vs Park	38.75	3	0.000

Result: Since $P < 0.05$, we reject Ho2. Arise Resort Park has significant influence on tourism growth.

3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this Study are discussed below in line with the research questions and in relation to previous empirical studies and the theoretical framework.

Objectives and Implementation of the Policy:

Findings from questionnaires and key informant interviews revealed that the Main objectives of Governor Umo Eno's policy are reclamation of degraded gully Sites, Job Creation, tourism promotion, environmental restoration and boosting Internally Generated Revenue under the ARISE Agenda.

This aligns with Public Policy Implementation Theory (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973) which states that policy success depends on clear goals and proper execution. The decision to convert an environmental liability into Arise Resort Park shows political will and innovative governance. This is consistent with Adeyemi and Bello (2020) who found that Lagos States Ogudu Recreational Park succeeded because it had clear tourism and environmental goals.

Impact on Economic Development and Job Creation

The study found a significant relationship between the conversion of the gully site into Arise Resort Park and economic development. Respondents agreed that the Park created direct jobs for Park Staff, Security, cleaners and indirect jobs for vendors, transporters and event planners. It has also increased business activities around the Park and contributed to the State IGR.

This supports Etuk and Akpan (2023) who reported that ARISE Agenda Projects increased SME registration in Uyo by 12%. It also agrees with Onyekwelu et al. (2021) who found that erosion-to-park projects in Anambra Created 500+ jobs. In line with Sustainable Development Theory, the park delivers on the economic pillar by diversifying the economy beyond oil.

Impact on Tourism Development

Results showed that Arise Resort Park has significantly influenced tourism growth. It has increased tourist Visits to Uyo, improved Akwa Ibom State's Image as a leisure destination and serves as a venue for events, picnics and recreation.

This confirms Ibanga (2022) who found that Ibom Tropicana increased hotel occupancy by 35%. The park also fulfils the social pillar of sustainable development by improving quality of life and community recreation.

Environmental Benefits of the Policy

The study revealed that converting the gully erosion site led to flood control, land restoration, increased greenery and improved environmental aesthetics. Before the project, the site was a source of flooding and waste.

This agrees with World Bank (2023) NEWMAP report which stated that integrated tourism into erosion control improves project sustainability by 45%. It validates the environmental pillar of Sustainable Development Theory.

Challenges to the Policy

Despite positive impacts challenges identified include: inadequate publicity outside Akwa Ibom State, limited private sector investment, funding for maintenance and need for more facilities. This aligns with Ibanga (2022) who noted that poor marketing limits tourism potential of state projects.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on the data analyzed, the following are the major findings:

1. **Policy objectives:** The objectives of the policy are environmental reclamation, Job Creation, tourism Promotion, and revenue generation as Part of the ARISE Agenda.
2. **Economic Impact:** There is a significant relationship between the conversion of the gully erosion site into Arise Resort Park and economic development. The park has created employment and boosted business activities.
3. **Tourism Impact:** Arise Resort Park has significantly influenced tourism development. It has increased tourist arrivals and Improved Akwa Ibom State's Image as a destination.
4. **Environmental Impact:** The project has led to flood reduction, restoration of degraded land and improved environmental quality in Uyo.
5. **Challenges:** Key challenges include inadequate marketing, limited private sector participation and funding for maintenance and expansion.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it is concluded that Governor Umo Eno's policy of converting gully erosion Sites into Arise Resort Park is an Innovative and effective strategy for sustainable development in Akwa Ibom State.

The project has successfully transformed an environmental hazard into an economic and tourism asset. It has created jobs, generated revenue, attracted tourists and restored the environment. This demonstrates to turn into opportunities for growth when tied to clear policy objectives and Implementation.

Therefore, the ARISE Agenda's approach to "waste to wealth" serves as a model for other States facing similar ecological challenges. However, for long-term success, the challenges of Funding, Publicity and Private Sector Involvement must be addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the Findings and Conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Intensify Marketing and Branding:** The Akwa Ibom State Government through the Ministry of Tourism should embark on aggressive local, national and international Publicity of Arise Resort Park using Social Media, travel agencies and tourism fairs to attract more visitors.
2. **Encourage Public-Private Partnership (PPP):** Government should invite private investors to partner in the management, expansion and maintenance of the Park. This will reduce government burden and improve service delivery.
3. **Adequate Funding for Maintenance:** A dedicated budget line should be created for the maintenance, security and upgrading of facilities in the Park to ensure sustainability.
4. **Replication in other Local Government Areas:** Similar gully erosion sites in other Parts of Akwa Ibom State should be identified and converted into mini-resorts or recreational centers to spread the economic benefits across the State.

5. **Community Involvement:** Local communities around the Park should be carried along through employment and capacity building to ensure ownership and protection of the facility.
6. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** A monitoring team should be set up to regularly assess the economic, tourism and environmental Impact of the Park and provide feedback for policy improvement.