



## EXPLORING THE NIGERIAN TRANSNATIONAL HOTELS' ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY PRACTICES TOWARDS BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN LAGOS, NIGERIA

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### Abstract:

The increasing threat from excessive consumption of environmental resources is one of the leading factors responsible for environmental problems like deforestation, biodiversity reduction, ozone layer depletion, climate change, and global warming. Unfortunately, the hotel sub-sector of the tourism and hospitality industry is complicit in this regard. Previous studies have concentrated mainly on the environmental impact of hotel activities. Most studies on the environmentally friendly practice of hotels appear to be focusing more on the developed countries like the USA and the UK. A few developing countries in Asia continent like Malaysia, China, Thailand, Singapore, and Macao have also come under the limelight in recent times. But little is known about the involvement of Nigerian transnational hotels in biodiversity conservation regardless of the repeated calls for sustainability in the industry. This study attempts to explore how transnational hotel in Nigeria engage in biodiversity conservation. To accomplish this, data was collected through the in-depth interview from among the managerial staff in five transnational hotels in Lagos, Nigeria. Additionally, seven senior staff were purposively selected from among the regulatory and non-regulatory stakeholder of the hotel in Lagos state in order to have a balanced view on the study. NVivo 10 computer software was used to run a thematic analysis based on the transcribed interview data. It was revealed that only three of the hotels engages in some kind of biodiversity conservation practices. Based on the findings, the studies recommend that necessary policies be implemented by the relevant stakeholder to encourage environmentally friendly initiatives regarding biodiversity conservation. Also, the need for training and

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awareness creation regarding environmentally-friendly practices in the hotel as well as general environmental protection and management was advocated.

**Keywords:** biodiversity conservation, environmentally friendly practice, and Nigerian transnational hotels in Lagos

## 1. Introduction

In recent times, the call for businesses to engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) is gradually taking a center stage in most businesses (Abaeian, Yeoh, & Khong, 2014; Dodds, & Kuehnel, 2010; Jamali, 2014; Mader, 2012; Sardianou, Stauropoulou, & Kostakis, 2017; Sucheran, 2016; Wells, Gregory Smith, Taheri, Manika, & McCowlen, 2016). Studies have shown that economic, legal, political and social reasons are some of the leading dynamics shaping CSR activities globally (Baughn, Bodie, McIntosh, 2007; Jamali, 2014; Mader, 2012; Samy, Ogiri, & Bampton, 2015; Sharma & Kiran, 2013). While some scholars conceived it differently as a set of actions meant to further designate social good beyond the explicit economic interests of the business which are not necessarily mandatory by law (Carroll, 2000; McWilliams, Siegel, 2000); other researcher looked at it as *"practices that improve the workplace and benefit society in ways that go above and beyond what the businesses are legally required to do"* (Vogel, 2005). In this paper, we contend that business environmentally responsible practices are an integral part of the CSR because they contribute huge benefits to the environment in a way that may not necessarily mean for the purpose of getting monetary reward. Therefore, the study is consistent with Kasim (2006)'s Business Environmental Responsibility in the Malaysian hotels. However, the researchers differ slightly in this current paper to focus only on the biodiversity conservation aspect of environmentally friendly practice in transnational hotels in Lagos, Nigeria.

According to the United Nations (2007), biodiversity is described as the very basis of life on earth which remained one of the pillars of sustainable development. To this end, it is important to acknowledge fact that diversity of life forms on earth enhances the ecosystem services on which human beings depend for food, shelter, medicine, and clothing among others. In addition to protecting the environments against natural disaster, biodiversity conservation also improves the aesthetic quality of the environment (Grimes, Bouchair, Tebbouche, 2017; International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2012; Orié, 2018), especially in hotel and tourism sector.

Being one of the vital sectors of tourism and hospitality industry, the hotel is obligated to protecting and maintaining the aesthetic quality of the environment because the richer the quality of the environment, the higher the proportion of tourists that can likely visit such location. Thus, creating mutual benefits between the hotel and the natural environment (Han, Yoon, 2015; Heish, 2012; Kasim, 2006; Wan, Chan, & Huang, 2017). In recognition of this, hotels strive harder to ensure that its activities do not leave negative environmental footprint on resources like land, air, water, energy,

biodiversity (Bohdanowicz-Godfrey, and Zientara, 2014; Bohdanowicz, Zientara, & Novotna, 2011; Deraman, Ismail, Mod Arifin, & Mostafa, 2017; Rahman & Reynolds, 2016). Furthermore, advancing environmental responsible practices in the hotel sector will also reduce the cost of hotel operations (Alan Bryman et al., 2007; Barberán, Egea, Gracia-de-Rentería, & Salvador, 2013; Chen & Chen, 2012; Gatt & Schranz, 2015; Gössling, 2015; Levy & Park, 2011).

As stated above, the environmentally responsible practice has attracted huge interest from practitioners and academics globally, but the mode in which such practice is being carried out by Nigerian transnational hotels have received little or no attention in the academic works.

Indeed, it has been argued that transnational hotels are big Multinational Corporation with enormous resources that can be committed to pursuing environmental management projects than smaller hotels which have meager resources, manpower, and technology to conveniently pursue environmental responsive agenda (Alvarez Gil, Burgos Jimenez, 2001; Rivera, 2002). The aforementioned factors thus explain the motives for embarking on this exploratory research. Given the increasing importance attached to the sustainability vis-à-vis environmental responsibility by various corporations across tourism and hospitality industry, the need to undertake this study cannot be overemphasized. Hence, this paper seeks to explore how the transnational hotels in Lagos carry out biodiversity conservation. This study became necessary because is relatively new in the context of the Nigerian tourism and hospitality industry. The exploratory research is guided by the following question: how are transnational hotels in Lagos involve in biodiversity conservation? By exploring the practice thoroughly, we hope to contribute to the existing knowledge on the corporate environmental responsibility, particularly in the transnational hotel business.

## **2. Transnational Hotels' Involvement in Biodiversity Conservation**

The increasing calls for conservation of the biodiversity have motivated several multinational hotels companies to take the necessary steps to encourage sustainability. For instance, Shangri-La Hotel in Haikou planted 5,740 trees to replenish vegetation resources in the area. About eighty percent (80%) survival rate was recorded in the project. In addition, the hotel undertakes the maintenance of the mangrove vegetation through regular colleague volunteering activities to remove dead tree and enforced pest control in the area. The Mangrove protection trained staff activities were also involved in raising awareness for the protection and conservation of the vegetation. Through this project, hotel guests were also offered the invitation to participate in tree planting activities (Shangri-La hotels, 2016:65).

Also, in China, Shangri-La Hotel Nanjing began an environmental conservation program called "Care for Nature project" with a view to protecting the endangered *Luehdorfia Chinensis* butterfly species. The purpose of the project is to increase the awareness of the predicament the butterfly goes through, and also to crave the support

of the guests and community to engage in activities that can help protect its habitat from degradation (Shangri-La hotels, 2016:65). Consequently, in 2015 Shangri-La hotel continued their efforts in the protection of habitat and biodiversity conservation campaign called "Our Sanctuary – Care for Nature programme" which offers protection for wetland, protection of animals and plants species namely "reef care, turtle care, panda care". Another focus of our Sanctuary projects involves *"raising public awareness, guest engagement, staff engagement and education programmes to address bio-diversity challenges from various angles"* (Shangri-La hotels, 2016:65).

Recently, Shangri-La Hotels, (2018) also reported that Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel in Taipei has entered into a long-standing partnership with a local bee farm to start supplies of a special honey product in the hotel's restaurants and bars. The hotel deals in pure honey, honey pastries, and cakes as well as other assorted dishes made with natural honey from the farm. While honey is made available for sale in the hotel's restaurants and bars, it is however offered as a local in-room amenity to welcome guests.

In another development, Shangri-La hotels (2016) reported it had embarked on a group-wide campaign called "Rooted in nature media campaign" with a theme "While 22 April is Earth Day on the calendar, every day is Earth Day in the Shangri-La kitchens". This gastronomic initiative inspires hotels to source from indigenous community, small-scale suppliers of ethically food produce or harvest. It was further stated that *"Some hotels have taken the step further by creating farmers' cooperatives together with local farms and by hosting frequent farmers' markets to introduce locally grown fruits and vegetables to guests. As a result of the campaign, our hotels recorded more than 350 articles and dozens of TV/Radio segments covering our efforts. By the end of 2015, more than 1700 Rooted in Nature dishes were being offered by Shangri-La hotels Worldwide."* (Shangri-La hotels, 2016).

It is evidently clear from the above literature that some of the transnational hotels elsewhere have been involved in the efforts to conserve biodiversity. However, it appears that detailed empirical studies on biodiversity conservation in Nigerian transnational hotels are lacking.

### **3. Theoretical Viewpoints on Hotel Environmental Responsibility**

This paper is guided by the legitimacy theory. According to Suchman (1995:574), *"Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions."* Hence, for a business to continue to exist it must act in congruence with society's values and norms (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). An aspect of legitimacy theory, which the researchers found applicable in this paper, is that hotel is expected to exhibit sustainable environmental behaviors in order to forestall adverse environmental impact and promote sustainable development. This is particularly important due to concerns showed by government, scholars, hospitality experts, environmental pressure groups/activists at national, regional, and global levels to promote environmental

management and sustainability (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999; Lagos State of Nigeria, 2017; United Nations, 2007, 2016; United Nations Global Compact, 2012; World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017). Also, Coopers and Lybrand (1993) posited that environmental behavior of business can further hinder the business's ability to access required resources from the host community especially if the business's environmental performance is not satisfactory, vice versa.

#### **4. Research Methods**

The section below provides a brief account of the methods used by the researchers before arriving at the study findings, and subsequently conclusion.

##### **4.1 Informants**

The informants in this study were drawn from among the managers in four and five stars graded transnational hotel in Lagos. The hotels are located within the central business district (administrative and commercial hub) of Lagos state. The study used a purposive sampling technique to select the managers of hotels that showed their willingness to participate in the study. The choice of selecting the hotel managers as informants was informed by the understanding that managers have a vast knowledge of environmentally responsible practices and policies in their hotels.

##### **4.2 Interview Protocol**

An interview schedule was designed in line with the previous studies conducted on the business environmental management in Malaysia (Kasim and Scarlat, 2007; Kasim, 2006), Mensah (2006) in Ghana and Mensah & Cecil (2018) in the United States of America supports the ongoing investigation. The interview protocol designed for the study-the research question is open-ended. This gave the informants the privilege to offer relevant information without being restricted.

##### **4.3 Data Gathering**

To understand the extent of biodiversity conservation practice, a total of twelve informants was interviewed. But only five of them were drawn from the transnational hotels, three informants were selected from the ministry of the environment as well as the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and culture. Only four informants from the non-regulatory stakeholders in the Lagos were interviewed. These hotels include Four Points by Sheraton hotel, Blu Radisson hotel, Protea hotel, Eko Hotels & Suites, and Sheraton hotel. Information on leading transnational hotels and their addresses were collected from the Lagos State Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. This was followed by in-depth interviews of managers of the respective hotels. The researcher used a smartphone with a digital voice/video recording capabilities to record the interview, take snapshots of the physical observations made while on the field. Field

note and a pen were used to write down important points raised by the informants' while on the field. Unstructured interviews were used to gather in-depth information for this study. This is consistent with the suggestion made by Creswell (2014) that unstructured interviews are useful when the researcher is interested in getting the depth, rather than breadth in the research project. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed to enable the data coding and analysis in NVivo computer environment.

#### **4.4 Data Analysis Process**

Levine (1996:1) described data analysis as the body of "*methods that help to describe facts, detect patterns, and develop an explanation.*" In his contribution, Neuman (2003, p. 439) explained that data analysis primarily is concerned with the "*a search for patterns in data—recurrent behaviors, objects, or a body of knowledge.*" In this study, interview transcripts were analyzed using NVivo 10 software. Initial coding was carried out by both authors, with the themes derived from the environmental management literature as highlighted above. During the analysis, the inductive reasoning techniques or 'open coding' was employed to discover the pattern and themes emerge from the data and subsequently a coding scheme was developed. Recurring themes identifying the biodiversity conservation practices as part of environmental management efforts emerged. At this point, the researcher read through five of the transcripts carefully and identified meaning units: words and phrases that rightly captured the meaning in each excerpt. Consequently, we inductively identified only three transnational hotels engage in biodiversity conservation as a priority in their organization's environmentally friendly practices in Lagos. To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, we then swapped transcripts and discussed various interpretations of the themes (Patton, 1990). Obvious discrepancies in meaning were rectified through superior clarification from my supervisor. Then, the entire textual data was subjected to the second round of the analysis along with the revised codes. At this stage, issues regarding coding were debated and agreed upon and final codes for biodiversity conservation practices was created to reflect the revised interview transcripts which were earlier re-analyzed and updated. This led to the final review of the (qualitative) trustworthiness. This step is also in line with the suggestion made by Creswell (2014).

#### **4.5 Techniques of Data Analysis**

In this case, NVivo 10 computer software was used to analyze the data based on the excerpts developed from the interview transcripts. Consequently, the theme and nodes were derived based on the research questions vis-à-vis existing emerging theories; the interpretations were drawn based on the previous studies.

#### **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

This study was conducted in line with the ethical consideration recommended by Babbie and Mounton (2001: 520-525). They suggested for a researcher to be strictly embedded in the principles of ethical practices to ensure "*voluntary participation, not*

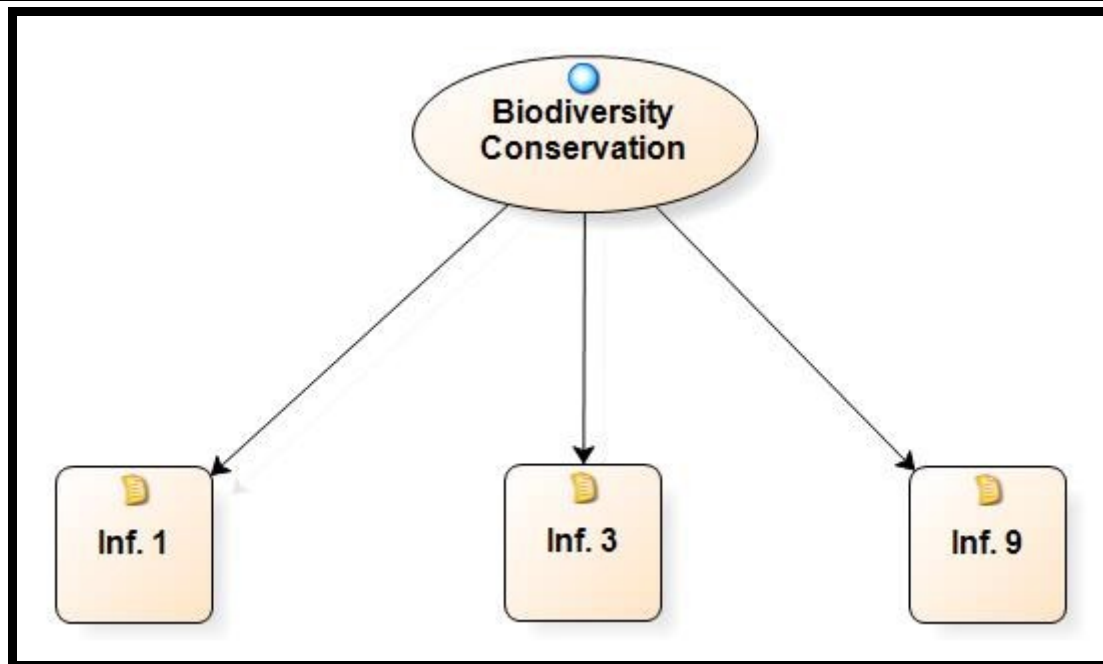
*doing harm to the participants, but respect confidentiality, avoid accepting favors that might violate research principles and avoid deceiving participants".* Hence, the informant was carefully selected based on their willingness to be interviewed without coercion. They were also assured that information/data provided would be treated with utmost confidentiality and for no reason (s) would the researcher mention their names.

## 5. Results

Findings revealed that transnational hotels in Lagos engage in various environmentally friendly initiatives to ensure that biodiversity is conserved. In view of that, informant 3 stated that *"as an environmentally responsive hotel, we do not buy or sell fish and meat from endangered animal species."* Similarly, informants 1 and 9 opined that they support the afforestation program initiated by the federal government of Nigeria through the initiative like the planting of wide varieties of trees and ornamental flowers. Particularly, informant 9 stressed that:

*"Of course, we try as much as possible to encourage tree planting program which has been initiated by the federal and state governments. We carry out this task through our commitment to tree planting in this facility. Though the tree planting program is currently restricted to our immediate community as time progresses, we intend to do more to expand the coverage. This exercise is capable of checking the rising environmental temperature (ambient temperature) of our community. It also serves as windbreakers (shelterbelt) associated with the thunderstorm."*

In a similar vein, informant 1 also revealed that *"our gardener has been trained to avoid the use of prohibited herbicides to kill weeds in the hotel premises. Instead, we encouraged them to always use mechanical means of weed control like pruner and semi-mower. This is to prevent water pollution and death of plants and animals that were not intended."* The above measures are consistent with provisions in article 28, part 2 section 22 (1) of the National Environmental (Sanitation and Waste Control) Regulation 2009 which prohibits the use of banned pesticides or chemicals for fumigation and pest control. Specifically, subsection two (2) provides for the prohibition or use of the banned pesticides, chemicals or equipment control pest or vector management (the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009).



**Figure 1.1:** Biodiversity Conservation as part of environmentally responsible practices by transnational hotels in Lagos state.

The above result clearly indicates that environmentally friendly practices exist in some Nigerian transnational hotel, even though it's not on the larger scale. Basically, they do this by protecting the flora and faunas from degradation. This was achieved through their commitment to afforestation programme, prohibition of the use of dangerous herbicides/chemicals, and prohibition sales of endangered animal species. Unfortunately, the researchers observed that some of the hotels do not have in-house environmental management policies but do implement some environmentally friendly initiatives. On inquiry, the researchers gathered that the hotel relied on the directives from the managers and environmental policies of their respective international management partners. This observation supports previous studies which also found that general manager of accommodation facility is the key factor in providing the benchmarks and implementation of environmental policies (Cespedes Lorente, Burgos Jimenez, 2003; Holcomb, & Smith, 2017).

## 6. Conclusion and Suggestions

There is a need for collaboration between transnational businesses (e.g. hotels) and government at all levels to address the rising cases of environmental degradation through formidable commitments to environmentally friendly practices. The study revealed that the current environmental practices in Nigerian transnational hotels are driven by commitments to achieve legitimacy and the strategic interests of their international partners' obligation to protecting the environment internationally. Undoubtedly, the hotel can benefit from customer patronage in a long term. Thus, studies should be conducted to examine business environmental responsibility (BER)



practices in the small and medium ranking hotels to also explore their level of commitments to environmentally friendly practices too. By so doing, there will be an increase in the number of hotels participating in sustainable environmental management.

Regarding the absence of environmentally responsible policies in some of the hotels, the government can encourage the hotel management to design in-house green policies to conserve resources, prevent of environmental degradation and sustain the environment for the future generations.

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