

Here's to the future

A pioneering and philanthropic vision is at the heart of the Sail Harbour Resort Community. It's an initiative that operates as an eco-tourist driven social business enterprise, which aims to support Ago-Ajo, Moba and other surrounding villages in the Badagry area. Words by **Nana Ocran**.

Philanthropy

Just over 30 years ago, Otunba Bola Adewunmi, a well-respected lawyer, arrived in the village of Eti Oko Erin at the invitation of a friend. That was back in 1976, when he was considering turning the area into a commercial enterprise. However, in buying up the land, he was tasked with developing a village with no access road, and surrounded by thick forest inhabited by elephants. In setting up the area as Ago-Ajo (meaning the Tabernacle, and a place of shelter), his first act was a spiritual one; to build a church, from which followed a community development association.

His son Olu Adewunmi – Chairman of Sail Harbour – has now taken on the same challenge, by continuing the legacy of his father. His passion for the project, in developing an eco-friendly resort is evident. His vision is to engage the surrounding communities in the future development of the site,

which sits on a serene island on Badagry Creek, between the mainland of Ago-Ajo village and the Moba Peninsular on the Atlantic Ocean. An oasis of calm, the retreat will consist of 27 floating villas, restaurants, bars and activities including snorkelling, nature walks, sailing and deep-sea fishing, (see www.sailharbour.org).

Olu: 'My aim is to leverage my father's achievement by creating this eco-friendly resort, which will be clean and safe, and thereby encourage sustainable development of

tourism in Lagos State. Only when the communities around the resort are sustainable in terms of infrastructure, education, health and employment shall our vision be complete'.

Essentially, Sail Harbour Resort Community uses its socially driven ethos to add to the development of tourism in Nigeria by providing opportunities for jobs, vocational training, as well as the empowerment of women, who greatly outnumber the men in both villages due to the lack of employment and high migration to the city.

Just a 40-minute boat-ride from Lagos, many people in Nigeria's former capital city are completely oblivious to the existence of Ago-Ajo or Moba, which together have a combined – albeit humble – population of around 350 people. Still, there are a further 36 surrounding villages that will ultimately benefit from the endeavour.

The Sail Harbour Foundation is



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A blessed project
The Ago-Ajo sign that welcomes visitors to the village (left) and the church that was built by Otunba Bola Adewunmi (right).

the fundraising arm of the community development projects. Run by CEO Lucia Troksiarova, it was set up with start-up money provided by the Adewunmi family trust. Lucia puts the villages' apparent anonymity into perspective. 'Whenever I speak to people outside of Badagry about the project, or show them the documentary we filmed, they are unaware of the extreme poverty in the area,' she says. 'During the rainy season, the villages were flooded, so Moba Primary School had no access to drinking water. 150 children and surrounding villages were drinking contaminated water until our donors helped us with the clean up of the wells and by helping to finance solar pumps.'

A year or so into her role at Sail Harbour Foundation, Lucia is open about the emotional attachment she has towards the villagers, as well as her initial shock at the general lack of basic resources.

The effects of the wet season in July were exacerbated in the two villages. Lucia: 'I'm developing a primary school in Moba, which has 150 kids. During the rains there were only about 40 of them there. The rest didn't make it in because either the bridge between the two villages was broken, or because families have had to move out of their homes until their houses dry'.



'Families have had to move out of their homes until their houses dry'

Lucia's early experiences at Sail Harbour Foundation were something of a baptism of fire. Coming from a high-powered background in finance, she had worked in the UK, Mubai and also Dubai, where she was involved in building a health-care system. However, Nigeria was different. Her first visit to Ago-Ajo to meet the leaders of the villages was memorable. She recalls: 'Olu basically said, "So, Lucia has come from London. She is going to change your lives".' She laughs at the memory. 'I thought, this is it. There's no way back.'

The similarity of thinking that exists between Lucia and Olu has manifested itself in an overriding business approach to the Sail Harbour Resort Community and Sail Harbour Foundation project. As the fundraiser, Lucia develops partnerships with national and international NGOs, charities, governments and private

donors, to scale up the next level of the foundation's work with the resort to maintain sustainable goals such as micro-financing to support the villagers in creating small businesses in farming, fishing, weaving and small-scale food processing. One of the latest projects initiated and developed by Olu is a fish farm, as well as an integrated farm for livestock and crop production. With the resort situated in a prime island location between Ago-Ajo and Moba, it will play a crucial role in the future expansion of both farms, as the main market for its produce. There are current plans to work with the Lagos State government to see this and the other ideas through to fruition.

Lucia: 'The plan is that once the resort is developed, there will be a lot of employment opportunities for the community to train in areas such as hospitality, to develop tourism in the area. We have put \$100,000 towards the new school in Moba and other small projects already. This was for refurbishment, uniforms and a small library. Eventually we aim to develop other villages when we have the right donors and the right partners'.

Bringing in experts with ready-made skills to the project is a priority. In all, the foundation's aims are challenging, but they are no doubt doable.



Village life
A green area at Ago-Ajo (left) and a village event (right).