

Level of Participation of Rural Dwellers in Conservation Practices Around Old Oyo National Park, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study was carried out in the communities bordering Old Oyo National Park located in Oyo State, to determine the level of participation of rural dwellers in conservation practices. The park has five ranges from which three ranges: Tede, Marguba and Oyo-Ile were purposively selected for the study. Also, a total of seven villages were purposively selected from the three ranges viz: Alakuuko and Ajebamidele from Tede range; Abanla and Lukutu from Marguba range; and Alada, Alaba and Ogundiran from Oyo-ile range. Fifty respondents were randomly sampled from each of the ranges to give a total of 150 respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the analysis of data. The study revealed, among others, that those that never participated in various conservation activities and management of the park were the highest (34.9%), followed by those that occasionally participated in the activities (30.0%). Sex, marital status, educational level and religion of the respondents were not significantly ($P < 0.05$) associated with the level of participation in the conservation practices. The respondents occasional participation levels in conservation practices such as boundary demarcation, construction of jeep track, and planting of hedges were rated as: 45.8%, 48.5%, 72.8% respectively, while the activities that were never participated in by the respondents are anti-poaching patrol, veterinary care, fire control and excursion or visitation into the park that were rated as: 75.5%, 70.3%, 42.2% and 55.7% respectively. It was further revealed that constraint was the highest predictor of rural dwellers' participation in conservation and management of the park ($B = 1.221$). This was followed in sequence by the ranges ($B = 0.633$), family size ($B = 0.120$) and gender ($B = 0.787$). Recommendations such as enlightenment campaign, repair of roads and provision of other basic amenities are made to enhance rural dwellers' participation in conservation and management of Old Oyo National Park.

Key words: Participation, Rural dwellers, Conservation, Management, Constraint

Introduction

In pre-colonial times, religious beliefs and practices played important roles in the protection of forest patches and their wildlife in various parts of Nigeria (NEST, 1991). People could not exploit sacred animals and habitats, and consequently they remained in their pristine state (FAO, 1991). However, with the advent of colonial regime in the country and the subsequent spread of western values and cultures, the traditional methods of conservation gradually disappeared and sacred forests became hunting grounds (Inahoro, 1991).

The regime, having recognized the renewability of forest resources vis a vis their finitability and perhaps as a way of ensuring perpetual supply of forest products, especially timber, therefore embarked on forest reservation programme. This was anchored by the Department of Forestry, which was faced with a number of problems. For instance, in many areas, the programme was vehemently resisted as the rural dwellers wrongly perceived it as a way to seize their lands. More so, bureaucracy, bush fires, inadequate and ill-trained staff and the operations of the Health Department's tsetse control scheme that encouraged the destruction of vegetation, among others are some of the impending problems. As a result, only 5.8 percent rather than the original projected 25 percent of the country's forests and woodlands had been protected by 1940 (Dickenson, 1981). Although, the grand design of the colonial government, in establishing forest reserves, was to ensure continuous timber supply to Europe, these reserves also functioned as refuges for wild animals, and later some of them were turned into wildlife reserves and national parks (FAO, 1988).

Historically, Nchor (1996) documented that a Regional Game Preservation Unit (GPU) was created in the Northern Region in 1953. Game Preservation Unit committee proposed the establishment of Yankari Game Reserve in Bauchi State, which was eventually established in 1956 (K.L.N.P., 1989). In the Western Region, six wildlife reserves were created namely; Old Oyo, Ado Ekiti, Akure, Obokemeji, Ibadan crown land and Oyo province. However, the Old Oyo was later merged with Upper Ogun. These were the only reserves that received attention for further development. In the Eastern Region, a Wildlife Advisory Committee was created in 1956, which identified a sanctuary for gorillas in Obudu Mountains (Nchor, 1996). In 1965, the most comprehensive report on Nigerian Wildlife resources was published. This report suggested the establishment of a Wildlife Advisory Agency whose duty was to protect the Wildlife resources and to promote management programmes, research and public education (Petrides, 1995). It further recommended that National Parks and Game Reserves should be established to protect biotic resources in the country.

Increases in human population have created more demand for land, food and export crop production. Similarly, the demand for wild harvested wood as a source of fuel for cooking, and cottage industries, such as brick making and tobacco curing is growing. Human beings rely on nature for food, water, energy, clothing, shelter, minerals, drugs and more; and they rely on the millions of animal and plant species to keep the system that provides those needs in running order (Okeyoyin, 1996). In spite of this obvious fact, the natural world is being destroyed, and wildlife is under pressure. Of all the current threats to wildlife, loss of habitat is the most dangerous, and this arises from incessant use as well as demand for forest products (Ayeni, 1995). Old Oyo National Park, like others, has suffered indiscriminate and uninhibited destructive human activities including hunting for a long time and some valuable species of animals are near extinction and rarely seen (Adetoro, 2002). Against this background, this study, therefore, aimed at determining the level of participation (either as benefit or constraint) of the rural dwellers in conservation and management of Old Oyo National Park.

Methodology

The study was carried out in the communities bordering Old Oyo National Park located in Oyo State, Southwest of Nigeria. The Park is one of the eight National Parks in Nigeria initially created by Decree No. 36 of 1991, which was later repealed and replaced with Act No. 46 of 1999. It lies between latitude 8°10' and 9°05'N and longitude 3°35' and 4°20'E. The Park covers a land area of approximately 2,512km² (251,200ha), making it the fourth

largest park in Nigeria after Gashaka-Gumti (637,100ha), Kainji Lake (538,000ha) and Cross River (400,000ha) (Nigerian National Park Service, 2000). The entire park lies in the southern part of the Southern Guinea Savanna (figure 1). Several large mammal species are still common. These include western Kob, Roan antelope, western hartebeest, grimm's duiker, oribi, crested porcupine, anubis baboon, patas monkey, buffalo, tantalus monkey, red river hog, spotted hyena and lions exist but rare. The vegetation in the park has been classified into four sub-types. These consist of dense woodland and forest outliers in the southeastern part mixed open savanna woodland in the central part; outcrop vegetation in the northeast, and riparian grassland and fringing woodland occupying the forest plains and valleys along the Ogun river.



Source: Nigerian National Park Service (2000).

Fig. 1: Map of Old Oyo National Park, showing drainage system, road system and nearest towns.

The Park has five ranges, namely: Tede, Igboho, Marguba, Yemoso and Oyo-Ile, of which Tede, Marguba and Oyo-Ile were purposively selected for the study due to their peculiarities. Tede range was known to have more woodland and vegetation; Marguba range has more valuable species of animals, while Oyo-Ile range, an ancient Oyo Empire, has several cultural and historical features.

A total of seven villages were purposively selected from the three ranges due to their proximity to the park and perceived greater participation of dwellers in the conservation and management of the park. The selected villages were Alakuuko and Ajobamidele from Tede range, Abanla and Lukutu from Marguba range and Alada, Alaba and Ogundiran from Oyo-ile range. Due to fairly equal population numbers and land mass in all the villages (Federal Office of Statistics, 2006), fifty respondents were randomly sampled from each range to give a total of 150 respondents.

Structured interview schedule was used to elicit information from the respondents. The dependent variable is the rural dwellers' level of participation in conservation and management of the Park. This was measured using a participation scale thus: Never participated (0), No Longer Participating (1), Occasionally participating (2), and still participating (3). The independent variables include age, sex, marital status, educational level, family size, income generating activities, benefits derived, constraints to participation and rural dwellers' perception of the purpose for which the park was established. Rural dwellers were asked to mark either No or Yes against identified benefits. Rural dwellers were also asked to mark either No or Yes against identified constraints.

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the analysis of data. The descriptive statistics used were frequency counts, percentages and mean. The Inferential statistics used to test hypotheses were chi-square and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) in determining the relationship between dependent and independent variables. Regression analysis was also used to determine the contribution of some independent variables to the dependent variables.

The multiple regression equation is: $Y = 0.862 \pm 0.633X_1 - 0.787X_2 + 0.120X_3 \pm 1.221X_4$
 Where, X_1 = Name of the range; X_2 = Gender; X_3 = Family size; X_4 = Constraints

Results and Discussion

The personal and socio-economic characteristics of the rural dwellers identified in the study area were age, sex, marital status, household size, religion, educational status and income generating activities.

TABLE 1: Distribution of the respondents according to their personal and socio-economic characteristics

	Variables	Frequency (N = 150)	Percentage (%)
1.	Age (year)		
	Below 26	44	29.3
	26 - 36	33	22.0
	37 – 47	28	18.7
	48 – 58	17	11.3
	59 - 69	12	8.0
	Above 69	16	10.7
2.	Sex		
	Male	103	68.7
	Female	47	31.3

3.	Marital status		
	Single	24	16.0
	Married	123	82.0
	Divorced	3	2.0
4.	Household size		
	Below 5	101	67.3
	5 - 9	41	27.4
	Above 9	8	5.4
5.	Religion		
	Christianity	45	30.0
	Islam	99	66.0
	Traditional	6	4.0
6.	Educational level		
	Non-Formal Education	97	64.7
	Primary Education	34	22.6
	Secondary Education	15	10.0
	Tertiary Education	4	2.7
7.	Income-generating activities		
	Farming	112	74.7
	Hunting	10	6.6
	Charcoal making	3	2.0
	Cattle trading	12	8.0
	Marketing/milling	13	8.7

Source: Field survey, 2005.

The result of the analysis as presented in Table 1 showed that the many of the respondents were below 26 years of age, which represented 29.3 percent. Majority (70.0%) were 47 years and below. Only 30.0 percent were above 48 years old, which implies that the people living near the park were in their productive years and they made their livelihood from resources therein.

About 68.7 percent of the people were males while 3.13 percent were females. A total of 82.0 percent were married, 16.0% were single and only 2.0 percent were divorced. This agreed with Jibowo's (1992) assertion that majority of the adult population in any society is made up of married people. Further more, the results revealed that 67.3 percent of the rural dwellers have a household size less than 4, while 27.3 percent have between 5 and 9 while 5.4 percent have household size above 9. This result further revealed that most people in these communities have large families ranging from 1 to 9 children (94.6%) with many other extended family members depending on them. About 66.0 percent were Muslims, 30.0 percent were Christians while only 4.0 percent were traditional worshippers. Analysis of the educational level of the rural dwellers shows that 64.7percent did not receive any formal education, 22.6 percent had primary education while 10.0 and 2.7 percent had secondary and tertiary education respectively.

Table 2: Chi-Square (χ^2) Analysis Showing association between the level of participation and some selected social characteristics of rural dwellers

Social variables	χ^2	df	P	DECISION	REMARK
Gender	0.238	1	9.045	Accept Ho	NS
Marital Status	0.179	2	4.989	Accept Ho	NS
Educational level	0.202	3	6.359	Accept Ho	NS
Religion	0.109	2	1.796	Accept Ho	NS

Source: Field survey, 2005.

df = Degree of Freedom.

The result of the Chi-square (χ^2) analysis shows that all the p-values were greater than their corresponding χ^2 - values. Therefore, in each of the case, null hypothesis was accepted, which means that sex; marital status, educational level and religion had no significant relationship with the level of respondents' participation in conservation practices (Table 2).

The result shows that all the respondents (100%) engaged in one activity or the other in the protected area. These include farming, rearing of domesticated animals, cutting and gathering of trees as well as other infrastructure development which were observed to be inimical to the set goals and objectives of the protected area.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to perceived benefits derived from the conservation area

Benefits	No		Yes	
	Frequency (N = 150)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (N = 150)	Percentage (%)
1. Ease of transportation due to construction of good roads linking major towns in the range	124	82.7	26	17.3
2. Provision of electricity in the communities.	150	100	-	-
3. Provision of good water for community use.	150	100	-	-
4. Provision of employment for community members.	89	59.3	61	40.7
5. Preservation of beneficial trees for later use	21	14.0	129	86.0
6. Economic development of the communities due to improved buying and selling, setting of industries	90	60.0	60	40.0
7. Provision of financial and moral support to the commu-				

	nities during festival	150	100.0	-	-
8.	Provision of school (education) as a means of giving enlightenment during festival.	147	98.0	3	2.6
9.	Preservation of cultural heritage and historical ruins/sites.	34	22.7	116	77.3
10.	Provision of good health facilities to the communities	149	99.3	1	0.7
11.	Provision of money for community development activity	150	100.0	-	-

Source: Field survey, 2005

Table 3 shows the perceptual variables of the respondents, which indicated that the rural inhabitants enjoyed the following benefits: provision of employment (40.7%), preservation of beneficial trees (86%), economic benefit of buying and selling of their produces (40.0%) and preservation of cultural and historical sites (77.3%). Other areas they were lacking benefit derivable from the Park were bad road (82.7%), poor electricity (82.7%), lack of good water (100%), lack of health facilities (99.3%) and lastly lack of good school (98.0%) that would have enlightened the populace. It was obvious from above that the communities lack social amenities like good water, road, school and electricity. These laxities have become peculiar to the conservation areas due to the rural area nature they were mostly located.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to their levels of participation in conservation and management of activities (N=150)

<i>Conservation Activities</i>		Never participated	No Longer participate	Occasionally participated	Still participate
1	Anti-poaching patrol.	75.5% (113)	15.5% (24)	5.5% (8)	3.5% (5)
2	Boundary demarcation.	0.6% (1)	13.4% (20)	45.8% (69)	40.2% (60)
3	Jeep track construction in the park.	0.8% (2)	6.2% (9)	48.5% (72)	44.5% (67)
4	Tourists/visitors' guard.	8.0% (12)	11.4% (18)	12.5% (18)	68.1% (102)
5	Conservation/Hunters Education Club.	28.5% (43)	15.4% (23)	30.0% (45)	26.1% (39)
6	Souvenirs/Gift-making and marketing to the visitors.	7.6% (11)	0.5% (1)	15.4% (23)	76.5% (115)
7	Veterinary/Healthcare of the wild animals.	70.3% (105)	12.5% (19)	10.0% (15)	7.2% (11)
8	Rescue/ Apprehension of wounded/ escaped animals.	63.2% (95)	0.7% (1)	14.0% (21)	22.1% (33)
9	Excursion into the park.	55.7% (84)	0.6% (1)	35.2% (53)	9.5% (14)
10	Planting of hedges around the park.	8.2% (12)	2.5% (4)	72.8% (109)	16.5% (25)
11	Fire warden for effective fire management plan.	45.2% (68)	15.5% (23)	15.4% (23)	23.9% (36)
	(Total) Mean %	34.9% (546)	10.0% (143)	30.0% (456)	25.0% (407)

Source: Field survey 2005; N = Number of respondents on each activity.

Table 4 shows the level of participation of the rural dwellers in conservation and management activities. Of those that occasionally participated, 45.8 percent indicated that they participated in boundary demarcation, 48.5 percent in construction of jeep track, and 72.8 percent in planting of hedges around the park were occasionally participated. The activities that are currently participated are 30.2 percent in boundary demarcation, 44.5 percent in jeep-track construction, 68.1 percent in tourists'/visitors' guard and 76.5 percent souvenirs/gift-making and marketing. Those activities that were never participated by the respondents are 75.5 percent anti-poaching patrol, 70.3 percent health care / veterinary of the animals 55.7 percent those that never made excursion in to the park and 42.2 percent those that never participated in the effective fire control. The study however revealed that community members were effectively engaged in the park activities, some participated in the clearing of park boundaries and planting of hedges around the park. The mean percentage reveal that those that never participated in various conservation activities and management of the park are the highest (34.9%), followed by those that occasionally participated in the activities (30.0%). Only 25.5 percent are currently participating while those that no longer participating are the least (10.0%).

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to constraints to their participation in conservation and management activities

Benefits	No		Yes	
	Frequency (N = 150)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (N = 150)	Percentage (%)
1. Lack of freedom to move in and out of the park at will	9	6.0	141	94.0
2. Fear to enter forest/conservation	7	4.7	143	95.3
3. Lack of adequate money/finance to meet needs.	84	56.0	66	44.0
4. Restriction on places of rituals	77	51.3	73	48.7
5. Restrictions on traditional hunting practices	51	34.0	99	66.0
6. Ban on mining/exploitation of minerals within the park	53	35.3	97	64.7
7. Fear of being arrested by game guard	4	2.7	146	97.3
8. Restrictions on killing of wild animals in the park at will.	24	16.0	126	84.0
9. Fear of being attacked	11	7.3	139	92.7
10. Prohibition on hunting and selling of bush meats	45	30.0	105	70.0
11. Ban on land cultivation at the area	7	4.7	143	95.3
12. Lack of awareness of the activities of the park	17	11.3	133	88.7
13. No alternative sources to wild resources.	97	64.7	53	35.3
14. Fear of being attacked by wild animals	20	13.3	130	86.7

Source: Field Survey, 2005.

The result showed different constraints to participation of the rural dwellers in conservation and management activities. About 97.3 percent of the rural dwellers indicated fear of being arrested by the Game guards as a constraint to their participation. Many respondents also indicated lack of freedom to move in and out of the park at will (94.0%), lack of awareness of the activities of the park (88.7%) and ban on land cultivation within the park (95.3%) as their constraints (See table 5).

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the amount of variation in dependent variable that is accounted for by the independent variables. The dependent variable is represented by “Y” and it determines the rural dwellers’ participation in conservation and management activities of the Old Oyo National park

The independent variables were regressed and yielded a R-square of 0.452. This means that 45.2 percent variation in participation level is accounted for by the independent variables. About 46 percent of the variability in the level of participation of the rural dwellers was explained by the explanatory variables. The multiple correlation coefficient r (0.672) was statistically significant. This is because f_{cal} (10.327) is greater than F_{tab} (1.85) at $P = 0.05$ level of significance. That is, $F_{cal} > F_{tab}$. The result of the multiple regression analysis shows that there was positive and negative significant relationship between rural dwellers’ level of participation in conservation and management of the park and name of the range, family size, constraints and gender. Constraint was the highest predictor of rural dwellers’ participation in conservation and management of the park ($B = 1.221$). This was followed in sequence by name of the range ($B = 0.633$), family size ($B = 0.120$) and gender ($B = 0.787$).

There was positive significant relationship between constraints and level of participation of the rural dwellers’ in the conservation and management of the park. This implies that rural dwellers’ participation will be low if the various identified constraints are not removed or reduced to a minimal level. The less constraints the people have, the more their participation will be and the better it is for the actualization of the objectives for which the park was established. Name of the range also have positive and significant relationship with rural dwellers’ level of participation. It was discovered in this study that more people participated in the conservation and management of Marguba range than other ranges visited. This is because Marguba range serves as the headquarters for all other ranges. More tourist activities are carried out in this range than others. Rural dwellers were sometime employed to clear park boundaries. Some were employed as staff. If other ranges could be developed and raised to standard, people will participate more because it will give avenue for activities like jeep track construction, boundary demarcation and other activities in which rural dwellers can actively participate.

Family size showed positive significant relationship with rural dwellers participation. The larger the size of a family, the more tendencies for them to participate in conservation and management of the park since such participation is not free. A token is being paid to compensate whoever participated. Gender has negative but significant relationship with rural dwellers’ participation. Males participated more than their female counterpart. This could be because the job requires some level of courage, demands time and a deal of effort. This kind of relationship is an inverse one.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded from the above that the majority of the people in the communities bordering the park are in their active or productive years. Gender, marital status, educational level and religion of the rural dwellers did not show any significant relationship with their level of participation in conservation and management of Old Oyo National Park. The variables did not influence their participation in conservation activities; there was significant difference ($P < 0.05$) between male and female rural dwellers' level of participation in conservation and management of Old Oyo National Park.

The study reveals that community members were actively involved in the national park management, their participation are in different degrees and agreed with Ayeni (1995) that, traditionally and culturally, African communities were originally linked with their natural resources and these are inseparable. These could be varying cultural practices, worships and beliefs of people that encouraged conservation and protection of certain animal species and wild areas. Fadare (1996) observed that different indigenous communities that make up each nation have had causes to protect certain areas. Olawoye (1996) pointed out that natural resources and management have always been part and parcel of the African way of life. Hence, what were considered as conservation efforts and activities today can be said to have stemmed from or regarded as improvements on traditional approaches to forest protection and preservation in natural society all over the world.

Community members claimed that there was lack of freedom or access to the conservation area. As a result of this problem, transportation of goods and services to urban centers are seriously impaired. Adetoro (2002) reported that the people see the park as not offering them enough benefits and support; hence it failed to fulfill their livelihood needs. This is because most of the protected areas in developing countries are located in the rural areas where the basic infrastructural facilities are absent or are not in good supply. Based on the outcome of the study, the following recommendations were made in order to enhance rural dwellers' participation in conservation and management of National park in Nigeria especially Old Oyo National Park, and to assist management of the park to achieve the objectives for which it was established. Government and other Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) should put in place concrete plans and establish adult education classes for rural people, so that their literacy level can be improved upon or enhanced. The park management should embark upon public enlightenment campaign in the media and communities bordering the park on the need for conservation of wildlife. The park management should also organize and form Conservation Education Club (CEC) in public schools. This will assist little children and youths to imbibe the spirit of conservation from childhood. They can also serve as means to reach their parents and enlighten them on the importance of conservation of national endowments or resources. A central park/community relations committee should be constituted with representatives from the park and each of the communities bordering the park. The central committee should meet regularly to discuss the progress of the park. This kind of administration will give the rural people a sense of belonging, and help them to do everything possible to achieve the objectives for which the park was established. This will discourage poaching and other illegal activities in the park. People arrested for illegal activities should be referred to the central committee for appropriate actions and discipline; Government should repair all the roads linking major towns bordering the park to ease the problem of transportation and high cost; Basic amenities such as good water, electricity, schools and health facilities should be provided by government, NGOs and private individuals for the benefit of the rural people; NGOs should be encouraged to participate

actively in the funding and management of Nigeria National Parks, especially Old Oyo National Park.

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