

Peoples Perceptions of the Old Oyo National Park, Nigeria: Germane Issues in Park Management

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Abstract: The study examined the peoples perceptions of the management and existence of the Old Oyo National Park, Nigeria. The study respondents were residents of the communities located around the park. The data collection took place over 6 months during which quantitative data was collected from 250 respondents. The data was analysed with frequency distribution, percentages and chi-square to measure the peoples knowledge of the conservation area and their perceptions of the management. The result shows that though 74.0% of the respondents were able to give one correct reason for the creation of the park, 29.6% for different reasons saw no need for its continued existence while others believe that it is stopping them from benefiting from their heritage (15.2%), it serves as hideout for armed robbers (12.4%), it has led to the absence of wild animals (bush meat) at social functions (10.8%), hunting is prohibited in the park (6.0%) and it is governments attempts at issuing licences to hunters (4.8%). The study observed that the community members were not involved in the park management activities though many of them support the park management and do desire to be part of the management. The study recommends that the park management should assist the communities to address the problems of insecurity in the areas and recruit more indigenes as park staff while the government is encouraged to adopt an Integrated Conservation and Rural Development approach to conservation in the park and country generally.

Key words: Peoples perceptions, park management, rural development, integrated conservation, community involvement

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of Game Reserves and National Parks have been one approach taken to conserve wildlife by successive Nigerian governments. With the establishment of the Yankari Game Reserve by the defunct Northern Regional Government several others have since followed (Ajayi and Milligan, 1975; Afolayan, 1980).

One major challenge in the protected area management is the low levels of awareness people have concerning the objectives of the protected area. As observed at the International Technical Consultation meeting organised by FAO/UNEP (1999), public awareness on conservation is very limited and this is worse in West Africa countries. It is probably, the realization of this that the government in Sudan introduced an awareness campaign on television to pass wildlife conservation messages to the people (Tut, 1999). Though, television may be accessible to the urban population, the rural people closest to the protected areas are not considered. Also, the enlightenment campaign needs to go along with programs that will alleviate the

sufferings of the people on conservation. Presently, it is the local people that pay the major price for protected area management and conservation of biodiversity. These prices are alienated land, lost opportunities for resource use, damage to crops and livelihood by wildlife (FAO/UNEP, 1999). Research into wildlife conservation and how to resolve many of the multi-various problems are still limited in Africa though the results of the few studies are hardly used.

Makombe (1999) called for the empowerment and capacity building of protected area management and communities if the biodiversity will be well conserved and managed in protected areas. There is an overall need to build both the capacity of protected area staff to manage conservation properly and that of the community as partner in the business of managing protected areas. McNeely (1996) reported that the modern protected area manager should be a renaissance person who has good grounding in biological and social sciences, resources management and practical diplomacy, nature and cultures as his job requires all these skills. Incorporating local people as legitimate partners in the management

enterprise helps to convert the mission from one of protection to one of active conservation, which enables the protected area to contribute to local development objectives. The expectation is that using such approaches to demonstrate the benefits of protected areas to society will help build stronger support-locally, nationally and internationally.

The community people are thus the best resource for achieving modern conservation objectives given their cultural conservation and means (Ayeni, 1995). This research was conducted in Old Oyo National Park (OONP) in order to assess the way the people in the adjoining communities perceive the park and if they see themselves as benefiting from the location of the park.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area: The research was conducted in the Old Oyo National Park (OONP) and the adjoining communities located in Oyo State. The area occupied by the park lies between longitudes 3°35' and 4°42'E and latitudes 8°15' and 9°N covering a total land area of 2,512 km² and sharing boundaries with 11 local government areas (LGA) in Oyo State and Kaiama LGA in Kwara State. Many communities and settlements surround the park (Fadare, 1989) prominent among which are Ago Amodu, Ago Are, Igboho, Igbeti, Ikoyi-Ile, Sepeteri and Tede. The park area is covered, by plain lowlands between 305-508 m above the sea level (Ayodele, 1988). The lowland continues all along River Ogun valleys, while scattered hills occur on the Eastern boundary of the park such as Yemoso Rock, Gbogun and Kosomonu hills. The Parks major drainage channels are River Ogun to the south and River Tessi to the North. River Ogun has a good network of tributaries that cover the entire southern part of the park. River Opo is a major tributary of River Ogun and it drains the east central part of the park. Other tributaries are Rivers Wana, Aje, Ayanta and Iwa. The main features of the climate in the park are divided into wet and dry seasons. The wet season is between May and September and the dry season is from October to April. The climate is typical of Guinea savannah zone lasting 150-200 rainy days per annum, about maximum of 5 months. Temperature is highest in the dry season and lowest during the wet season with mean daily maximum which are greatest during February and March with values of about 20°C during the height of harmattan in December and January. Total annual rainfall varies between 1,100 and 1,250 mm in the Southern axis of the park.

Observers and park rangers and guards in the Park have sighted the following mammalian species either directly or indirectly. Roan antelope (*Hippotragus*

equinus), Water buck (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*), Bush Buck (*Tragelaphus scriptus*), Western harte beast (*Alcelaphus buselaphus major*), Oribi (*Ourebia ourebia*), Warthog (*Phacochoerus aethiopicus*), Patas monkey (*Erythrocebus patas*), Lion (*Panthera leo*), Baboon (*Papio Anubis*), Kob (*Kobus kobus*) and Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer caffer*).

Methods: Using simple and stratified random probability sampling techniques, the communities around the park area were zoned to 5 ranges and based on this nine communities were selected as follows: Yemoso Range (Ikoyi-Ile), Sepeteri Range (Igboho and Igbope), Oyo-Ile Range (Igbeti and Ogundiran), Marguba Range (Sepeteri and Ago Amodu) and Tede Range (Tede and Ago Are). The study covered the 5 ranges and in each range, the major community where the park office is located was included in the study. Two hundred and fifty questionnaires were administered in the 9 communities with 50 respondents included from each range. Research Assistants were recruited from each range to administer the questionnaires at the household level. The study recorded a 100% response rate.

Data analysis: Frequency distribution and percentages were employed which was then subjected to further analysis using cross-tabulations and chi-square. Tables were used to explain and present the data.

RESULTS

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The respondents are in different age groups as follows: 40-49 (27.6%), 50-59 (24.8%), 30-39 (23.2%), 60-69 (13.6%), 20-29 (5.6%), 70-79 (4.0%) and 17-19 (1.2%). The study included male (51.2%) and female (48.8%) respondents with most of them being Muslims (51.2%), Christians (34.8%) and traditional religious worshippers (13.6%). Majority of the respondents (84.0%) are married followed by singles (8.0%), widowed (4.4%) and divorced or those separated from their spouses (3.6%). The educational attainment of the respondents vary widely with 70.0% having some level of western education while 7.2% have Islamic education only with 22.8% having no formal education.

The study investigated the peoples knowledge of the purpose for the creation of the park in the area. The cross-tabulated Table 2 shows that many respondents mentioned the preservation of wild animals (28.0%), promotion of recreation and tourism (25.6%), promotion of the importance of parks, game and forest reserves (15.2%), viewing of wild animals (6.0%), preservation of wild plants (2.8%) and protection of historical ruins in Old Oyo as the main reasons. Thus, 186 respondents or 74.4% gave one correct reason for the creation of the park.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
17-19	3	1.2
20-29	14	5.6
20-39	68	23.2
40-49	69	27.6
50-59	62	24.8
60-69	34	13.6
70-79	10	4.0
Total	250	100.0
Sex		
Male	128	51.2
Female	122	48.8
Total	250	100.0
Religion		
Christianity	87	34.8
Islam	128	51.2
Traditional Religion	34	13.6
None	1	0.4
Total	250	100.0
Education		
None	57	22.8
Primary	64	25.6
Secondary	48	19.2
Post Secondary	63	25.2
Islamic	18	7.2
Total	250	100.0

The inaccurate reasons given by 11.6% include the protection of surrounding towns and villages while 8.0% did not have any idea of the purpose. It then follows that while some people in the adjoining communities know the purpose for the parks existence others may not understand the rationale for such preservation.

The respondents were asked if they agreed with the mission of the park, which is the conservation of the area to enhance the ecological process and to preserve the historical ruins among others. Majority of the people (78.4%) said that they agreed with the mission of setting up the park while only 21.6% disagreed with the rationale for the parks mission ($\chi^2 = 18.75$, $df = 4$, p value = 0.00087811). The respondents were further asked of their view of the administration of the conservation efforts in the park. The result is presented in Table 3. Varied views were given as follows: it stops us from enjoying our heritage (15.2%), it should be discontinued (8.4%), it is governments attempt at issuing licences to hunters (4.8%) while 6.4% had no idea and 0.4% gave no response. Seventy nine respondents or 31.6% felt that the administration is good for the future children, 21.6% saw it as a good idea while 4% requested that more areas should be preserved as 7.6% saw it as a place for excursion and relaxation.

The respondents were asked if they see the presence of the park as a social problem to their respective communities. Twenty nine percent of the respondents saw the park as constituting one form of problem or the other to their respective communities while 70.4% said they had no idea about it. All the respondents were

further asked about the type of social problem the park constituted. The responses are reported on Table 4 with 12.4% seeing the park as a hideout for armed robbers terrorizing their communities. All these respondents are from Sepeteri (83.9%) and Oyo-Ile Ranges (16.1%). The people in the 2 ranges complained that armed robbers used the park lands as hideout from which attacks are launched on the surrounding communities. The second reason mostly mentioned is the prohibition of hunting within the park given by 6.0 and 3.2% mentioned the absence of wild animals or *bush meat* in social functions as a problem while 2.8% mentioned the prohibition placed by government/park management on people from entering the forests and 2.4% mentioned the prohibition placed on tree cutting in the park. Other reasons given are: restrictions placed on God endowed land (0.8%), no access to balanced natural nutrition (0.8%), restrictions placed on grazing within the park (0.8%) and lack of games in hotels (0.4%).

DISCUSSION

The peoples knowledge of the purpose of the park is relatively high as many people are able to mention and give one good reason for the setting up of the Park. This is an appreciable difference or improvement in knowledge among the respondents between Fadare (1989) and the present study. In the 1989 study, the people did not know the essence of the park and the Bororo Fulanis were quoted to be claiming that the park was preserved for their cattle grazing activities. It is even interesting to note that a few of the respondents mentioned the preservation of historical ruins in the park as one of the major purposes of the creation of Old Oyo National Park. However, there is still a gap in the peoples knowledge of the reason for the Park set up (FAO/UNEP, 1999; Tut, 1999). One would expect many people in these communities to appreciate the purpose to be principally the preservation of the historical ruins as well as conservation of wildlife. That some respondents reiterated the protection of surrounding towns as part of the purpose of the Park leaves much to be desired.

The inability to appreciate the purposes for the setting up of the Park is an issue that the Park Management has to address if the people are to be supportive of what goes on in the Park. Thus, while a great percentage agrees with the mission of setting up the park, many still express the views that the conservation effort should be stopped forthwith (Wells *et al.*, 1992; Adetoro, 1998). As far as majority of these people are concerned, the Park is only succeeding in stopping them from benefiting from their natural heritage while some see

Table 2: respondents' knowledge of the purpose for setting up the park by range

Purpose	Yemeso	Sepeteri	Oyo-ile	Marguba	Tede	Total	(%)
To promote the importance of park, game and forest reserves	4	5	16	3	10	38	15.2
To promote environment for viewing wild animals	4	1	2	2	6	15	6.0
To promote Recreation and Tourism	5	9	18	16	16	64	25.6
To preserve wild animals	18	27	4	13	8	70	28
To preserve wild plants	4	2	0	1	0	7	2.8
To protect surrounding towns	5	1	0	0	0	6	2.4
To protect historical relics	1	0	5	1	0	7	2.8
Others	6	2	1	5	9	23	9.2
No idea	3	3	4	9	1	20	8.0
Total	50	50	50	50	50	250	100.0

Table 3: respondents' views of the park management's mission

Mission	Agreed	Disagreed	Total	(%)
Stop us from exploiting from our heritage	24	14	38	15.2
It should be discontinued	6	15	21	8.4
It is good for future children	70	9	79	31.6
It is government's attempt at issuing licences to hunters	7	5	12	4.8
A good idea	54	0	54	21.6
More areas should be preserved	10	0	10	4
Place of excursion and relaxation	17	2	19	7.6
No idea	7	6	16	6.4
No response	1	0	1	0.4
Total	196	54	250	100.0

Table 4: reasons why respondents see the national park as a social problem

Type of social problem	Total	(%)
Serve as hide-out for armed robbers	31	12.4
Hunting is prohibited in the Park	15	6.0
Absence of wild animals (bush meat) in social functions	8	3.2
Government don't allow people to enter the forests	7	2.8
Disallow people from cutting trees	6	2.4
Restrictions from God endowed land	2	0.8
No access to natural nutrition	2	0.8
Restriction of incursion and grazing	2	0.8
No games in hotels	1	0.4
No idea of park being a social problem	176	70.4
Total	250	100.0

it as governments attempt at issuing licenses to hunters. These observations are similar to those of Adetoro (2003) and also earlier ones from other countries like Nepal (Nepal, 1999) and Sudan (Tut, 1999). It also, confirms the observations of FAO/UNEP (1999) International Consultation that people see the setting up of protected areas as a program of injustice. This nevertheless does not stop some others from appreciating it as being good for the future children.

The implication is that while they agree that conservation effort is good, they nevertheless have not been properly mobilized to support the Park. The ten principles of McNeely (1992) are relevant here if all these problems are to be addressed. This can best be explained by the fact that some people see the Park as a social problem to the communities and this is more pronounced at Sepeteri Range where the people complained that the

Park area served as the hideout for armed robbers who terrorize the surrounding communities. In fact the traditional ruler of the town bitterly complained about this though he still supported the need for the existence of the Park. The park management should liaise with the Nigerian Police to curb the menace of armed robbers using the parkland as hideout. The park/community relations committee should also be part of the process of flushing out the miscreants. Local hunters should also be co-opted into this effort especially in Sepeteri Range.

Other reasons for seeing the Park as a social problem are the prohibition on hunting and selling of bush meat, which people see as restrictions on their God given heritage (Fadare, 1989; Adetoro, 1998; FAO/UNEP, 1999 and Adetoro, 2003). While, the issue of allowing the people to enter the park without restrictions cannot be an ideal thing in conservation, the community members should be involved in the management of the park. This has been successfully done using different approaches in many societies so as to achieve an Integrated Conservation and Rural Development (McNeely, 1992; Wells *et al.*, 1992; FAO/UNEP, 1999).

The communities adjoining the park should therefore be more involved with the activities going on in the park and be provided with more social infrastructures as dividends for their loss of access to the park. Though, the park management is contributing to community development activities in some of these areas but the impact seem to be minimal and therefore not reaching everybody. The recruitment of more indigenes of these communities as park staff-either as rangers or park guards, will be more appreciated by the people.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author appreciates the approval received from the management and (the field support from the) staff of the Old Oyo National Park to conduct the study. The community leaders also played a key role in ensuring the success of the field work.

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