

SUPPORT ZONE COMMUNITIES' PERSPECTIVES ON THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF ECOTOURISM IN OLD OYO NATIONAL PARK, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism benefits to local communities are germane to support for conservation. This study determined the perspectives of the residents of support zone communities on Old Oyo National Park on the potential benefits of ecotourism. It was a questionnaire survey involving 150 residents of the support zone communities (rural and urban communities) of the Park. Data obtained were subjected to descriptive, independent t-test, chi square, and Pearson's correlation analysis. Results indicated that 60.9% and 69.5% of respondents in rural and urban communities respectively were male, the mean age for rural communities' residents was 42.1 while it was 38.4 for urban communities. In addition, 42.9% and 40.7% had non-formal and primary education respectively in rural communities while 35.6% and 33.9% had primary and secondary education in urban communities. Economic development, social development, community capacity building, and environmental potential benefits of ecotourism were perceived very high by the respondents while cultural benefits were perceived high. In all, environmental protection benefits of ecotourism were rated highest while the least were cultural benefits. For the environmental benefits of the park to be sustainable, support for conservation of cultural, historical and biodiversity resources of the park by rural communities, who are the custodians of these resources, social development of the rural areas through continuous and sustained interventions should be improved upon.

Keywords: National park, Community development, Environmental protection, Ecotourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is fast becoming the engine for the growth of the global economy, with unique contributions to GDP and employment. According to Sundufu *et al.* (2012), one of the most common uses of protected areas is tourism. Ecotourism has been regarded as a form of tourism that is expected to boost conservation and socioeconomic development in the rural communities of developing economies, like those of many African countries (Mawere & Mubaya, 2012). Ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015). Ecotourism, as well as nature-based tourism, contributed significantly to the increase in global tourism and its impact on economic development. From the 1990s, ecotourism has been growing 20%-30% per year (Honey, 2010).

Fiagbomeh (2012) opined that ecotourism is the appropriate one to provide the necessary livelihood benefits or incentives among livelihood activities that have the potential to provide one. According to United Nations World Tourism Organisation (2012), many of the 50 million international tourists visiting Africa each year are driven by the continent's unparalleled wildlife and scenery. These tourists spend in the local economy, sustain jobs and provide an incentive for conservation, making tourism a powerful engine for sustainable development.

Most research studying local residents' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development and the factors that may influence their

perceptions and attitudes is essential in achieving a host community's support for tourism development (Choi & Murray, 2010). According to Diaz and Gutierrez (2010), given that several of the impacts converge in the dimensions or categories, it is possible to observe the most important impacts-dimensions by groups or segments. Moreover, each group or segment of residents shares common interests which will affect their attitude toward tourists. Thus, positive and negative social, cultural, and economic impacts are closely linked (Castillo Canalejo, Núñez Tabales and Sánchez Cañizares, 2016). Despite largely agreeing on what theoretical steps are needed to achieve sustainable ecotourism, such as supporting local economies, generating revenue for conservation, etc., the practical accomplishment of these goals have been more controversial (Sarti, 2016), and empirical evidence supporting these assertions is limited (Holladay & Ormsby, 2011).

This study investigated the support zone communities' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism in Old Oyo National Park, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- i. describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the residents of the support zone communities of Old Oyo National Park;
- ii. ascertain the respondents' awareness of ecotourism activities in the Park;
- iii. determine the rural and urban residents' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism in their communities

The study hypothesised that:



- i. There is no significant difference between rural and urban residents' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism development
- ii. There is no significant relationship between the selected socio-demographic variables and residents' perspectives on potential benefits of ecotourism development.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in communities located in four administrative and protection ranges of Old Oyo National Park, Oyo State, Southwest Nigeria. The ranges are Tede, Marguba, Sepeteri, and Oyo-Ile. The Park derives its name from the ruins of Oyo-Ile (Old Oyo), the ancient political capital of Yoruba Empire. The Park has a total land mass of 2,512km² and situated in northern part of Oyo State on latitude 8° 15' and 9° 00'N and longitude 3° 35' and 4° 42' E. The Park has an average annual rainfall of about 3,000mm. Ambient temperature is high ranging from 23-32 degree Celsius at lower altitudes.

The study population was the residents of support zone communities in the four administrative ranges of the Park. The communities were purposively selected based on their closeness to the Park and tourists' entry point to the park. The urban communities, where the selected administrative range offices are located and through which tourists enter the park include Tede, Sepeteri, Igboho, and Igbeti. In total, seven (7) communities from 27 communities present in Tede range were selected, eight (8) were selected from 12 communities in Marguba range, eight (8) were selected from 17 communities in Sepeteri range and eight (8) were selected from 30 communities in Oyo Ile range. Thus, 31 communities were selected from 86 communities bordering the four selected ranges of the park. Due to unavailability of the total population of each of the communities sampled, convenience sampling method was adopted. Thus, respondents that were willing to participate in the study were selected. In all, 150 respondents were elected from the communities that lie within 0-15km from the park.

Data were obtained through the use of questionnaires administered to individuals selected in each community. The questionnaire comprised the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the residents' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism in the park. The internal consistency reliability of the instrument was ascertained using the Cronbach's Alpha procedure. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for the perspectives on potential economic development benefits of ecotourism was 0.82, 0.77 for perceived

social development, 0.80 for cultural preservation, 0.77 for community capacity building, and 0.86 for environmental protection.

The dependent variable for the study is residents' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism development which was measured by providing the respondents with a set of perceptual statements and this was assessed on a 5-point scale of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree, scores of 5,4, 3, 2,1 were assigned respectively. The data collected were analysed and presented descriptively using SPSS version 23. Hypotheses were tested using Independent T-test, Chi-square, and correlation tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic characteristics

Of the respondents ((Table 1), male represents 60.9% and 69.5% in rural and urban communities respectively, this is consistent with previous studies by Ogunjinmi, Onadeko and Aiyeloja (2012), Ogunjinmi, Onadeko, Inah and Osunsina (2014) and Mensah (2016). The mean age for rural and urban communities' residents was 42.1 years and 38.4 years respectively, this implies that they are relatively young and were in their active age. This result is in agreement with Mutanga, Vengesayi, Gandiwa and Muboko (2015) and Abeli (2017). Furthermore, 42.9%% and 40.7% had non-formal and primary education respectively in rural areas while 35.6% and 33.9% had primary and secondary education in urban communities, which implies that residents in urban areas are more educated than their rural counterparts. This result is consistent with Abeli (2017). In terms of income, the mean income of respondents from rural areas was N144,066 while it was N225,763 for participants from urban communities. Thus, the mean income of the respondents from rural areas was lower than that of the urban areas. This shows that the rural respondents were low income earners. The findings are in line with Abeli (2007) and Mutanga *et al.* (2015). Furthermore, the mean years of residency in the selected communities for respondents from rural areas was 13.7 years while that of the urban areas was 23.9 years, this conforms to Mensah (2016). Findings further reveal that 14.3% of the respondents from the rural areas were aware of ecotourism activities in the park. On the other hand, 96.6% of the respondents from urban areas were aware of ecotourism. This implies that the awareness of ecotourism by urban residents was very much higher than the rural residents. The low level of awareness of ecotourism by rural residents has the potential of limiting their involvement and benefits from ecotourism as well as their support for conservation activities in the park.



Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Rural (n=91)	Mean/Mode	Urban (n=59)	Mean/Mode
Gender				
Male	60.9	Male	69.5	Male
Female	39.6		30.5	
Age (years)				
15-24	5.5	42.1	3.4	38.4
25-54	75.8		93.2	
55-64	12.1		3.4	
65 and above	6.6		0.0	
Education				
Non-formal	42.9	Non-formal	11.8	Primary
Primary	40.7		35.6	
Secondary	14.3		33.9	
Tertiary	2.2		18.6	
Annual Income (Naira)				
0-50,000	26.3	144,066	8.5	225,763
51,000-100,000	30.8		16.9	
101,000-150,000	8.8		13.6	
151,000-200,000	18.7		27.1	
>200,000	15.4		33.9	
Length of residency (years)				
1-5	31.8	13.7	15.3	23.9
6-10	24.2		15.3	
11-15	12.1		6.8	
16-20	16.5		6.8	
21 and above	15.4		55.8	
Awareness of ecotourism				
Yes	14.3	No	96.6	No
No	85.7		3.4	

Residents’ perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism in Old Oyo National Park

The residents’ perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism to their communities is presented in Table 2. On the potential of ecotourism to propel economic development, 68.7% and 28.0% strongly agreed and agreed that ecotourism will promote local economic development, 63.3% and 32.7% strongly agreed and agree that it will promote local industry development and 56.0% strongly agreed and 39.3% agreed that it will increase the income of local residents. For social development, 54.0% strongly agreed and 28.7% agreed that ecotourism will increase economic opportunities for local residents, 60.7% strongly agreed and 29.3% agreed that it will raise the fame of local communities, 53.3% strongly agreed and 36.7% agreed that ecotourism will improve local infrastructure and quality of life, 11.3% strongly agreed and 25.3 agreed that it will increase the prices and cost of living while 12.7% strongly agreed and 24.7% agreed that ecotourism will disrupt daily lives of the residents. With regard to cultural preservation of potential benefit of ecotourism, 50.0% strongly agreed and 32.7% agreed that it will promote protection of local cultural heritage, promote protection of diversity of local cultural activities (32.7% strongly agreed and 22.0% agreed), and will destroy local communities’ culture

(21.3% strongly agreed and 25.3% agreed). In terms of community capacity potential building of ecotourism, 50.0% strongly agreed and 28.7% that it will enhance the cohesion of communities and that it will improve the ability and quality of local residents (55.3% strongly agreed and 34.7% agreed). For environmental potential benefits of ecotourism, 66.7% strongly agreed and 24.7% agreed that ecotourism will protect and improve local natural environment while it will improve local residents’ awareness on protection of environment (71.3% strongly agreed and 22.7% agreed). From these findings, environmental protection functions of ecotourism were adjudged the most perceived potential benefit while cultural preservation was rated least. These agree with Ramseook-Munhurrin and Naidoo (2011) and Mensah (2016). However, least benefit reported by Ramseook-Munhurrin and Naidoo (2011) and Mensah (2016) was economic benefit. The findings of cultural preservation is in conformity with Atsepoyi, Pai and Masters (2015). Overall, the perceived environmental protection, economic development, community capacity building, and social development benefits of ecotourism were very high while that of cultural preservation was high. This is consistent with the findings of Mohammadi, Khalifah and Hosseini (2016), Abeli (2017), and Acquah, Nsor, Arthur and Boadi (2017).



Table 2: Residents' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism development

Perception statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Economic development					
Ecotourism will promote local economic development	68.7	28.0	2.0	0.7	0.7
Ecotourism will promote local industry development	63.3	32.7	2.7	0.7	0.7
Ecotourism will increase the income of local residents	56.0	39.3	0.7	2.7	1.3
Social development					
Ecotourism will increase employment opportunities for local residents	54.0	28.0	12.0	2.0	4.0
Ecotourism will raise the fame of local communities	60.7	29.3	8.0	0.7	1.3
Ecotourism will improve local infrastructure and quality of life	53.3	36.7	8.7	0.7	0.7
Ecotourism will increase the price and the cost of living	11.3	25.3	24.7	10.0	28.7
Ecotourism will disrupt daily lives for residents	12.7	24.7	16.0	12.7	34.0
Cultural preservation					
Ecotourism will promote protection on local cultural heritage	50.0	32.7	9.3	2.0	6.0
Ecotourism will promote protection on the diversity of local cultural activities	32.7	22.0	16.7	6.0	22.7
Ecotourism will destroy local community folk culture	21.3	25.3	18.7	10.7	24.0
Community capacity building					
Ecotourism will enhance the cohesion of community	50.0	28.7	15.3	2.0	4.0
Ecotourism will improve the ability and quality of local residents	55.3	34.7	6.7	1.3	2.0
Environmental protection					
Ecotourism will protect and improve local natural environment	66.7	24.7	6.7	0.7	1.3
Ecotourism will improve local residents' awareness on protection of environment	71.3	22.7	4.0	1.3	0.7

Differences between rural and urban residents' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism in Old Oyo National Park

The independent t-test was conducted to determine if there is no significant difference between rural and urban communities' perspectives on potential benefits of ecotourism. Results reveal that there was significant difference between rural and urban residents' perspectives on the potential social development ($t=-3.24$, $p<0.01$) and environmental protection benefits ($t=2.14$, $p<0.05$) of ecotourism in the park. The residents of the urban communities had a higher perceived social development potential benefits of ecotourism than the residents of the rural communities surveyed. In contrast, the residents of rural communities had a higher perceived environmental potential benefit of

ecotourism than the residents of the urban communities. In addition, there was no statistically significant difference between the rural and urban residents' perspectives on the potential economic development benefits ($t=1.08$, $p>0.05$), cultural preservation benefits ($t=-1.06$, $p>0.05$), and community capacity building benefits ($p>0.05$) (Table 4). This is in conformity with the findings by Acquah *et al.* (2017). The reason for the difference could be that social facilities are more concentrated in the urban centres than the rural areas. Facilities such as roads, electricity, water and other infrastructure provided by government are important for tourist visitation. On the contrary, environmental benefits of ecotourism are much more pronounced in the rural areas than the urban centres and thus the differences between rural and urban centres.

Table 4: Differences between rural and urban residents' perspectives of the potential benefits of ecotourism development

Perspectives on potential benefits of ecotourism	t- value	Mean difference	df	p-value
Economic development	1.08	0.32	148	0.281
Social development	-3.24	-2.87	148	0.001**
Cultural preservation	-1.06	-0.37	148	0.291
Community capacity building	1.20	0.29	145.76	0.262
Environmental protection	2.14	0.48	148	0.034*

*P<0.05, **P<0.01

Relationship between the selected socio-economic variables and residents' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism development

Among the selected socio-economic variables, only length of stay was significantly correlated ($r=0.21$, $p<0.01$) with residents' perspectives on potential benefits of ecotourism. However, age and income are not significantly correlated ($p>0.05$) with their perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism. Community type is also significantly related to the residents' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism ($\chi^2=62.58$, $p<0.01$).

Gender, education, and awareness of ecotourism are not significantly related to residents' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism ($p>0.05$) (Table 5). This implies that among the selected independent variables, length of stay in the community and community type are the two variables that are significantly related to perceived potential benefits of ecotourism. This is in consonance with the findings of Han, Fang, and Huang (2011) on the relationship between age, years stayed in the community and perception of ecotourism. Awareness of ecotourism in the park could be an eye opener to the residents on the benefits of ecotourism to their communities.

Table 5: Relationship between the selected socio-economic variables and the residents' perspectives on the potential benefits of ecotourism

Variable	r-value	p-value
Age	0.153	0.061
Income	0.076	0.354
Length of stay	0.211	0.010
	χ^2 value	
Community type	62.582	0.001
Gender	28.782	0.581
Education	105.052	0.185
Awareness of ecotourism activities	133.473	0.265

*P<0.05, **P<0.01

CONCLUSION

Educational attainment of residents of rural communities was lower than that of the urban, with a far-reaching implication on rural residents' ability to understand the purpose and goals of establishing the park and its activities. With lower income of the rural residents, this could put pressure on the park in order for the inhabitants to enhance their income from park resources in the form of illegal hunting and poaching of wildlife and other resources which could impact negatively on the sustainability of the park resources. Lack of awareness and participation in ecotourism could prevent the multiplier effects of tourism and conservation in the park.

Although Old Oyo National Park is noted for historical and cultural resources, the cultural preservation potential benefit was adjudged to be the least by the respondents, thus, the awareness of the cultural preservation potential benefit of the park, compared to other benefits is at variance to one of the major goals of establishing the park, i.e., the

preservation of historical sites and monuments of the Old Oyo Empire from where the park derives its name. The findings further suggest that the social development potential benefit is perceived higher by the urban residents while on the other hand, the rural residents see the environmental protection as the major benefit. This suggests that social development in the rural areas was low and thus far-reaching effects on the support that could be accorded to conservation. In other words, concentration of social amenities in the urban areas, neglecting the rural areas could impede local support for conservation activities of the park. Consequently, for the environmental benefits of the park to be sustainable, support for conservation of cultural, historical and biodiversity resources of the park by rural communities, who are the custodians of these resources, social development of the rural areas through continuous and sustained interventions should be improved upon.



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