

ECOTOURISM IMPACTS OF OLD OYO NATIONAL PARK ON HOST COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Old Oyo National Park has commenced active ecotourism services based on ecology and archaeology resource. This include, the museum at the park administrative head office and Akoto camp display exhibits of cultural, archaeological and historical values for eco-tourists' delight (NNPS, 2015). This research work delves into the impact of this ecotourism park on the host communities.

The findings reveals that the impacts are multifaceted both positive and negative. It further revealed that though some of the locals have benefited from employment opportunities within the park, and provisions of borehole and good roads, but the challenges relating to clashes, litigations and lack of active participation or involvement of the communities in the park management activities on one hand and that involving policy clashes between the community members and the park management on the other hand are major issues militating against the development and peaceful co-existence of the park development and the host communities.

Suggestions, hinging on the creation of community friendly awareness, adopting active participatory approach to park management and provision of healthy and economically viable environment for living were recommended for effective park management within the host communities.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Park, Host Community, Participation

Introduction

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that involves travelling to tranquil and unpolluted natural areas. It can also be referred as a responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people (McCool, 2009).

Since ecotourism involves travel to natural destinations; It possesses qualities, such as, building environmental awareness; provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people; it respects local culture and It supports human rights and democratic movements; as the Conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection (Tuohino & Hynonen, 2001). Consequently, Honey, (2008) express major advantages of ecotourism to include the promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, provision of jobs to local populations; Sharing of socio-economic benefits with local communities and indigenous people by having their informed consent and participation in the management of ecotourism enterprises; Minimization of tourism's own environmental impact and affordability and lack of waste in the form of luxury (NNPS, 2015).

Ecotourism, responsible tourism, jungle tourism, and sustainable development have become prevalent concepts since the late 1980s, and ecotourism has experienced (Randall, 1987), arguably the fastest growth of all sub-sectors in the tourism industry. The popularity represents a change in tourist perceptions, increased environmental awareness, and a desire to explore natural environments. At times, such changes (Tuohino & Hynonen, 2001) become as much a statement affirming one's social identity, educational sophistication, and disposable income.

However, in the continuum of tourism activities that stretch from conventional tourism to ecotourism proper, there has been a lot of contention to the limit at which biodiversity preservation, local social-economic benefits, and environmental impact can be considered "ecotourism". For this reason, environmentalists, special interest groups, and governments define ecotourism

differently. Environmental organizations have generally insisted that ecotourism is nature-based, sustainably managed, conservation supporting, and environmentally educated, as (Honey, 2008) tourist industry and governments; however, focus more on the product aspect, treating ecotourism as equivalent to any sort of tourism based in nature (Pongpontat, 2011).

Ideally, ecotourism satisfies several general criteria, including the conservation of biological diversity and cultural diversity through ecosystem protection, promotion of sustainable use of biodiversity, increase in environmental and cultural knowledge, affordability and reduced waste, and minimization of its own environmental impact. In such ways, it contributes to the long term benefits to both the environment and local communities.

Ecotourism: Scope and Concept

Ecotourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the tourism industry, growing annually by 10-15% worldwide, (Rubinstein et al. 2008). It is an aspect of the broad based tourism, which is now the single largest industry in the world and accounts for one third of all international trade, and many view tourism as a vehicle for economic development. The World Tourism Organization reports that 625 million international travellers spent US\$444.7 billion in travel related costs excluding airfare in 1998. Furthermore, the Ecotourism Society projects that over the next two decades arrivals will increase by 4.3% and receipts will climb by 6.7% annually. Late twentieth century phenomena like an increase in wealth, an increase in the number of retired persons with income to travel, transportation improvements, and technology improvements all contributed to the growth in the tourism industry. Within the rapidly expanding tourism industry, the fastest growing sector is ecotourism. Ecotourism is growing between 2.5 and 7 times faster than the rest of the tourism sector. According to the WTO, in 1998, international travellers spent

US \$48 billion on nature tourism representing approximately ten percent of all international travel expenditures. Furthermore, in the US alone, 4-6 million Americans travel overseas for nature related tourism annually. According to the Ecotourism Society, 30% of all tourists today are ecotourists, which suggests that this sector of the industry generates approximately, US \$145 billion, (UNWTO, 2005).

Although alternative definitions for ecotourism abound, most experts agree that ecotourism must meet the following general criteria:

- Promote biodiversity conservation
- Contribute to local sustainable development goals
- Bring profits to the participants, (Mader,1999)

Although the financial requirements for ecotourism projects are similar to those of other commercial projects, the potential yields of ecotourism may not equal the highest premiums that investors reap from other tourism investment opportunities. Nevertheless, ecotourism projects can contribute to conservation objectives and human resource development in host countries. The key to successful investment lies in selecting projects with the help of local nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and communities, seeking public and private joint ventures, and obtaining grants and low interest loans from financial institutions. Ecotourism is practiced throughout the world. From the tundra region through the temperate zone, the montane forest region, the deserts to the tropical world. However, ecotourism destinations are restricted to some few specific protected natural enclaves within these geographic regions. For any particular site or location to qualify for ecotourism, the natural landscape must be relatively undisturbed for people to study, enjoy and admire the scenery and its wild animals and plants in their natural state, (Mader, 1999).

According to further research by Kamaro (1996), western tourists are now seeking alternatives to traditional tourism. Instead of taking traditional mass tourism oriented vacations, many tourists are now seeking new, less visited destinations. As a result of the growing concern with environmental and cultural issues, tourists are now demanding vacations in pristine environments with uncorrupted local culture.

These factors contribute to an increased demand for development, creating an environment of investment in the infrastructure projects necessary to sustain tourism. A variety of factors contribute to the growth of ecotourism. For example, some East Asian and Latin American governments have adopted policies to induce capital investment in ecotourism. In addition, NGO's, industry associations, and policy makers are developing guidelines and certification standards to ensure uniform development of the industry. Ecotourism experts suggest that a system of voluntary certification will help consumers to choose legitimate ecotourism enterprises. However, such a system will work only if business leaders insist on high certification standards.

Although it's economic, social and conservation contribution to sustainable development are highly touted, tourism industry professionals are unable to ascertain ecotourism's actual contribution to the tourism industry. Part of this difficulty stems from the confusing array of definitions offered by ecotourism policy specialists. Adding to this dilemma, the market equates ecotourism with other related terms such as sustainable tourism, nature tourism, wildlife tourism, and adventure tourism.

Specialists in the field generally define nature tourism as travel to unspoiled areas to experience and enjoy nature. Unlike adventure tourism, nature tourism usually involves moderate and safe forms of exercise such as hiking, biking, sailing, and camping.

Adventure tourism, however, requires physical skill, endurance, risk taking, and generally involves activities such as rope climbing, deep-sea diving, bicycling or kayaking. Wildlife tourists, however, travel in order to observe birds, fish, and other animals in their native habitats.

The Old Oyo National Park

The park is approximately 300km from Lagos, 60km from Ibadan, 160km from Ilorin, 660km from Abuja, and 660km from Kaduna and 910 from Kano. A network of fairly tarred roads surrounds the park, making it possible to reach with relative ease. Travellers from eastern part of Nigeria and Lagos/ Ibadan axis can come in through Ibadan-Iseyin-Sepeteri to enter the park through Ajaku gate. Travellers from Abuja, Kaduna Kano axis can come in through Ilorin-Igbeti to enter the park through Jokoro, Tessi Garuba or Apata routes. Those from Kainji Lake National park can come in through Kishi-Soro to enter the park through Soro gate, while those traveling from central Benin Republic can come in through Yaashikira Kosubosu-Igboho to enter the park through Alaguntan rout. Some of the routes are inaccessible during the rainy season (NNPS, 2015).

Most parts of Old Oyo National park are lowland plains, undulating from 300m to 500m above sea level. Few hills, notable Yemoso and Gbofun, however rise several meters above their general surroundings. Annual rainfall in the park ranges between 900mm and 1500mm, and main annual temperature is between 12°C and 37°C. The rainy season begins in April through September, with the highest rainfall record between July and August. The dry season begins in October through early April and the driest and hottest period is between March and April. The park experiences the harmattan period from November through February. During this time, night temperatures are quite

low. Jeep track can however be slippery or even unpassable during the rainy season. The best time to visit is the dry season (NNPS, 2015).

For a very long time in the past, the area has suffered indiscriminate and uninhibited destructive human activities, including hunting. As a result, animal species have been greatly depleted and some species have either become locally extinct or rare. Fauna is relatively more abundant in the southern part of the park. Some fauna found in the park are: roan antelope, western hartebeest, kob, red flanked duiker, grey duiker, patas monkey, baboon, water buck, bush buck, oribi, wathog

The entire park lies in the Southern part of the Southern guinea Savanna. Several Botanists have classified the vegetation in the park in different ways, but generally there are four sub-types. These consist of:

- Dense woodland and forests outlier in the South-eastern part.
- Mixed open savannah woodland in the central part
- Outcrop vegetation in the northeast
- Riparian grassland and fringing woodland occupying the forest plains and valleys along the Ogun River (NNPS, 2015).

The abundance of cultural features both within and outside the park makes it a combination of an ecological, cultural or historical park. The site of Oyo-Ile, now in ruins, located in the north east corner of the park was the capital and the hub of the ancient Oyo Empire of the Yoruba race. This empire was one of the first states to emerge in the forest and the coastal region of West Africa and was also the most culturally advanced.

- The Royal Cemeteries at Igboho and Bara, both require development.

- The Antete shrine at Ikoyi-Ile (there is a part containing swarms of honey bee which used to fight for the people of Ikoyi-Ile by stinging enemies to death). This myth can be attested till today.
- The Antete shrine at Saki
- Ibuya pool (a good potential for water recreation).
- River Ogun
- Yemeso Hill (with several old settlements at its base, it harbors a lion's den).

The largest concentration of archaeological/ cultural sites/relics is found at Oyo-Ile. Here, more than twenty of such have been identified. They include:

- Four concentric defense walls around the former ancient capital city.
- Mejiro industrial sites (consisting of blacksmiths, iron forgery sites and grain milling sites).
- A large water reservoir for dry season utilization
- A zoo and Ogun shrines
- Palace (Aafin) of Alaafin alongside the town hall and Akesan market (NNPS, 2015).

Hosts of cultural artifacts littering most of these sites include grinding stone, earthen pots, potsherds, snags, snail shells, mud walls, tomb stones, mound of ashes and charcoal, and so on are still discernible with these abandoned old settlement sites till date. Other features of interest is the present balance (Aafin) of the Alaafin of Oyo at Oyo include an ageless tortoise and a tree of more than three hundred years old at Ogbomosho, closely relate with the ancient kingdom of Oyo, (NNPS, 2015).

The ancient Oyo Empire was very powerful and lasted for so long partly, because it was self sufficient in many aspects. For example, it established industries for manufacturing weaponry, household utensils and clothing. Many of these traditional industries still continues to this day. Oyo, for example, is well known for pottery and calabash carving, Iseyin for weaving. Traditional clothes, ASO OKE and Igbeti for blacksmithing. Others are basket weaving, drum making, leather works, wood carving and sculpture (NNPS, 2015).

Research Method

This survey was carried out on two population samples. The first population constitutes the Park community, while the Park Manager or Conservator of the park was chosen to represent the park staff. Consequently, the Park Community constitutes the entire population of communities surrounding the national park site. For ease of sampling and research focus, two neighbouring communities were chosen. These communities are Sepeteri and Saki in Oyo state.

A total of 120 questionnaires were administered. The questionnaires were distributed evenly between the till two communities. Sample Random sampling procedure was adopted in the administration of the questionnaires with the aid of updated base maps of the two towns, while efforts were made to administer the questions directly through skilled enumerators who are also fluent in English and Yoruba languages. This was because many of the target respondents are illiterates.

For further analysis of data collected, qualitative method of data presentation was adopted.

Research Findings

Table 1: Benefits Derived From the Park by the Communities

	Frequency	Percent
Provision of Employment	69	57.5
Education and Learning	4	3.3
Provision of Basic needs and Infrastructures	22	18.3
All of the Above	41	17.5
Others	4	3.3
Total	120	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The data collected relating to the derived benefits from the use and products of the park revealed that employment provision and the provision of basic amenities constitute major attractions and benefits to the host communities. The provisions of amenities as further revealed from the findings include borehole water and good road network and increased trade and business opportunities.

Table 2: Adverse Ecotourism Impact on Host Community

Challenges	Frequency	Percent
Environmental Degradation	6	5
Clashes and crisis	72	60
Animal Attacks	7	5.8
Lack of access to land	35	29.2
Total	120	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2015

The table above also revealed that, issues relating to communal clashes and crisis, coupled with litigation appears to the respondents as most negative and damaging challenge associated with the ecotourism preserved area. Issues relating to communal crisis seem to be a regular occurrence in the study areas, as reports and cases of boundary dispute and encroachments on specific portions

of the park area top the list. It was further revealed that there exist regular clashes between the park security men and the villages who may want to make use of reserved land for farming purposes or for hunting. The regular incident of clashes has led to loss of lives and left many people injured even disabled in the process.

Summary of Findings

This research work hinges on the study of the assessment of ecotourism benefits on the neighbouring communities of Old Oyo National Park, Oyo State. This study was effectively carried out through a comprehensive survey of important parameters required for the research. The residents of the study areas, Sepeteri and Saki and also the Park Management were all involved in the gathering of research data and the provision of useful information.

This study further revealed that the development of the Old Oyo national Park has accrued some benefits to the neighbouring communities which have enhanced the social and economic wellbeing of the community members. Some of the benefactors include commercial drivers, traders and farmers. Also, positive community's suggestions and contributions and supports from the local people were lacking, which has directly and indirectly affected the expected peaceful co-existence of the park activities and the host communities. Sequel to this therefore, issues of poaching or illegal hunting for animals in the park has resulted to lots of clashes and crisis in and within the park environment.

The research revealed an existing culture of "top-down" approach to project initiation and execution in the operation and management of the park. The local people were mainly involved in product marketing, but rarely on decision making and park management issues. It is not out of

place to say that active and full participation of the community hosting a park of this nature is expedient to the smooth management of the park. It will also enhance its growth and sustainability. This will also generate maximum support from the public for optimum socio-economic and physical development of the park.

Conclusion

Ecotourism has proven itself to be an important tool for conservation, and in certain cases it has improved the quality of life of local people, who continue to demand it as a sustainable development option. But its record has been far from uniform throughout the world. Evaluating ecotourism as a global sustainable development tool is a difficult task.

The tourism industry is growing in Oyo state due to the establishment of the Old Oyo National park and the benefits, (which could be direct or indirect) which are derived from the incident and development of ecotourism are numerous. Although the development of ecotourism in the study area is gradual, its economic effects are inevitable. This study shows that despite all the benefits known to be accrued for the establishment of the Old Oyo National park, there are still several resources that are left untapped, which when effectively exploited can generate enormous economic development for the park environment and the state as a whole

Recommendations

From the foregoing, the researcher is of the opinion that if certain policies and efforts are put in place, it will not only address regular communal crisis between members of the host community around the park environment and that between the park management and the communities. Strict adherence to suggestions below will further develop both the park and the communities in diverse facets. Some of these are:

- Provision of more employment opportunities for the local people and basic infrastructures and amenities. This will definitely bring the community members close to the park management and consequently attract their support.
- The active and full involvement and participation of the community members on the planning and management of park activities must be taken as priority and implemented to the letters for full support from the people.
- Creation of awareness about the benefits of the park, through jingles, workshops and other sensitization tools. This type of awareness will revealed to the public advantages of preserving our natural resources respectively the conservation of potential ecotourism site for the wellbeing of the neighbouring communities and the nation as a whole.

The neighbouring communities of the Old Oyo National park should be given adequate consideration by creating “Community Wildlife Lovers” in each community to serve as wildlife Monitoring groups. This set of people would also serve as informants for the Park Management championing awareness crusade discouraging people from poaching into the park. As a result, a lot of animals if protected would be available for viewing by tourists and will further enhance the quality and quantity of wildlife deposits in the Park. This would further help the individuals involved to see themselves as a stakeholder of the park project and that such should not fail. Therefore, active community participation in the management of ecotourism potentials in the park is not just important for the benefits of the host communities, but as a very germane factor for the sustainability of wildlife resources.

The economic wellbeing of the neighbouring communities, quality cultural artefacts peculiar to each community should be available for display and sold by the residents to the tourists as

souvenirs. This would not only increase the income of this local people, and consequently provide employment opportunities as a long-term benefits.

To further boost ecotourism in the Old Oyo national park, provision of adequate facilities to take care of the issue of overnight accommodation either in lodges or camps is a necessity. Provision for standard accommodation facilities will encourage more tourists to visit the park especially those that may not be able to return home and those tourists who may want to take some time out to relax and enjoy nature and its resources. Sequel to this therefore, improvement on existing accommodation facilities will prevent tourists from going to look for accommodation outside the national park or want to rush home due to either inadequate or sub-standard of accommodation facilities. The provision of such facilities within neighbouring communities would also serve as employment centres for some of the residents of host communities.

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