Socioeconomic Impacts of Old Oyo National Park on Host Communities in Oke-Ogun Region, Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

It is against the background of enhancing the impact of tourist sites on host communities in Nigeria that this study investigates the socioeconomic impacts of Old Oyo National Park on its host communities in the Oke-Ogun region of Oyo State, Nigeria. To achieve this, a set of questionnaires was administered to 109 systematically sampled households while another was administered to randomly selected 106 tourists identified in the park both during the festivity holiday. Information obtained, among others, includes the impact of the park. Obtained data were subjected to descriptive statistics while the Park Impact Index (PII) was developed. With the low PII values of 1.37 and 2.53, the tourist site has an insignificant impact on its host community. The study therefore, among others, recommends a repackage of the national park by rehabilitation of its existing infrastructures.

Keywords: Tourism, Urban Planning, Leisure, Oke Ogun

1. Introduction

As Nigeria is seeking to diversify its economy from oil dependency, other sectors of the economy inclusive of tourism are gradually gaining attention (Adeigbe *et al*, 2023; Sadiq *et al*, 2023). Unfortunately, the nation's tourism sector is faced with a plethora of challenges, among which are the near dearth, and low impact of existing tourism sites (Tangban, 2022). Thus, there is a need to focus on improving this category of landuse through adequate planning, development and management. A National Park is a natural area of land and/or sea, designated to protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations (Worboys, 2015). They are excluded from exploitation or occupation inimical to the purposes of designation of the area (Hall and Forest, 2012) and provide a foundation for spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible (Wright and Matthew, 2015). In Nigeria, national parks were designated for the dual purpose of conserving nature and promoting ecotourism (Ngoka, 2013). However, both objectives cannot be optimally achieved if conscious recreation planning is not put in

place. Planning of parks and recreation sites is not limited to Nigeria but the world over, with more amplification in Brazil, Kenya, Tanzania among others (Tibesigwa *et. al.*, 2020). This may be associated with these country's recognition of the role of national parks in the preservation, conservation and propagation of important natural cultural heritage "for the enjoyment of people" (World Tourism Organisation, 1992).

In Nigeria, for instance, there are eight National parks and over 20 Game Reserves that cut across various geographical and ecological regions. Also, in the latter part of the year 2002, the Nigerian government declared tourism as one of its six key areas for economic development for 2003-07(Odeniran *et. al.*, 2018; Yusuff, 2016). Despite this policy intervention, the tourism industry in the country has been argued to still have low returns to the economy of the country (Matthew et al, 2021). Although Nigeria is not a popular tourist destination like Kenya and Ivory Coast, and tourism itself is not a major sector of the country's economy; its impact particularly on its immediate environment at least should be felt. Parks are to boost the economy and drive development in the localities where they are situated (Fezeka et al, 2020). However, Nigeria reserves and parks are yet to be fully developed to the standard required to promote tourism (Mejabi and Abutu, 2015). Also, the lack of basic infrastructure has affected the impact of tourism on their immediate environment (Onokala and Olajide, 2020). This requires conscious recreation planning intervention; however, such cannot be perfectly done until an enquiry is made.

It is against this background that this study assesses the impact of Old Oyo National Park. Nigeria. This is to enhance the impact of the park, and similar ones, on their host communities and the Nation. The objectives of the study include an assessment of the existing situation of the park, an evaluation of its challenges, and an appraisal of its impact.

2. The Study Area

The National Park (Figure 1), located in Oyo state, was established in the year 1936. The saxophone-shaped park is bordered in the North by Kwara State, South by Ikoyi, and on its western part are Igbope and Sepeteri towns. The park lies between latitudes (8˚10′ and 9˚05˙N) and between longitudes (3˚35' and 4˚ 20˙E), and covers about 251,200 hectares (Fadare, 1989).

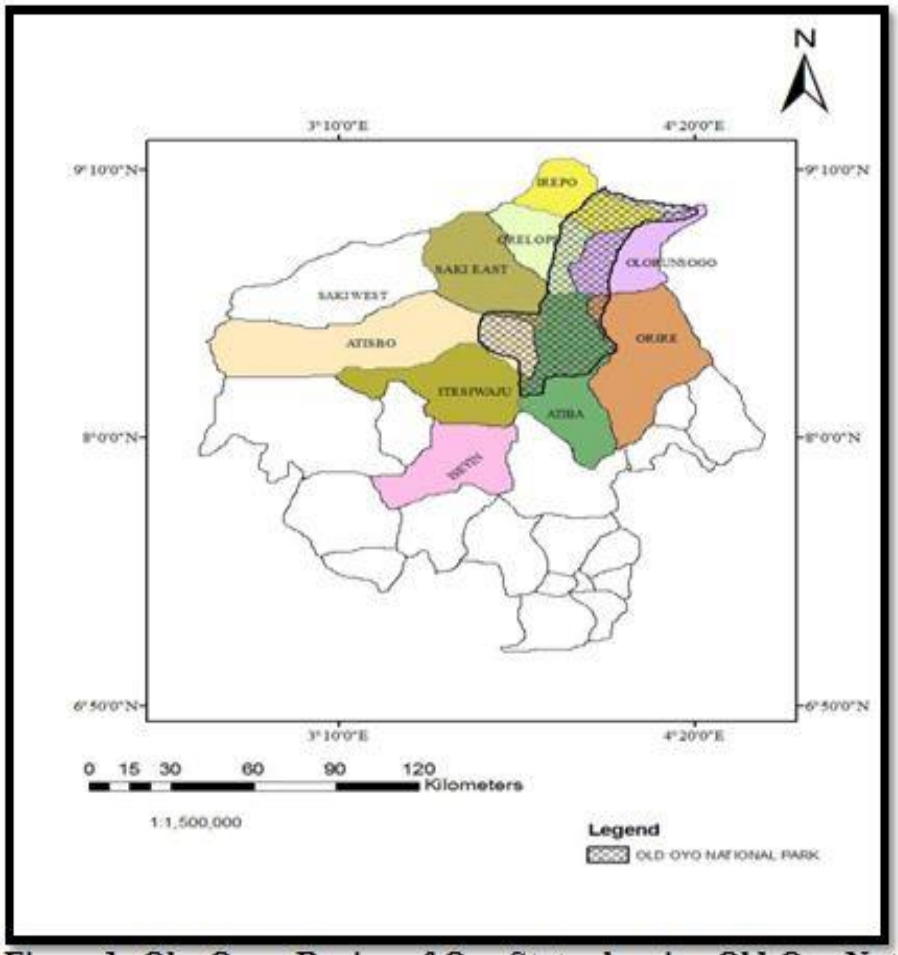


Figure 1: Oke Ogun Region of Oyo State showing Old Oyo National Park
Source: Authors work, 2023

3. Research Methodology

For the purpose of this research, a survey design (field survey) method was adopted, and both primary and secondary data were utilized. For the collection of primary data, an interview guide was used to obtain information from 50 members of staff of the national park while a set of questionnaires was used to illicit information from tourists, and another was used to obtain information from residents in the host community (Sepeteri town).

To determine the number of questionnaires to be administered to residents of Sepeteri town, the number of households in the town was determined by multiplying the total number of housing units in the village with an average number of four households in each building. In all, as of the time of this survey, there are 753 housing units and 3012 households in Sepeteri town. With a sample size of 3.6%, a total of 109 households were selected. A systematic random sampling, where the first house was selected randomly and subsequent ones selected at an interval of three buildings, was utilized. In every selected building, the questionnaire was administered to an adult representative.

Another set of questionnaires was randomly administered to 106 tourists identified in the

tourist centre between8 am – 6 pm on both Easter and Eid Fitr holidays. The choice of these days is that high patronage of tourist centres is usually recorded during the festive period. In all, two hundred and fifteen questionnaires and fifty interview guides were utilized. Information obtained includes socioeconomic characteristics of respondents such as age, sex, and monthly income and challenges of the park. The impacts of the park were assessed using Likert ratings. The obtained data was subjected to descriptive statistics like frequency count and percentages. An index, the Park Impact Index, was developed to evaluate the economic impact of the park.

4. Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings that were made during the course of the research. It is subdivided into three sections viz: socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, Old Oyo National Park: the issues; and impact of Old Oyo National Park.

A. Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

Like almost any other sector in African societies, males seem to be more interested in tourism and issues concerning it (Mura and Khoo-Lattimore, 2012). This was inferred as 64.2% of the respondents were males while 35.8% were females (Table 1).Also, residents of the host community are predominantly agrarian possibly because of the vast land for agriculture in the area, or the diffusion of agricultural innovations that can be associated with the park. This position was testified to, as 37.2% of the respondents were farmers, while 28.8% were civil servants.

As about 43% of the residents earn less than #7500 monthly, one may infer that residents of the host community are poor, and are possibly battling with a poor standard of living (Table 1).Also, 30.9% of the residents in the host community earned between N 7,500-N15, 000 monthly, 14.3% earned between N15, 001-N30, 000, and only about 11.8% claimed to earn more than N30, 000 per month. This is worrisome as the majority of the residents earn less than 1$ (N1200) daily. This indicates a low economic development of the area, despite the presence of a national park. This suggests that the potentials of the park are not fully harnessed. Parks of such capacity are expected to promote economic development of not only the area but the region through improvement of business, increased patronage and diversification. Another immediate dimension to this statistic is that residents of the host settlement may, due to lack of affordability, not be able to patronize the tourist centre. This situation is not exclusive to the study area as Akpeampong (2011) also reported that residents around the Kakum National Park have little benefits from tourism which necessitates a range of pro-poor interventions.

Table 1: Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

Sex	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Male	138	64.2
Female	77	35.8
Total	215	100.0
Occupation	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Farmers	80	37.2
Traders	29	13.5
Artisan	44	20.5
Civil servant	62	28.8
Total	215	100.0
Monthly Income	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Below N7,500	93	43.0
N7,500-N15,000	66	30.9
N15,000-N30,000	31	14.3
Above N30,000	25	11.8
Total	215	100.0

Source: Authors work, 2023

B. Old Oyo National Park: The Issues

This section appraises the Old Oyo National Park. It examines the situation of the park, and the challenges associated with its use.

i. Existing Situation of the Park.

Collections from the interview guide revealed that, despite its seemingly low economic impact, there are modern facilities which could facilitate improved tourism in the centre, if well harnessed. These are four (4) V.I.P tastefully furnished chalets, four (4) western chalets, thirty (30) states chalets flashy furnished, eight (8) cabins for Students on excursions, and canopy walk way. There also exist a multi-purpose and well- furnished conference hall, conspicuously located at the centre of the park. Other facilities in addition to chalets include tourist camps and restaurant, air conditioned bus and facilities for boat cruise and sport fishing etc.

The park is rich in abundant tree species such as the mahoganies, *Naucleadiderrichii (opepe), Terminalia ivorensis (Odigbo), Terminalia superba (Afara), Triplochitonsceleroxylon (Obeche)* and others known in international market. Different researches (Afolayan, 1997; Adetoro, 2008; Toyobo *et. al.*, 2014) have reported that the park has animals like Lion, Leopard, Greater bustard, Spotted Hyena, Serval Cat, Aadvark, Elephant, Buffalo, Kob, Waterbuck, Reed buck, Oribi, Roan Antelope, Hartebeest Bush Buck, Common Warthog, Red River Hog, Red Flanked Duiker, Bush buck, Mongoose, Maxwell's duiker, Patas monkey, Tantallus monkey, Olive baboon, Hunting dog and Mangabey. However, personal observation and reports from tourists informs that these facilities are both underutilized and not well maintained.

ii. Access fee of the Park

It was discovered that the entrance fee for adult and children are #1000 (Approx $1) and #500 (Approx $0.5) respectively. However as revealed in Figure 1, about 64% of the respondents claimed that the access fee for the park is too expensive. Further interaction revealed that these respondents based their judgment on several factors such as the comparative price of other tourist centres, the socioeconomic characteristics of the host community, and the level of facilities development in the park. Some of the respondents were of the view that the gate fee of the park should not be more than #500 and #200respectively for adult and children, to encourage patronage.

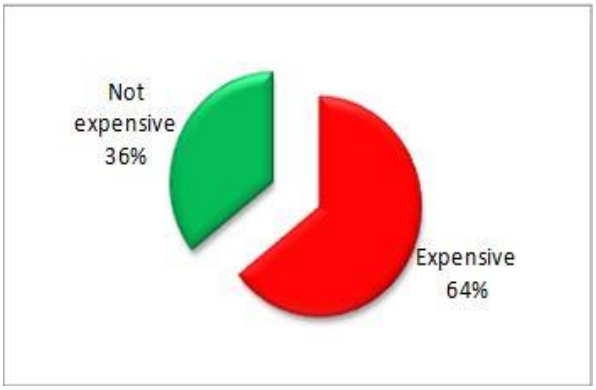


Figure 2: Assessment of the Gate Fee
Source: Authors work, 2023

iii Challenges of the National Park

This section examines the challenges of the tourist sites. As summarised in Table 2, the predominant challenge of the park is inadequate government intervention (42.9%). This challenge, as reported by Meer et al, (2023) and Ijeoma and Ogbara, (2013) is not limited to the park, but is inclusive of other ones in the country. This may be partly associated with a lack of administrative coordination between agencies in charge of parks in the country. Also, the coordination of parks by the federal government appears to be overwhelming for the federal government. State government or private organisations should have been involved in the management of the park to boost the economy of the state. Other challenges of the park are the poor impression of tourists (22%)/ Inadequate sports facilities, local infrastructure, transportation, architecture or buildings, shopping facilities, and accommodation facilities influence destination image (Charlotte and Ritchie, 1991). Hence, a poor destination image arising from inadequate facilities will lead to low patronage, which is reported in the study area. This challenge has been traced to the overall poor management of tourism in the country. Another major challenge of the park as claimed by 22.0% of the respondents is lack of awareness. The absence of advertisement and publicity has caused low knowledge hence poor patronage of the park.

Table 2: Major problems of the National Park

Major problems of the tourist centre	Frequency	Percent
Inadequate government intervention	92	42.9
Poor impression of tourists	47	22.0
Lack of awareness	28	13.1
Emigration of youth	21	9.9
Poor usage by the tourist	15	6.8
Communal conflict	12	5.2
Total	215	100.0

Source: Author's field survey, 2023

C. Impact of Old Oyo National Park

To evaluate the impact of Old Oyo National Park, especially on the economy of the host community (Sepeteri), five variables were rated on a Likhert scale. For this rating, 1 was allocated to strongly disagree, 2 to disagree, 3 to indifferent, 4 to agree, and 5 to strongly agree. This was used in the generation of the Park Impact Index (PII). The variables considered are the creation of job opportunities, provision of desirable jobs, improvement of standard of living, increase in price of goods and services, and assessment of business benefits from tourists.

As revealed in Table 3, with the PII values of 1.37 and 2.53 which is lower than the mean value of 2.57, there appears to be no impact of the park on the improvement of the standard of living and creation of employment opportunities. This was further affirmed as the negative deviation values of -1.2 and -0.04 were respectively recorded for the two variables. The implication of this is that despite the presence of the national park, there is little or no employment opportunity while the standard of living of the residents is also not improved. A closer look at the table informs that with the variance of 1.44 for improved standard of living, the situation is acute in the host community. These statistics have earlier been testified to with the monthly income of respondents, where a majority of the respondents were reported to earn a low monthly income of less than a dollar per day. This situation is in contrast to the position of Ardahaey (2011) on the economic benefits of tourist centres on host communities.

On the contrary, with the PII value of 2.98, the presence and activities of Old Oyo National Park have led to an increase in the price of local goods and services. This may not be farfetched from traders' quest to maximize the opportunities of tourism in increasing the price of goods (especially Fast Moving Consumer Goods). Unfortunately, both indigenes and tourists patronize the same market, and this situation may bring further hardship on the indigenes who earn less, yet pay more.

The Old Oyo National Park did not exist without its benefits, with the PII value of 3.35, the predominant economic impact of the park is the assessment of benefits from tourists by residents of the host community. This may be possible, especially with the spiritual attachments to benevolence and gifting in Africa; hence tourists may give alms to residents, who sometimes may be beggars or spiritualists. They may also gift their balance to traders in goodwill (Table 3).

Table 3: Impact of Old Oyo National Park

Variable	S.D		D		N		A		SA		∑		x (PII)	(X-x)	(X-x)^2
	F	W	F_2	W_2	F	W_3	F	W_4	F	W_5	∑F	∑W	∑F/∑W		
Creation of Employment Opportunities	23	23	102	204	56	168	11	44	23	105	215	544	2.53	-0.04	0.0016
Provision of Desirable Jobs	34	34	91	182	34	102	24	96	32	160	215	574	2.66	0.09	0.0081
Improvement of Standard of Living	16	16	8	16	45	135	26	104	5	25	215	296	1.37	-1.2	1.44
Increase in Price of Goods and Services	45	45	20	40	56	168	81	324	13	65	215	642	2.98	0.41	0.16
Assessment of business benefits from tourists	12	12	45	90	45	135	90	360	23	115	215	712	3.35	0.78	0.60
													12.89		

Source: Authors work, 2023 $x = 2.57$

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that the potential of Old Oyo National Park, due to poor maintenance, has not been fully harnessed. This has not only caused low patronage of the facility but reduced its economic impact on the host community. To ameliorate this condition, it is suggested that the government, through the tourism management board, should repackage the national park by rehabilitating existing infrastructures in the park while new ones should be introduced.

A maintenance routine plan should be developed for the effective management of the park. The management of the park or any of its fragments can be privatized through public-private partnerships, which will encourage the overhauling of the park. Since the park does not exist in isolation, infrastructural facilities in the host community, especially road and electricity should be improved. Affiliate commercial activities and services should be introduced in the park, this will, on the one hand, boost economic activities in the park and, on the other, improve the economy of the host community through the provision of jobs.

Publicity and awareness through media and appropriate programmes should be put in place to encourage patronage of the park. Lastly, a recreation development plan should be developed for the park and similar ones in the country to direct the pattern of

growth for the parks. The foregoing, if put in place, will aid sustainable tourism in the study area.

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