

## Local Community Participation in the Management of Old Oyo National Park, Nigeria

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### Abstract

The study assessed the level of participation of local communities in the management of Old Oyo National Park. Data were obtained through the administration of questionnaires to 150 randomly selected respondents from fifteen communities. The communities were randomly selected from the five ranges of the park. Results of the study show that the majority (62.7%) of the respondents were males, 85.3% were married and 71.3% had formal education. In addition, 86.3% of the respondents fell within ages of 20-50 years and 86% were farmers, hunters and traders. Ninety - nine percent of the respondents were aware of the existence of the park, 80.6% supported the conservation of the park resources while 61.7% were of the opinion that more effort is needed to effectively conserve these resources. Although, 64.0% reported non- participation in park management, 92.67% were willing to participate. Also, 50% of the respondents agreed that there has been substantial benefit from the park to the community in terms of infrastructure, employment opportunities and empowerment programme. Management of protected areas requires effective local community participation; therefore, a bottom-up approach is recommended for adoption in the management of the park.

**Keywords:** Conservation, Resources, Community, Participation, Bottom-up

### Introduction

Protected areas play an important role in maintaining a sustainable world and it is one of the most powerful tools for biodiversity conservation. It is an effective response strategy to mitigate biodiversity loss worldwide (MEA, 2005). Currently, the number of protected areas worldwide is in hundreds of thousand, 116,000 (Phillips 2000 and CBD, 2008) and 207,000 covering 12.7% of the world's terrestrial area and 1.6% of the global ocean area. Not only do they provide refuge for biological diversity, they play an equally significant role in changing economic and social basis of local communities and nations. Protected areas, such as national parks and reserves, form the front line in the campaign to conserve biodiversity. The national park is designated to conserve the animals, plants, soils, geological formation, archaeological sites and historical monuments and it is forbidden to tamper with any resources of the park without prior approval from the appropriate authorities (Afolayan, 1987).

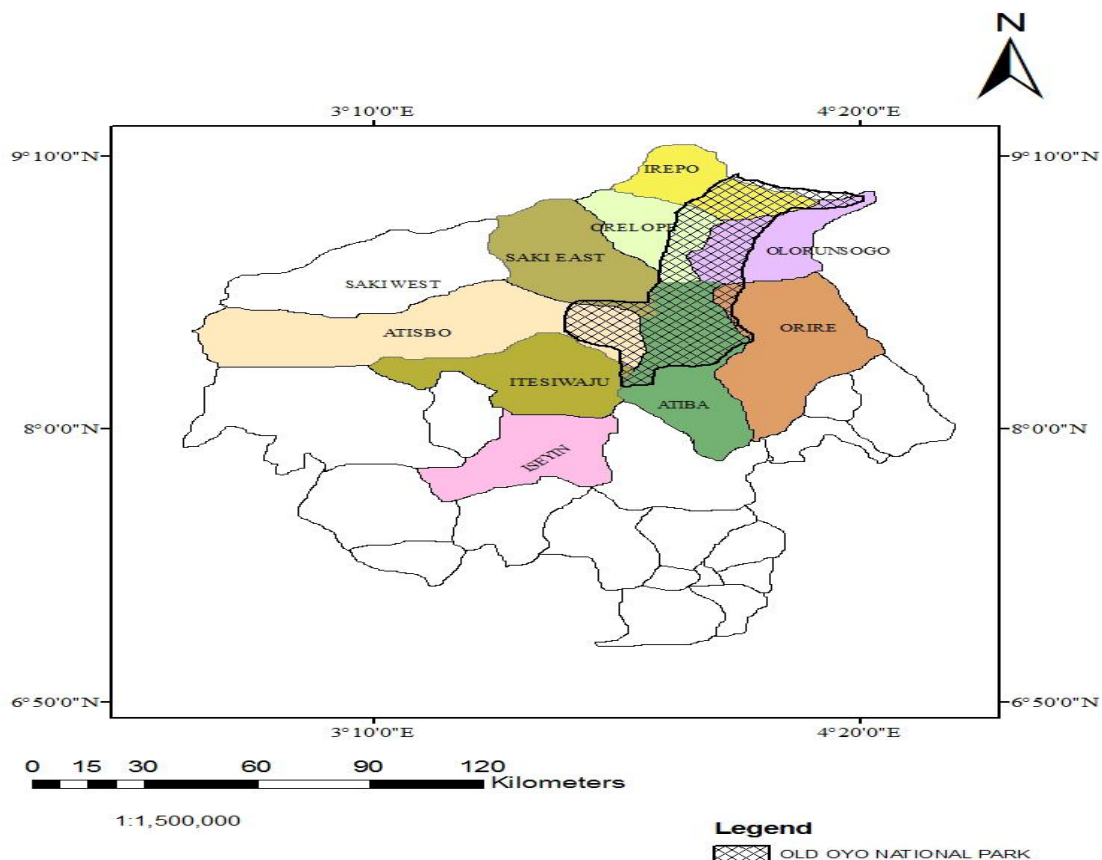
Many rural communities depend on the natural resources in the park for subsistence livelihoods before designating the areas as protected. Conservation areas were largely established through enforcement and compulsory expulsion of the communities. This has resulted into conflicts between these rural communities and the park management. Several of these conflicts are experienced due to the non-involvement of communities in park development and management. However, there should be a mutuality relationship between the protected areas and their adjoining communities, each benefiting from the other. The local communities should be integrated into the activities of the park in order to achieve the goal of sustainable use of natural resources. This study therefore aimed at determining the level of participation of the local communities in the management of National Parks in Nigeria with a case study of Old Oyo National Park. The understanding of the relationship between the park and the community will go a long way to determine the kind of support given by the local people towards the conservation initiatives in the park.

### Materials and Method

#### *The Study Area*

The Old Oyo National park is one of the seven national parks of Nigeria and it is located across the northern part of Oyo state and southern Kwara state Nigeria. It is rich in plant and animal resources including buffaloes, bushbuck and wide variety of birds. The park is easily accessible from southwestern and northwestern Nigeria. Old Oyo National Park is geographically located between North latitudes 8° 10' and 9° 05', and East longitudes 3° 35' and 4° 21', and centered on North latitude 8° 36' 00'' and East longitude 3° 57' 05''. The Park covers a land area of approximately 2,512 km<sup>2</sup> making it the fourth largest national park in Nigeria and it is divided into 5 ranges. Politically, it lies in Oyo State in the Southwest of Nigeria and borders Kwara State in the Northeast. It is surrounded by ten (10) Local Government Areas in Oyo State namely: Atisbo, Atiba, Irepo, Oorelope, Saki East, Iseyin, Orire, Itesiwaju, Olorunsogo, Saki West and Kaima Local Government Area in Kwara State (Oladeji *et al.*, 2012). The Park is bordered by seventy two support zone communities.





**Figure 1: Map of Oyo State showing the location of Old Oyo National Park and the adjoining Local Government Areas**

Source: Oladeji *et al.*, (2012)

### **Data Collection**

The primary data were collected through the use of structured questionnaire that were designed for members of the support zone communities bordering the park. The questionnaire elicit information on their demographic characteristics, their views as regards efforts on conservation of natural resources in the park, their level of involvement, benefit of park to community and how supportive they have been to the goals and objectives of the park.

### **Sampling Techniques**

Multistage sampling technique was used. The first stage was the selection of the five ranges of the park. Second stage was the random selection of fifteen (15) communities representing 20 % of the support zone communities present in each of the five ranges of park (Table 1). The last stage was the random selection of ten (10) households in each of the selected communities for administration of questionnaires. A total of 150 questionnaires were administered to the fifteen communities that were randomly selected from the five ranges of the park.

### **Results**

The Demographic characteristic of the respondents which helped in validating the correctness of their response showed that 62.7% were male, 83.3% fall between ages 20-50 years and 85.3% were married. Literacy level of the respondents is relatively high (71.3%) while majority (86.0%) has no formal occupation (farmers, trade, driver and hunters) (Table 2). Awareness of park existence was attested by 99% of the community respondents (Figure 2). Table 3 show that the majority (98.6%) are of the opinion that conservation of the park resources is important while 64.7% opined that more effort is needed to effectively conserve the resources of the park. The majority of the respondents which made up 64.0% were not involved in the management of the park (Table 4). For the willingness of the

respondents to participate in the park management, 92.7% of the respondents are willing to participate if given the opportunity as community representative in park management, park staff, member of conservation club, informants and artisans (production of arts and crafts) ( Table 5 and 6). Moreover, fifty percent (50%) of the respondents agreed that there has been substantial benefit from the park to the community (Figure 3).

**Table 1: Distribution of Sample Size in the Study Area**

<b>RANGES IN OONP</b>	<b>NUMBER OF COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>COMMUNITIES SELECTED (20%)</b>	<b>NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS SELECTED</b>
Marguba	8	Aba nla/ Aba imodi	10
Sepeteri	15	Sepeteri	10
		Igbope	10
Oyo ile	13	Igboho	10
		Alaguntan	10
		Igbeti	10
Tede	16	Ogundiran	10
		Opa	10
		Ago are	10
Yemoso	21	Tede	10
		Alakuko	10
		Ikoyi ile	10
		Obamo	10
Total	72	Oloka	10
		Olokiti	10
		15	150

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Community Respondents**

<b>VARIABLES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY (N=150)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>GENDER</b>		
Male	94	62.7
Female	55	36.6
Missing system	1	0.7
<b>AGE</b>		
20-30	49	32.7
31-40	56	37.3
41-50	20	13.3
51 and above	25	16.7
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>		
Single	16	10.7
Married	128	85.3
Widowed	5	3.3
Missing system	1	0.7
<b>EDUCATION</b>		
Primary	48	32.0
Secondary	32	21.3
Tertiary	27	18.0
Non-formal	43	28.7
<b>OCCUPATION</b>		
Non-formal	129	86.0
Formal	14	9.3



Retired	1	0.7
Students	6	4.0

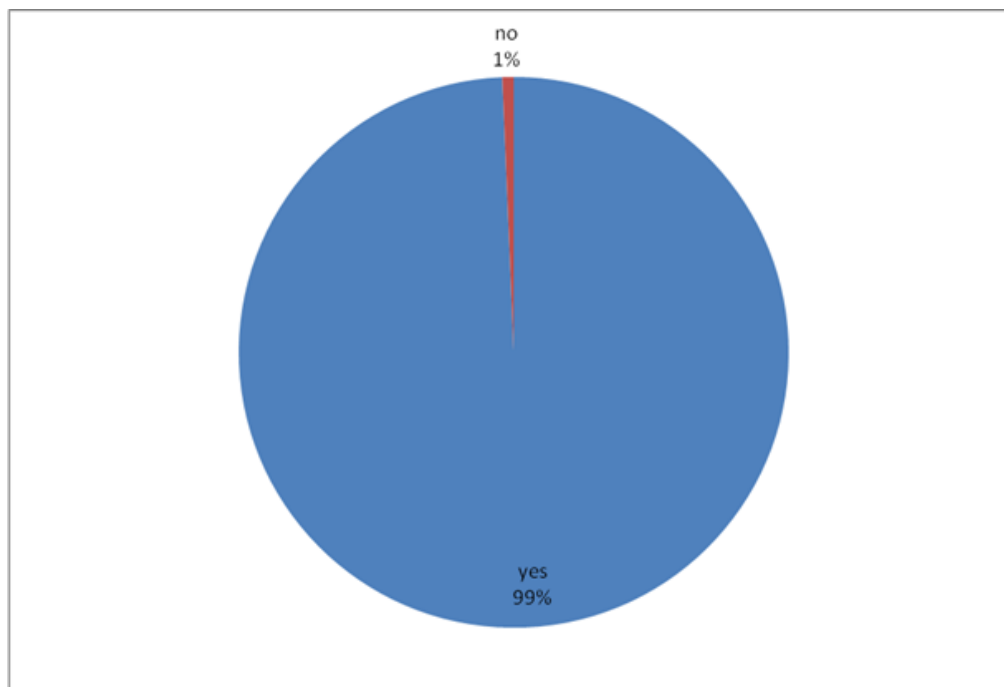


Figure 2: Community Awareness of Park Existence

Table 3: Community Perception and Park's Management efforts on conservation

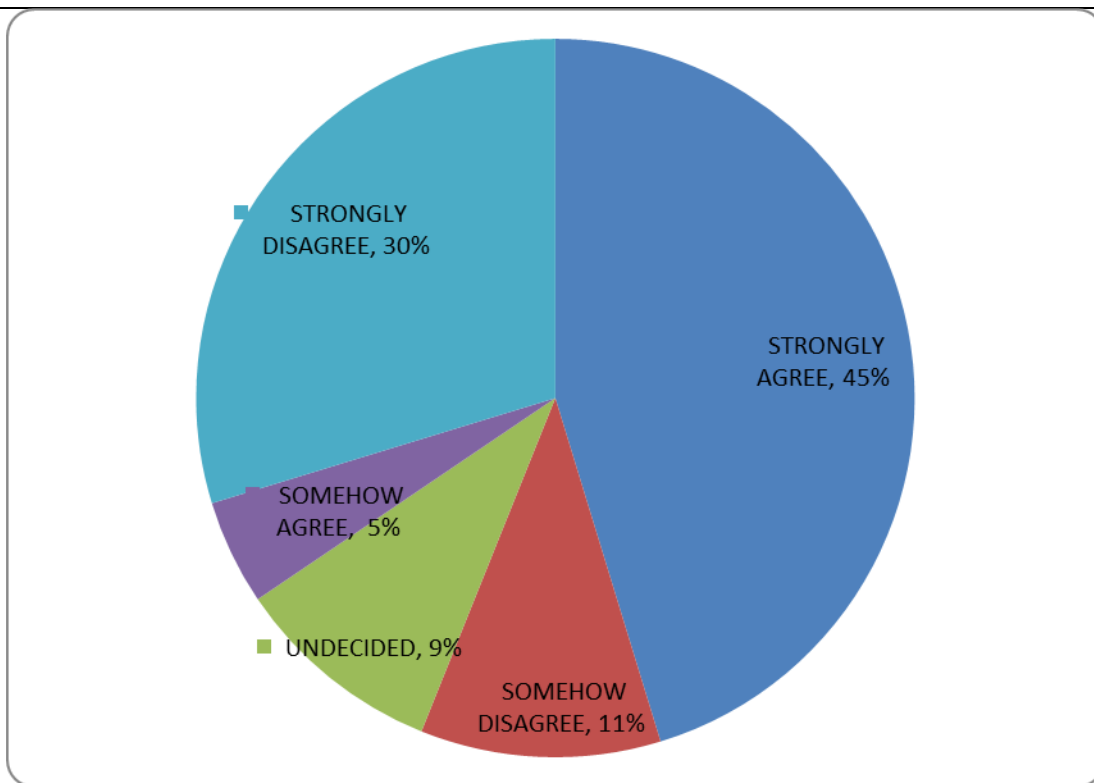
Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Community perception on conservation effort of the park</b>		
Extremely important	100	66.6
Very important	30	20.0
Moderately important	18	12.0
Unimportant	0	0
Extremely unimportant	1	0.7
Missing system	1	0.7
Total	150	100
<b>Park management effort on conservation</b>		
A lot more effort is needed	69	46.0
A little more effort is needed	28	18.7
Just right	35	23.3
A little less effort is needed	13	8.6
A lot less effort is needed	3	2.0
Missing system	2	1.4
Total	150	100

**Table 4: Areas of Participation in Park management**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage %
Informants	17	11.33
Labourer	25	16.67
Member of Local Committee	12	8.0
Not Involved	96	64
Total	150	100

**Table 5: Community willingness to Participation in Park management**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage %
Willing	139	92.67
Not Willing	11	7.33
Total	150	100



**Figure 3: Community Response on benefits from park to the Community**



**Table 6: Willing areas of Participation of the respondents in Park Management**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage %
Committee member	24	16.00
Employment as Staff	56	37.33
Informant	29	19.33
Member of Conservation Club	18	12.0
Production of arts and craft	12	8.0
Not willing	11	7.33
Total	150	100

## Discussion

Awareness of the existence of Old Oyo national park as an important place for managing and conserving wildlife resources is very high among the residence of the support zone communities. This agrees with the findings of Ijeoma and Obiora (2013) in their study at Kainji Lake National Park. The park has been involved in enlightenment and awareness campaign to sensitize the communities bordering the park on the conservation objectives of the park. However, the need for more efforts is required of the residents of the community by the park management to elicit their support for efficient management of the park resources from unsustainable utilization. Majority of the respondents were not involved in the management of the park because they are not allowed in the decision making and resource management, which indicate neglect of local institution and social organization, thus leading to severe conflict with the local populations as opined by Pimbert and Pretty (1995). They also reported that the park has negatively impacted on their livelihood. The rural communities depended on the park for the supply of various resources such as farmland, food, medicines, cultural and economic usage. This affirms Shackleton and Shackleton (2004) report on the importance of “everyday resources” such as fuel wood, medicine, wild foods, building materials among others, on livelihoods of local people in Southern Africa.

Most of these respondents are willing to participate in managing the park resources if given the mandate as average number of them have seen the park being beneficial to the community in the areas of infrastructural development, employment opportunities and provision of alternative livelihood which support the ascertainment of Magome and Fabricius (2004) who pointed out that where benefits from conservation are more, people tend to be more supportive of various conservation initiatives but where the benefits seem to go to “outsiders” at the local people’s expense or are minimal, there is often limited support. More so, participation as park staff was highest as a way of contributing to conservation of the park resources, since the support zone programme in Nigeria provides the opportunity to employ the low cadre staff from the communities’ bordering the protected areas. This comes through benefit sharing arrangements which are put in place as a strategy to win the support of the local people towards conservation as well as improve their welfare (Emerton 2004). More so, provision of income to the community through the creation of business opportunities as they produce of arts and crafts directly contributes to their economy which agrees with the findings of Manu *et al.*, (2012) in Sirigu, Ghana. The involvement of local communities as local advisory committees in decision making and management, informants and member of conservation club is geared to promoting a course of development that protects the park as opined by (Jacob and Ogogo, 2011).

## Conclusion

The study has shown that the level of local community participation in the park management is limited. However, majority of the people expressed their willingness to participate in managing the park on benefit oriented basis. Successful protected area management can be achieved by integrating local population through a bottom –up participatory approach in the management of the park which empowers the local communities and local users to recognise their rights and responsibilities in order to achieve the goal of wildlife resources conservation.

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