

Original article

Assessment of community awareness and participation in ecotourism in Old Oyo National Park, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the level of community awareness and participation in ecotourism in Old Oyo National Park, Nigeria. Data were collected in communities located in four ranges (i.e. administrative and protection zones) of Old Oyo National Park, Oyo State, Southwest Nigeria. The ranges are Tede, Marguba, Sepeteri, and Oyo-Ile. Seven (7) communities out of 27 that are 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 while eight (8) were selected from 30 communities in Oyo Ile range. The study was a questionnaire survey involving 150 respondents that were randomly selected from communities in the four (4) ranges of the Park. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's HSD, t-test and logistic regression. Results revealed that 48% of the respondents were aware of ecotourism while 52% were not. Also, 46% participated in ecotourism while 54% did not participate. A relationship exists between ecotourism awareness and participation ($p < 0.01$). Community type ($p < 0.01$) was the only predictor of community awareness of ecotourism while community type ($p < 0.01$) and awareness ($p < 0.01$) were the predictors of participation in ecotourism in the park. Awareness, active involvement of communities in stakeholder meetings, decision-making and provision of start-up capital are important for ecotourism development in the park.

KEY WORDS: community, awareness, ecotourism, participation, national park

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1. Introduction

According to OGUNJINMI (2015), ecotourism, as a sub-sector of global tourism, has become a growing phenomenon, particularly in developing countries. It is considered the fastest-growing market in the tourism industry (JOHNSTON, 2006). Beginning in 1990s, ecotourism has been growing 20% - 34% per year (HONEY, 2010). In 2004, ecotourism/nature tourism was growing globally 3 times faster than the tourism industry as a whole (WTO, 2004). Ecotourism is considered as a powerful conservation and local development tool of great importance which provides alternatives to the traditional protectionism and fortress approach to conservation. When conservation and ecotourism are integrated, it serves as a tool for income generating activities

and local empowerment with limited negative impacts on the environment. ASHLEY ET AL. (2001) and UNWTO (2002) opined that ecotourism activities using natural resource attractions in remote rural areas can be important sources of economic diversification and livelihood opportunity. It has been heralded as an alternative, sustainable development initiative particularly in remote communities located in National Parks and Reserves (GUMUS ET AL., 2007).

Participatory management of conservation has received increased attention due to the failure of the traditional system of managing natural resources. Ecotourism as a concept emerged from the needs to involve local communities and stakeholders that are hosts to the natural resource attractions in order to ensure long-term sustainability of the

resource through empowerment and capacity building. MASCARENHAS & AMPADU-AGYEI (1998) define participation as a process through which different groups in a community influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them. FEANTSA Participation Working Group and GRUNDTVIG Participation Project (2013) see participation as a way of working that empowers people to participate in decisions and actions that affect their lives. A basic tenet of the participatory approach is that all groups must be involved in all phases of the decision-making processes (SALOMÃO, 2004). According to MANU & KUUDER (2012), participation implies how, and to what extent, people are able to share their views, take part in an activity, project, programme, decision making, profit sharing and other issues related to the tourism development process.

Stakeholder involvement, or participation, in tourism development is a critical factor of success, yet there are many local communities being excluded, or mainly minimally involved in the planning and management of natural resources in protected areas (RASTEGAR, 2010). Local community participation in tourism decision-making processes in developing countries is considered poor (CHIRENJE ET AL., 2013) and the strategies for promoting public participation have not been effective (MAK ET AL., 2017) and local community is not taken into account in planning, decision making and management of tourism sector (CHIRENJE ET AL., 2013). The prerequisites needed for participation are most often non-existent in local communities due to a myriad of external and internal factors. TOSUN (2000) opined that these factors are often just a reflection of the socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions prevailing in the area. While ecotourism can create jobs for local communities, community members are often stuck in low skill and low pay jobs due to lack of skill and bargaining power (DAS & CHATTERJEE, 2015a; 2015b). According to MILLER (2017) a lack of business knowledge also acts as a barrier to ecotourism entrepreneurship in local communities. Also, local communities often have limited access to credit, hence, cannot effectively participate in ecotourism (DIEKE, 2005).

Community involvement emerges as a key element of both sustainable tourism and ecotourism and in this context, is generally agreed to include at least two aspects: public participation in decision-making (i.e. some degree of control over outcomes and natural resource utilisation) and residents' receipt of benefits from tourism (SCHEYVENS, 2002; TIMOTHY, 2002). MOWFORTH & MUNT (1998) posited that although it is easy for community participation

to be promoted, the implementation process is very complex, thus resulting in participation assuming different forms. PRETTY (1995) outlines seven forms of participation which include manipulative participation, passive participation, participation by consultation, participation for material incentives, functional manipulation, interactive participation, and self-mobilisation. PRETTY (1995) however, suggested that the first four maybe termed non-participation because they are likely to have no positive lasting effect on people's lives.

This article aims to determine 1) the level of community awareness and participation in ecotourism in Old Oyo National Park, 2) identify differences in community awareness and participation in ecotourism based on residents' socio-demographic characteristics, 3) identify the forms and level of community participation in ecotourism, 4) determine the level of importance communities attached to issues of participation in ecotourism, and 5) identify the constraints to community participation in ecotourism. Studies on community awareness and participation in ecotourism in Nigeria's protected areas are scant, particularly, in Old Oyo National Park. Studies on community awareness and participation in ecotourism are very germane to the current attention on achieving sustainability in resource use as well as meeting conservation objectives through ecotourism. Ecotourism projects which involve local communities in their decision making and management have a greater potential to strengthen local institutions for conservation (STRONZA & PEGAS, 2008). Community participation was successful in local communities which must organize themselves at all levels to play a more effective role in the development of tourism (AREF & RIDZUAN, 2008).

2. Study area

The study was conducted in communities located in four ranges (i.e. administrative and protection zones) of Old Oyo National Park, Oyo State, Southwest Nigeria. The ranges are Tede, Marguba, Sepeteri, and Oyo-Ile (Fig. 1). The Park derives its name from the ruins of Oyo-Ile (Old Oyo), the ancient political capital of the Yoruba Empire. The Park is made up of two previous Native Administrative Forest Reserves, the Upper Ogun (1936) and Oyo-Ile (1941) Forest Reserves. These unique ecosystem and historical relics were converted to Game Reserves in 1952 and finally upgraded to the present status of National Parks (NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, undated). The Park has a total land mass of 2,512 km² and is located in

south west part of Nigeria, specifically Northern Oyo State at latitude 8⁰15' and 9⁰00'N and longitude 3⁰35' and 4⁰42' E. The location has inevitably placed the Park at a vantage position of abundant land area as well as diverse wildlife and cultural/historical settings. Eleven (11) Local Government areas, out of which ten (10) fall within Oyo State and one (1) in Kwara State surround it (NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, undated). In terms of ethnic composition, the inhabitants of the local communities surrounding the park are mainly from the Yoruba ethnic group, which is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Other prominent ethnic groups in the communities are Fulani, Igbo, Igala, Ebira, Igede, Tiv and Idoma among others. Because the northern part of Oyo State where the Park is located shares an international boundary with Republic of Benin, which encourages migration, the population of the communities around the Park include people from Republic of Benin, Togo, Ghana, Niger and other West African countries.

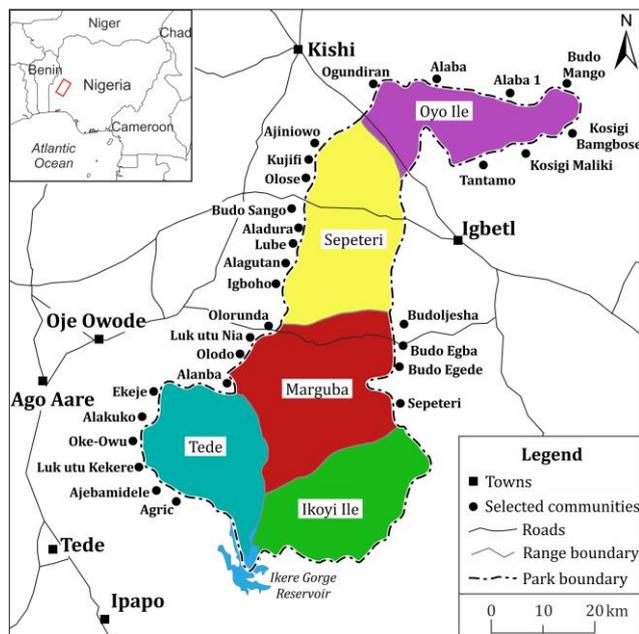


Fig. 1. Map of Old Oyo National Park

The topography of the whole area covered by the Park has a beautiful uniqueness as most of the Park lies in plain lowland between 330 and 508 meters above sea level and continues with a gentle slope along the Ogun River valleys. Outcrops of granite characterize the north eastern Zone of the Park especially at Oyo-Ile. The central part of the Park has isolated hills and ridges of numerous rock outcrops. Dominating the extreme northern part are caves as well as rock shelters. The drainage system is also interesting as the Park is well drained by the Rivers Ogun, Owu, Owe and their tributaries in the central and southern parts, while the River

Tessi drains the northeast part of the Park. For ecotourism development, the inventory list with cognizance of the topography of the Park, inevitably include the rock out-crops (for mountaineering), Ikere Gorge Dam/River Ogun (for water recreation) and the archaeological endowments of Oyo-Ile (for Cultural/Historical) (NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, undated). All these constitute important ecotourism attractions in the park.

The climate is tropical with two seasons, a wet season (March-November) and a dry season (December-February). Rainfall is copious and regular even though the intensity and distribution diminish as one move north from the coast. The rainfall is conventional with a double maximal. The Park has an average annual rainfall of about 3,000 mm. Ambient temperature is high ranging from 23-32 degrees Celsius at lower altitudes. The major wild animals in the park include roan antelope (*Hippotragus equinus*), western hartebeest (*Alcelaphus busalaphus*), kob (*Kobus kob*), baboon (*Pabios anubis*), waterbuck (*Kobus defassa*), oribi (*Ourebia ourebi*). The vegetation of Old Oyo National Park has been classified as Southern Guinea savannah. However, more intense studies classified the southern portion of the vegetation as forest savannah mosaic with wooded savannah containing relics of moist semi deciduous forest, grading northwards into drier mixed leguminous wooded savannah with a continuous lower stratum of perennial grasses (MARGUBA, 2002; NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, undated).

3. Materials and methods

The study population was the community residents in four ranges around the National Park. The communities were purposively selected based on their closeness to the Park and tourist entry points to the park. The communities, which are large urban communities where the selected range offices are located and through which tourists enter the park, include Tede, Sepeteri, Igboho and Igbeti. In total, seven communities from 27 communities present in Tede range were selected, eight were selected from 12 communities in Marguba range, eight were selected from 17 communities in Sepeteri range while seven were selected from 30 communities in Oyo Ile range. Thus, 31 communities were selected from a possible 86 communities bordering the four selected ranges of the park.

Due to the unavailability of the total population of each of the communities sampled, the convenience sampling method was adopted. Thus, respondents that were willing to participate in the study were selected randomly. In all, 150 respondents were

randomly selected from the communities that were randomly selected among the communities that lie within 0-15 km from the park. Data were obtained through the use of a questionnaire administered to the individuals selected in each community. The questionnaire comprised the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, awareness and participation in ecotourism in the park, areas and level of community participation in ecotourism, importance attached to issues of participation in ecotourism and constraints to community participation in ecotourism. The internal consistency and reliability of the instrument was

ascertained using the **CRONBACH'S** (1951) Alpha procedure. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for forms of participation was 0.95. The explanatory and dependent variables are operationalized in Table 1. The data collected were analysed and presented descriptively using SPSS version 21 (IBM Corp, 2012). Differences in awareness and participation in ecotourism were tested using one-way analysis of variance with Tukey's HSD and t-test, while logistic regression was used to identify the socio-demographic predictors of awareness and participation in ecotourism.

Table 1. Operationalization of variables

Explanatory variables	Description	Operationalization
Community type	Whether the respondent's community is rural or urban	1 for rural, 0 otherwise
Gender	Whether the respondent is a male or female	1 for male, 0 female
Age	Actual age of respondent in years	
Education	Education attainment of respondent	1 for non-formal, 0 otherwise
Occupation	The occupation of the respondent	1 for farming, 0 otherwise
Income	Total amount realized by the respondent as income on annual basis in naira (₦)	
Length of residency	Actual years respondent has lived in the community	
Native status	Whether the respondent is an indigene of the community or not	1 for yes, 0 otherwise
Ethnicity	The ethnic group a respondent belongs to	Respondents were asked to state their ethnic group
Nationality	Whether the respondent is a Nigerian or non-Nigerian	1 for yes, 0 otherwise
Forms and levels of community participation	The areas and levels at which residents of the communities are involved in ecotourism in the park	Always participate=2, occasionally participate=1
Importance attached to issues of participation	The importance the communities attached to issues of participation in ecotourism in the park	Extremely important=5, very important=4, important=3, less important=2, not applicable /does not matter=1
Constraints to participation	The constraints the residents of the communities encountered in their participation in ecotourism	Very severe=3, severe=2, not severe=1
Dependent variables	Description	Operationalization
Awareness of ecotourism	Whether a respondent is aware or not aware of ecotourism activities in the park	1 for aware, 0 otherwise
Participation in ecotourism	Whether a respondent is involved in activities linked to tourist presence and activities in the park	1 for participate, 0 otherwise

4. Results

4.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 2, Figs. 2, 3 and 4 present the socio-demographic features of the respondents. Of the

respondents 60.7% were from rural settlements, 64% of the respondents were male. The median age of the participants in the survey was 40 years, 89.3% were married, 69.3% of the respondents were illiterate with a non-formal education. In addition, the annual median income of the respondents was ₦150,000.00 (USD761.42 at ₦197/USD, in 2015

when the study was conducted). A large percentage of respondents (64.0%) practiced Islamic religion while 56.7% were native of the communities. The study also revealed that 84.7% of the respondents were Nigerians while 11.3%, 2%, 1.3% and 0.7% were from Republic of Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Niger respectively (Table 1). Furthermore, 47.3% of the respondents had farming

as their occupation (Fig. 2) while their mean length of residency was 18 years (Fig. 3). The ethnic composition revealed that 67.7% of the respondents that were Nigerians belonged to Yoruba ethnic group, this was followed by Fulani (10.2%), TIV (7.9%), Hausa (7.1%), Igala and Igede (2.4%) respectively, Idoma (1.6%) and Zuru (0.8%) (Fig. 4).

Table 2. Socio-demographic features of respondents (n=150)

Variable	Frequency	Percentages [%]
Community type		
Rural	91	60.7
Urban	59	39.3
Gender		
Male	96	64.0
Female	54	36.0
Age (years): Mean=41, Median=40		
15-24	7	4.7
25-54	124	82.7
55-64	11	7.3
65 and above	8	5.3
Marital status		
Single	13	8.7
Married	134	89.3
Divorced/separated	1	0.7
Widow/widower	2	1.3
Education		
Non- formal	46	30.7
Primary	58	38.7
Secondary	33	22.0
Tertiary	13	8.7
Income (Naira: ₦) Mean=₦176,000, Median=₦150,000		
0-50,000	29	19.3
51,000-100,000	38	25.3
101,000-150,000	16	10.7
151,000-200,000	34	22.7
201,000 and above	33	22.0
Religion		
Christianity	52	34.7
Islam	96	64.0
Traditional	2	1.3
Native status		
Native	85	56.7
Non-Native	65	43.3
Nationality		
Nigeria	127	84.7
Benin	17	11.3
Togo	3	2.0
Ghana	2	1.3
Niger	1	0.7

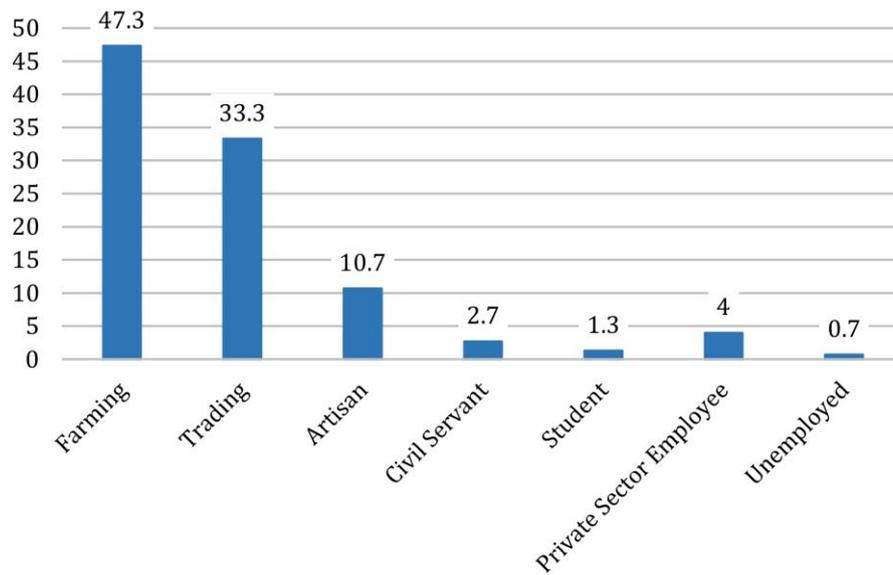


Fig. 2. Respondents occupation (%) (n=150)

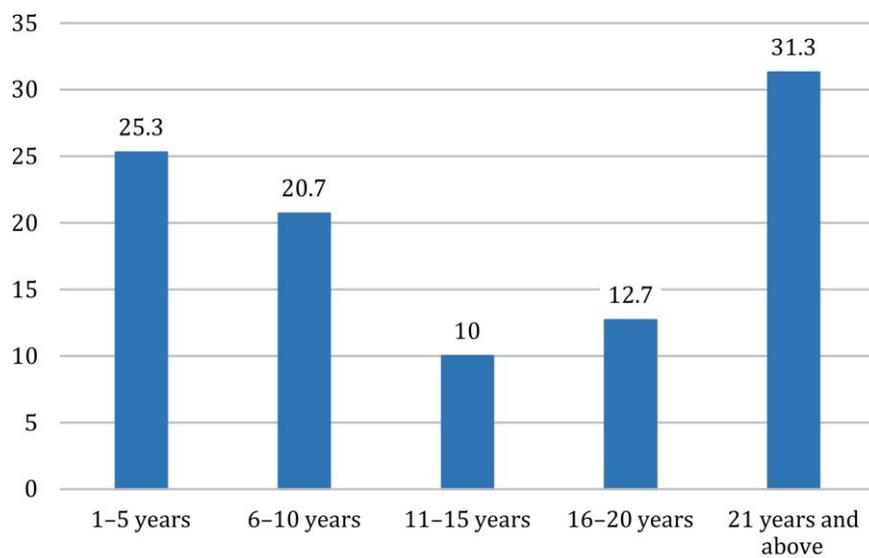


Fig. 3. Length of residency in years (%) (n=150)

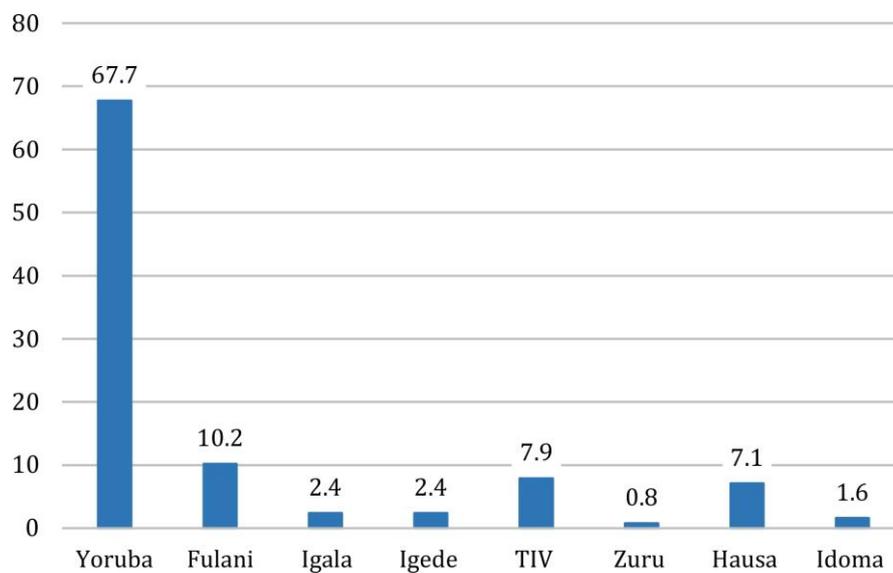


Fig. 4. Distribution of respondents according to their ethnic groups (%) (n=127)

4.2. Awareness and participation in ecotourism

Figure 5 presents respondents' awareness and participation in ecotourism. It shows that 48% and 52% were aware and not aware of ecotourism respectively. Also, 46% and 54% participate and did not participate in ecotourism activities respectively. A significant relationship was observed between communities' awareness of ecotourism and their participation ($r = 0.95, p < 0.01$).

Awareness and participation in ecotourism significantly differs with community type ($p < 0.01$), education ($p < 0.01$), occupation ($p < 0.01$), length of residency ($p < 0.01$), native status ($p < 0.01$), and nationality ($p < 0.01$). T-test and Tukey's HSD revealed that ecotourism awareness was significantly higher in urban communities than in rural communities. Respondents with degree holders' awareness is significantly higher, people with occupations other than farming had significantly

higher awareness, awareness is significantly higher in respondents that have lived in the communities for 25-54 years with native awareness significantly higher while respondents that are Nigerians had significantly higher awareness than non-Nigerians. Also, results revealed that participation in urban communities was significantly higher than that in rural communities. University Degree holders' participation was significantly higher than that of primary school certificate holders, participation by respondents with occupations other than farming was significantly higher. Participation by the respondents with residency above 20 years was significantly higher than other years of residency groups. Respondents that were natives of the selected communities had significantly higher participation than non-natives while respondents who were Nigerians had significantly higher participation than non-Nigerians (Table 3).

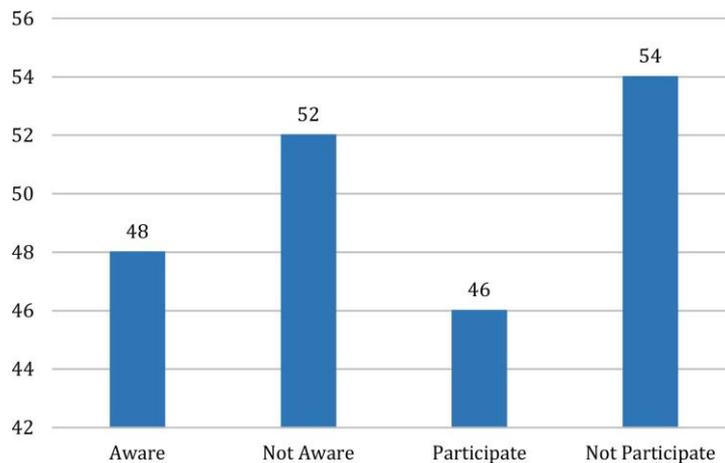


Fig. 5. Respondents awareness and participation in ecotourism in the Park (%) (n=150)

Table 3. Differences in ecotourism awareness and participation based on socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

	Awareness	Participation
	F value	F value
Age	1.20	1.30
Education	6.65**	6.65**
Occupation	16.78**	19.32**
Income	1.31	1.15
Length of residency	2.01**	1.84**
	T value	T value
Community type	18.76**	22.23*
Gender	-0.41	-0.10
Native status	-7.09*	-7.18*
Nationality	-3.98*	-4.25*

**Tukey's HSD and T- test indicating differences between groups; **P<0.01 *P<0.05

4.3. Forms and level of community participation in ecotourism activities

Table 4 presents the forms and level of community participation in ecotourism. It reveals that the three main areas of participation of communities in ecotourism services were provision of retail goods and services (45.4%), provision of local foods/restaurants (43.4%) and provision of transport services (38%). The level of participation also varies with 18.7% and 26.7% always participate and occasionally participate respectively in the provision of retail goods and services while 20.7% and 22.7% always participate and occasionally participate respectively in the provision of local foods/restaurants. In addition, 22% and 16% always participate and occasionally participate in the provision of transportation services.

Table 4. Forms and levels of community participation in ecotourism (%) (n=150)

Forms and levels of community participation	Always participate	Occasionally participate	Total
Provision of retail goods and services	18.7	26.7	45.4
Provision of accommodation	2.3	4.0	6.3
Provision of transportation services	22.0	16.0	38.0
Provision of local food/restaurants	20.7	22.7	43.4
Provision of souvenir for tourists	8.7	10.0	18.7
Involvement in decision making	0.0	1.0	1.0
Involvement in planning process	0.0	1.0	1.0

4.4 Level of importance communities attached to issues of participation in ecotourism

The means and standard deviations of level of importance the communities attached to issues of participation in ecotourism are presented in Table 5. The mean ranges from 3.29 to 3.47 with

the highest level of importance attached to community active involvement in stakeholders/management meetings (Mean=3.47, SD=0.86), followed by participation in decision making (Mean=3.45, SD=0.89), and local participation in ecotourism revenue distribution (Mean=3.41, SD=0.88).

Table 5. Level of importance communities attached to issues of participation in ecotourism

Level of importance communities attached to issues of participation in ecotourism	Mean	Standard deviation
Policy formulation	3.29	0.82
Decision making	3.45	0.89
Local participation in ecotourism revenue distribution	3.41	0.88
Community active involvement in stakeholder/management meeting	3.47	0.86
Partnership formation with the Park	3.35	0.87

Measured as extremely important = 5, very important = 4, important = 3, less important = 2, not applicable /does not matter = 1

4.5. Constraints to community participation in ecotourism planning and management

The mean of constraints to community participation in ecotourism in the park ranges from 1.99 to 4.34 (Table 6). The three most ranked items were lack of capital to engage in ecotourism-

based enterprises (Mean=4.34, SD=1.09), locals are not integrated into ecotourism management activities (Mean=4.16, SD=1.25) and opinion of the locals are not considered in decision making (Mean=4.15, SD=1.31). A relationship exists between constraints and the respondents' participation in ecotourism (rho= -0.41, p<0.01).

Table 6. Constraints to communities participation in ecotourism

Constraints	Mean	S.D
Lack of financial support from government for ecotourism ventures	4.05	1.35
Lack of linkages of ecotourism activities with the communities	4.07	1.39
Locals are not allowed to utilise recreational resources free	1.99	1.41
Opinion of locals are not considered in decision making	4.15	1.31
No benefits for locals from ecotourism and conservation ventures	4.07	1.40
Increased crime in communities through ecotourism	1.82	1.30
Inadequate communication between park and residents	3.95	1.44
Locals are not integrated in ecotourism management and activities	4.16	1.25
Lack of capital to engage in ecotourism based enterprises	4.34	1.09
Relationship between constraints and participation in ecotourism	Spearman's rho= -0.41,	P= 0.00

Constraints were ranked as very severe = 3, severe = 2, not severe = 1

4.6. Socio-demographic predictors of community awareness and participation in ecotourism

The results of the model explaining community awareness and participation in ecotourism in Old Oyo National Park are presented in Table 7. The likelihood ratio test indicates that the logistic regression model is significant with Chi-square statistics of 88.28 for awareness and 31.67 for participation. This shows that the socio-demographic variables of the respondents were significantly related to their awareness and participation in ecotourism in the park. In addition, the model predictions are correct at 90% and 97.3% for awareness and participation respectively, which shows that the explanatory variables can be used to specify the dependent variables (i.e. awareness

and participation in ecotourism in the park) in discrete term (0,1) with a high degree of accuracy. Community type is statistically significant with awareness of ecotourism, while community type ($p<0.01$) and community awareness of ecotourism ($p<0.01$) are also statistically significant with communities' participation in ecotourism. However, gender, age, education, occupation, income, length of residency, native status and nationality of the respondents are not statistically related to the respondents' awareness and participation in ecotourism in the park. The final model fit indicated that 73% and 92% of the variation in the awareness and participation in ecotourism respectively is explained by the logistic model indicating a strong relationship between the predictors and the predictions.

Table 7. Socio-demographic predictors of community awareness and participation in ecotourism in Old Oyo National Park

Variables	Community awareness of ecotourism					Community participation in ecotourism				
	B	SE	Wald	Sig	EXP(B)	B	SE	Wald	Sig	EXP(B)
Community type	5.77	1.05	30.17	0.00	319.00*	3.14	1.46	4.46	0.00	336.15*
Awareness	-	-	-	-	-	5.82	1.05	30.63	0.00	0.03*
Gender	0.22	0.67	0.11	0.74	1.25	0.71	0.70	1.03	0.31	2.03
Age	-0.05	0.03	2.64	0.11	0.95	-0.06	0.03	3.26	0.07	0.94
Education	-0.15	0.42	0.13	0.72	0.86	-0.04	0.44	0.01	0.92	0.96
Occupation	-0.29	0.43	0.44	0.51	0.75	-0.13	0.46	0.08	0.77	0.88
Income	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.90	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.99	1.00
Length of residency	0.03	0.03	0.68	0.41	1.03	0.05	0.03	2.51	0.11	1.05
Native status	0.15	0.81	0.03	0.85	1.16	0.77	0.89	0.75	0.39	2.16
Nationality	0.55	0.87	0.40	0.53	1.73	0.82	0.89	0.84	0.36	2.26
Constant	-7.47	1.16	41.18	0.00	0.01*	-6.95	1.79	15.02	0.00	0.01*
Correct prediction [%]	90.0					97.3				
Final Model Fit										
-2 Log Likelihood	88.28					31.67				
Nagelkerke R Square	0.73					0.92				

* $P<0.01$

5. Discussion

The study revealed that 60.7% of the respondents were from rural settlements, which is higher than THE WORLD BANK (2015) estimate of 53% living in rural areas of Nigeria in 2014. Males were more represented in the study with 64%. ADELEKE & NZAMA (2013) in Hhuhuwe-Umfolozi Park, South Africa reported that 58.3% of the participants in their study were female. MANU & KUUDER (2012) reported that 40% constituted female while 60% were male among their respondents in Sirigu, Upper

East Region of Ghana in their study. The median age of the respondents was 40 years; this is lower than the 42 years reported by OGUNJINMI ET AL. (2014) in their studies on local residents around Nigeria National Parks. Compared to the Nigeria national median age, the median age observed in this study was higher than the estimated national median age of 18.2 years reported by CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA) (2016).

Furthermore, 89.3% of the respondents were married; this is lower than 92% married respondents reported by OGUNJINMI ET AL. (2012) in communities

around Nigerian National parks. [ADETORO \(2008\)](#) reported that 84% of the sampled local residents around Old Oyo National Park were married. The study revealed that 69.3% of the respondents were illiterate with non-formal education. If literacy rate is considered, it is inconsistent with the national literacy rate of 61.3% reported by [CIA \(2016\)](#). This is inconsistent with the findings of [WUVER & ATTUQUAYEFIO \(2006\)](#) in The Muni-Pomadze wetland in the central region of Ghana that reported that about 26% of the community selected residents lacked formal education. [OGOGO ET AL. \(2010\)](#) reported that only 6.04% of their respondents in Cross River National Park, Nigeria, had non-formal education.

Of the respondents, 64% practiced Islamic religion. Compared with the estimated national religious adherents (Muslim 50%, Christian 40%, indigenous beliefs 10%) by [CIA \(2016\)](#), the percentage Muslim population observed in this study was higher. This result is also larger than what was reported by [ADETORO \(2008\)](#) in Old Oyo National Park with 51.2% of the sampled local residents being Muslims. The study revealed that a large percentage of the respondents (47.3%) had farming as their occupation. This is lower than 86.9% farmers reported by [OGUNJINMI ET AL. \(2014\)](#). [OGOGO ET AL. \(2010\)](#) reported that 82.47% of the sampled residents around Cross River National Park were farmers.

The annual median income of the respondents was ₦150,000.00 (USD761.42 at ₦197/USD). If this is divided into 12 months, the median income per month is ₦12,500.00 (USD63.45) which is lower than the country's minimum wage of ₦18,000.00 (USD91.37/month). [YEBOAH \(2013\)](#) reported that residents around ecotourism projects in the Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana earned a monthly income of less than 100 Ghana Cedis (USD21). The mean length of residency of the respondents was 18 years, which is an indication of relatively long living experience in the community. The majority (56.7%) of the respondents were natives of the study communities. [AFUA \(2012\)](#), however, reported that 52.3% of the sampled residents in Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary, Ghana were non-indigenous and also, 84.7% were Nigerians. This is consistent with the findings of [OGUNJINMI ET AL. \(2012\)](#) which reported that 93.2% of the selected local residents around Nigerian National Parks were Nigerians. The study revealed that 11.3% of the residents of the selected communities were from Republic of Benin. This is not surprising because Oyo north where the park is located shares a boundary with Republic of Benin, which makes it an easy access point for people from Benin Republic to migrate

into Nigeria. Among Nigerians that were residents in the communities, 67.7% were from Yoruba ethnic group. This is because the park is situated in Oyo State which is a part of Nigeria's south western states inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic group.

The study further showed that 48% were aware of ecotourism activities in the park. This level of awareness is lower than 70% reported by [MENSAH & ERNEST \(2013\)](#) in Bobiri Forest Reserve and Butterfly Sanctuary, Ghana. Of the respondents, 46.0% and 54.0% participated and did not participate in ecotourism activities respectively, an indication of a low level of participation. Consistent with this study, [TANG ET AL. \(2012\)](#) also reported that the level of community participation in tourism was low. [YEBOAH \(2013\)](#) reported high participation among the residents in ecotourism project with 72% participating in decision-making about the project's goals and objectives, prioritization of needs, problem identification and problem solution. [RAO & PAWAR \(2013\)](#) in Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary, Karnataka, India, observed that the majority of the local residents were not participating in ecotourism ventures. However, [ADELEKE & NZAMA \(2013\)](#) in Hhuhuwe-Umfolozi Park, South Africa reported that 65.7% of the sampled local residents were participating in ecotourism activities in their communities. The findings on community participation in ecotourism is consistent with the observations of [NZAMA \(2008\)](#) who observed that 58% of the sampled residents in rural areas within the World Heritage sites of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, were not actively involved in tourism. The study observed a significant relationship between communities' awareness of ecotourism and their participation, an indication of the role that the awareness had on community participation in ecotourism.

The three main forms of participation of communities in ecotourism services in the park were provision of retail goods and services (45.4%), provision of local foods/restaurants (43.4%), and provision of transport services (38%). The findings are inconsistent with what was reported by [AFUA \(2012\)](#) that the involvement in decision making and provision of support services were the main forms of community participation in ecotourism in Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary in Ghana. [AFUA \(2012\)](#) also observed that the local community had a high degree of control over the management of the project. [MANU & KUUDER \(2012\)](#) observed that the natives were actively involved in tourism activities including the decision-making process and management from the inception of the ecotourism project.

The highest level of importance was attached to community active involvement in stakeholders/management meetings by the respondents followed by participation in decision-making and local participation in ecotourism revenue distribution. These exemplify the importance the communities attached to stakeholder engagement, decision making and ecotourism revenue distribution to local communities; unfortunately, these were reported lacking by the communities in this study. The respondents ranked lack of capital to engage in ecotourism based enterprises, locals were not integrated into ecotourism management activities and opinion of the locals are not considered in decision making as the main constraints affecting their participation in ecotourism in the park. TANG ET AL. (2012) reported that most community residents lacked the funds to participate in tourism.

6. Conclusions

From the findings, the percentage of the respondents that were aware of ecotourism activities in the park was less than the average (48%) with 46% of them participating in ecotourism. Differences in awareness and participation were observed based on education, occupation, length of residency, community type, native status and nationality. The participation of the respondents was limited to the provision of services to tourists (i.e. retail goods and services, foods/restaurants and transport) with little or no participation in decision-making or involvement in ecotourism planning process - key areas that are important to effective participation. Lack of capital to engage in ecotourism-based enterprises was the highest constraint to their participation. It could be noted that most of the services provided by the participants were already established for their livelihood, not newly established because of ecotourism in the park, but enjoyed patronage from the tourists because the Park was not providing such services.

On a closer look at the rate of participation, one could erroneously conclude that the level of community participation was high when results from similar studies elsewhere are considered, but, the basic structure for effective community participation was lacking and thus revealed the low premium park management places for local community participation and involvement in ecotourism and conservation in the Park. This is because the Park does not empower, or build local capacity, for participation in ecotourism vis-à-vis conservation by excluding them from the decision-making and ecotourism/conservation planning

process. For effective participation of local communities in ecotourism in the Park, there is need for the Park to build a structure through which each community could be empowered through decision-making and involvement in the ecotourism planning process rather than the haphazard mode their participation currently assumes. Building local capacity to enhance their engagement in ecotourism-linked business through financial support, either through government guaranteed low interest loans or facilitation of local money contributory system that could be circulated among the beneficiaries is very germane to their participation. These could only be possible by involving them in the decision-making and planning processes.

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