

ECOTOURISM INDUSTRY A PANACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDY OF OSSE RIVER PARK, ONDO –STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Osse river Park is rich in biodiversity and high in species endemism recognized by many international treaties and conventions. It is surrounded by communities with rich cultural values. The potentials of the Park and its environs to support ecotourism and sustainable economic development were explored through field observation, focus group discussion and administration of questionnaires between October 2011-April, 2012. Presence of fauna species such as *Potamocheilus porcus*, *Pabio anubis*, *Veranus sp*, *Ibadanensis malimbus* and flora species such as *Parkia biglobosa*, *Diospyros spp* e.t.c were established. Aquatourism potentials of river Osse, Uwesse and their tributaries were also explored. Demographic characteristic of the respondents were revealed and socio-economic needs of the communities were ranked in order of priorities. Cultural heritage resources in the adjoining communities include festivals, local music, traditional mode of dressing, sacred rivers and hills. Development of rich ecotourism resources of the Park and its environs is targeted at addressing community's needs.

Keywords: ecotourism, sustainable economic development, hydrological formations, flora resources, cultural values

INTRODUCTION

The concept of ecotourism is due to the widespread and growing interest in the natural environment and a corresponding recognition of the importance of conserving natural environmental quality (Orams,1995). Ecotourism has brought the promise of achieving conservation goals, improving the well-being of local communities and generating new business — promising a rare win-win situation (Drumm and Moore, 2002). Ecotourism typically involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna and cultural heritage are the primary attractions (Oladeji, *et.al*, 2012). Ecotourism is the fastest growing segment of the travel industry –growing World wide by 30% each year (Varty, 2003). Ecotourism has attracted increasing attention in recent years, not only as an alternative to mass tourism, but also as a means of economic development and environmental conservation (Campbell, 2002). According to Honey, 1999 ecotourism involves travelling to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strive to be low impact and (usually) small scale. It helps in educating the tourists; generate funds needed for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights. Mader, 2000, defined ecotourism as environmentally sustainable travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features-both past and present) that promotes conservation has low negative visitor impacts and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations.

The number of visits to national parks in potentially important ecotourism destinations has grown dramatically over the last ten years, signaling a shift in tourist preferences from traditional popular destinations in Europe to nature destinations located mainly in the developing world (UNEP, 2001). Nigeria as a developing nation in her quest to diversify her economy in reducing over dependence on oil should embrace the opportunities offered by ecotourism industry. Extending the locale of the study to the immediate environment is hinged on the premise that tourists are not only interested in sight-seeing alone but of equal importance to them is the natural and cultural resources of the area so visited. Ecotourism therefore implies tourism practices that benefits all concerned parties (all people and the entire environment) rather than benefiting some and neglecting others. Culture is a resource base found among the local communities and it contributes significantly to the growth and development of ecotourism destination. In other words it goes beyond visiting heritage sites but it includes participating in cultural events like festivals and ceremonies. According to Richards, 2001 cultural tourism covers not just the consumption of the cultural products of the past, but also of contemporary culture or the way of life of a people or region. Cultural tourism is a sustainable form of tourism that includes the art, history, traditions, customs, language , literature and other disciplines that preserve and shed light on the human condition (humanities)(Shilling, 2000). According to Wesche (1997) numerous indigenous groups in the wilderness peripheries of less developed countries have adopted ecotourism as part of their development strategy since it provides opportunity to sell their traditional knowledge and permits the commercial utilization of natural resources without outright exploitation and immediate destruction. A particular feature of *community-based tourism* (as distinct from general tourism development) is that it can strengthen community management of a range of natural resources. This is far from inevitable, but can happen where community tourism develops within a context of a broader institution-building and natural resource development programme (Ashley, 2000).

Ormsby and Mannle (2006) opined that ecotourism venture have sustained the economy of most nations for example East Africa countries like Kenya , Tanzania and part of West Africa. Part of its role also include the generation of income for conservation and the management of National Parks and other Public land as well as employing local people. Its purpose may be to educate the travelers, to provide funds for ecological conservation, to directly benefit the economic development and politics, empowerment of local communities or to foster respect for different cultures and for human right (Ceballos-Lascurain, 2001). There are several reasons why tourism development could be a particular effective tool of poverty reduction. First, tourism offers considerable employment opportunities for unskilled labour, rural to urban migrants, and lower income women. Secondly, there are considerable linkages with the informed sector which could generate positive multiplier effects to poorer groups that rely on that sector for their livelihood. Third, tourism levels to be heavily based upon the preservation of natural capital such as wildlife and cultural heritage which are often “assets that some of the poor have, even if they have no financial resources (Ashley *et. al*, 2001).

Osse river Park is rich in biodiversity, high species endemism and home to many wildlife species recognized by international treaties and conventions such as the Convention on International Treaties in Endangered Species (CITES). Boosted by remarkable, geographical, natural, cultural, historical and aesthetic attribute, the Park is a potential pearl of ecotourism in the world. The need to provide accurate and up to date information on the potentials of these resources and those in the neighbouring communities to support ecotourism practices and meeting the socio-economic challenges of the people has necessitated this research finding.

METHODOLOGY

Study area

The research study was carried out at Osse River Park (formerly known as Ifon Game Reserve) in Osse local government area of Ondo State, Nigeria. The reserve covers a total area of 282.72sq.km which is equivalent to 8.4% of the state and it is suited between latitudes 6⁰ 40" and 7⁰ 15 " North and longitude 5⁰ 4 3 "and 5⁰ 55 " East. Osse River Park has a unique quality because of its high forest vegetation as well as Savanna which made it easily accessible from all sides because of its central location (see fig. 1)

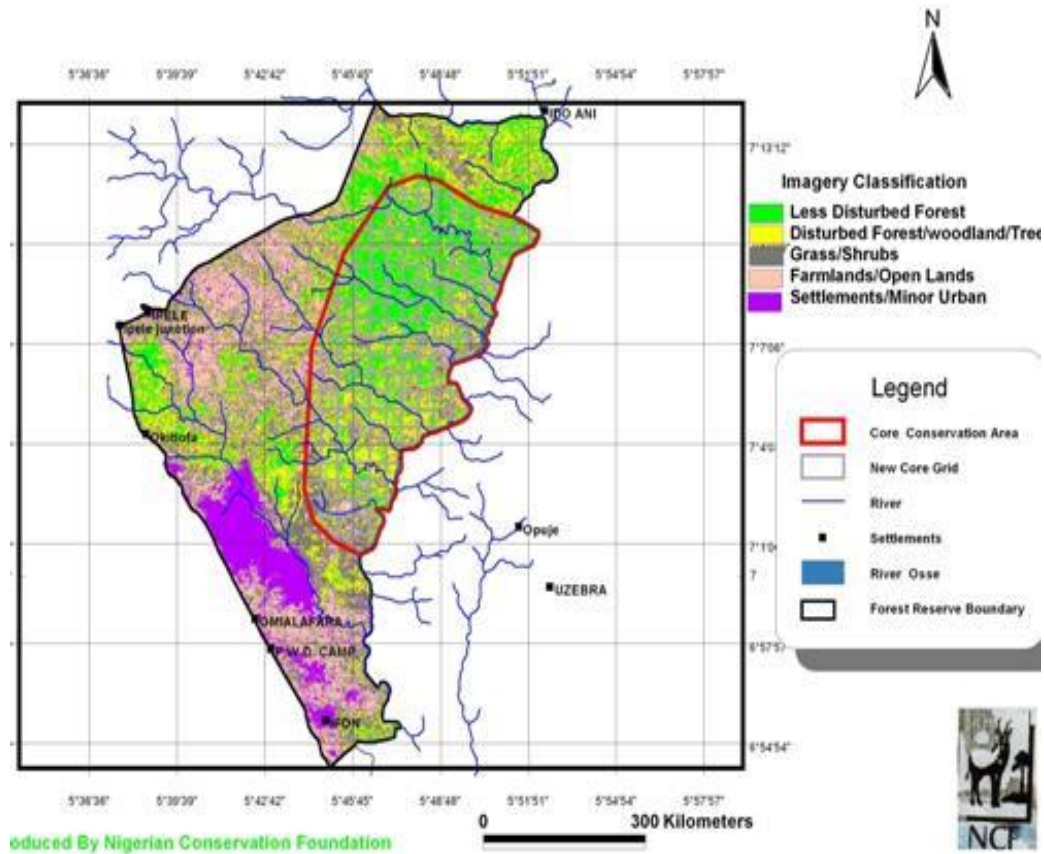


Fig.1: Map of Osse River Park

Source: NCF, 2007

The Park consists of some important rivers mainly: Osse, Omor, Okua, Uwesse and Oroken. Osse River Park is surrounded by various communities and camps among which are: Ifon, Igbo-nla, Ikaro, Uwesse camp, Omi-arafa, Ori-ohi camp, Ipele, Igbogburu (Ido-ani), Ago-Igbira, Ago- Alao, Ofale and Elegbeka. The three major vegetation types in the Park include Tropical Rainforest area covers 50% (150. 22sq.km), Savanna Woodland including forest/savanna mosaic which covers an area of 132.48sq.km and the riverine forest which occurs along the courses of the major rivers draining the reserve. The annual rainfall in the reserve ranges between 1270-2000mm. The vegetation of the reserve is mostly dominated by species that are common to the lowland rain forest as described by Keay (1959). Fauna resources such as Elephant *Loxodonta africana* , Bush buck *Tragelaphus scriptus*, Bush pig *Potamocheirus porcus*, Grey checked Managabey *Cercocebus albigena*, Olive baboon *Papio anubis*, African buffalo *Syncerus caffer*, Patas monkey *Erythrocebus patas* have been identified in the Park (NCF, 2007). Flora resources such as Stool wood *Alstonia boonei* , Pod Mahogany *Azelia africana* , Ebony *Disopyrous mespliformis spp* were also identified to be present (NCF, 2007)

Sampling techniques

Prior to the commencement of the research work, reconnaissance survey was carried out in the study area for a period of 2 weeks in a month for two months in order to identify and design appropriate methodology for this study (Oladeji, *et. al* 2012, Wachter, T. & Newby, J. 2012 and Halstead and associates, 2008). It was observed that the Park is divided into various axes with observation trails to facilitate accessibility and monitoring within the Park. The names of some of the axes include Osse, Uwesse, Bending corner, Alaba –Ife 1&2, Agbanimu and Oke-Ogun, however two of these axes (Osse and Uwesse axes) were purposely selected since they reflect relics of wildlife resources of ecotourism values (Agbelusi and Afolayan, 1992). In the same vein, four of the adjoining communities to the Park were purposely selected based on their proximity to the Park. Each community was divided into blocks using the streets name or quarters from where housing units were randomly selected (Dohrmann *et.al*, 2006, Kennel and Liu, 2011). The four selected communities include Ikaro, Ifon, Omi-araafa and Elegbeka.

Data collection

a. Questionnaire administration

Population size for the selected communities

According to Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette (FRNOG, 2009), the population of Ose Local Government Area was put at 144,139 with male constituting the highest percentage of 50.73%. However, this official gazette lacks breakdown of the figure for each of the selected communities unlike the National Population Commission Census Final results for 1991. Thus, the National Population Commission Census Final result for 1991 was obtained for this study showing the 1991 population figure and 1996 population projection for the study communities to include Ikaro, Ifon, Omiaraafa and Elegbeka with population figure of 2,758; 17,138; 2,016 and 4,128 respectively. The annual exponential population growth rate for Nigeria was put at 3.18% (FRNOG, 2009). This annual exponential growth rate (3.18%) was therefore used to obtain the 2012 population projection used for the study.

Table 1: Population figure of selected communities

LOCATION	MALE	FEMALE	1991 BOTH SEXES	1996 PROJECTION	2012 PROJECTION
IKARO	1,188	1,262	2,150	2,758	4,550
IFON	7,144	7,779	15,223	17,138	28,280
OMI ARAFA	918	873	1,791	2,016	3,326
ELEGBEKA	1,927	1,740	3,667	4,128	6,811

Source: National Population Commission Census Final result for 1991

The selected sample size was obtained from the above population projection for year 2012 thus;

According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) the required sample size from a given population can be obtained using this formula

$$s = X^2NP(1-P)/d^2(N-1) + X^2P(1-P)$$

s=required sample size

X^2 =the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841)

N=the population size

P=the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size)

d=the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05)

This formula was used to obtain the sample sizes for each community as needed for this study as shown below

Thus for Ikaro $s = 3.841 \times 4,550.39 \times .50 (1-.50) / .05^2(4,550.39-1) + 3.841 \times .50 (1-.50)$

$s = 365$. This represents 8% of the population.

Ifon $s = 3.841 \times 28,280 \times .50 (1-.50) / (0.05)^2(28,280-1) + 3.841 \times .50 (1-.50)$

$s = 378$. This represents 1.3% of the population

Omi-arafa $s = 3.841 \times 3326 \times .50 (1-.50) / 0.05^2(3326-1) + 3.841 \times .50(1-.50)$

$s = 344$. This represents 10 % of the population

Elegbeka $s = 3.841 \times 6,811 \times .50 (1-.50) / .05^2 (6,811-1) + 3.841 \times .50 (1-.50)$

$s = 363$. This represents 5% of the population

Due to the limitations/ bias as stated below $\frac{1}{4}$ of each of the sample size was selected and administered in the following proportion.

Ikaro $365/4 = 91$, Ifon $378/4 = 94$, Omi-arafa $344/4 = 86$, Elegbeka $363/4 = 91$. Total questionnaire administered = $91+94+86+91=362$

Bias/Limitations

1. Annual exponential growth rate of 3.18% (FRONG,2009) was used to obtain the 2012 population projection as used for this study
2. The formula for determining sample size as published by the National Education Association in the article 'Small Sample Size' (Small-Sample Techniques,1960 cited in Krejcie and Morgan,1970) was used to obtain the sample size .

3. The limited time and finance for this study has necessitated the use of ¼ of the sample size using Krejcie and Morgan, 1970 uniformly across the selected communities obtained.

c. Participatory Research Method: Focus Group Discussion

Prior to the group discussion the consent of the community's heads and other relevant groups were sought as a way to seek for their cooperation in order to achieve meaning full result Two group discussions were held in two of the four selected communities adjoining the Park consisting of 14-17 participants cutting across sex, age, religion and human socio-economic activities. The average age of the participant was 41 years in both communities. The two communities where discussions were held include Ifon and Elegbeka. Each group consist of the head of the community, religion leader, traditional Chieftaincy holders, representative of community based organizations, representative of market women , representative of farmer/ hunter 'group and the youth leaders. PRA Ranking exercise was carried out in such a way that communities' members were asked to list their priorities in term of their overall needs and perceive needs for social economic development (Gajanayake and Gajanayake, 1993 , IFAD, 2012) .

d. Direct Observations:

The observation trails were traversed early in the morning between 6.00am – 8.00am and in the evening between 1600hrs to 1800hrs for a period of two days in a month for four months. The researchers were accompanied by the assigned Park guards in the state ministry of natural resources , department of wildlife , who were formally hunters now being recruited as staff of the Ministry. A hand held Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver was used to record the readings of some of the hospitality facilities that were observed to be under construction.

e. Secondary data: Secondary data collected include list of the identified fauna and flora resources as observed over a period of five years and compiled by the representative of Nigeria Conservation Foundation (NCF). Literatures and Past research works (Agbelusi and Afolayan,1992) on the Park were also consulted. These provided background knowledge of the fauna and flora species that had been observed to be present in the Park.

Data analysis: The data collected were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively using SPSS 16. The administered questionnaire were analysed descriptively. The demographic and non-demographic information were represented in form of pie chart , bar chart and frequency tables while the focus group discussion were analysed qualitatively to indicate the views and opinions of the representative in the group.

RESULT

Quantitative analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic characteristics of the respondents (362) were descriptively analysed and represented in form of table (table 2), bar chart and pie chart (figure 2-5) as shown below.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
SEX		
Male	229	63.3
Female	133	36.7
AGE		
< 20	12	3.3
21-30	121	33.4
31-40	109	30.1
41-50	48	13.3
> 50	72	20.0
MARRITAL STATUS		
Married	206	57
Single	102	28
Divorcee	36	10
Widow/widower	18	5
Total	362	100

Household size

It could be deduced that greater number of the respondents(148) maintain polygamous family type of household size of 11-15 while the least number (18) were those with household size of 1-5 as shown in fig.2

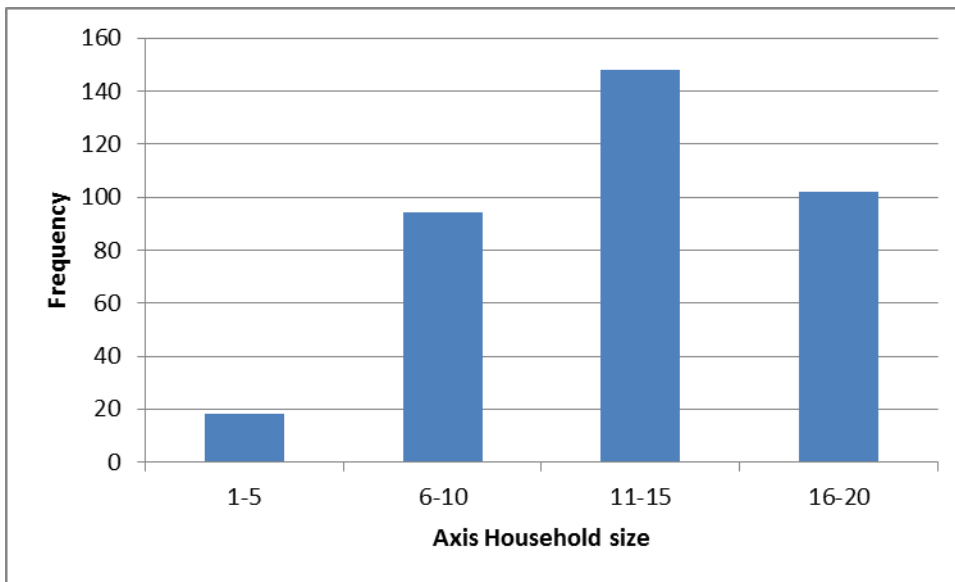


Figure 2: Household size

Economic and livelihood of the house hold: Primary occupation

Greater percentage of the respondents (65%) was into subsistence farming / hunting as the primary occupation, followed by those engaging in agricultural produce business the least are those employed as civil servant in the government owned institutions in the community as reflected in figure 3.

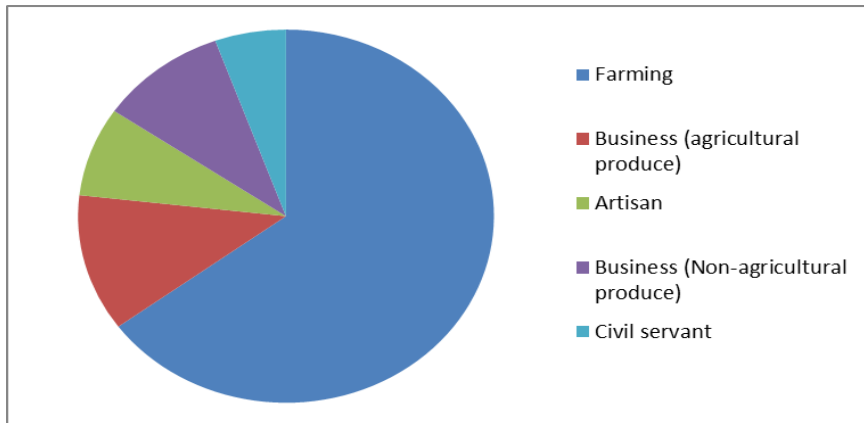


Figure 3: Primary occupation

Secondary occupation

Greatest percentage of the respondents(35.5%) are artisan that have chosen bricklaying, carpentry, painting, fashion designing as their secondary occupation while 7% of them do not engage in any form of secondary occupation and this include those that went home to relax after the close of work for the day(Figure 4) .

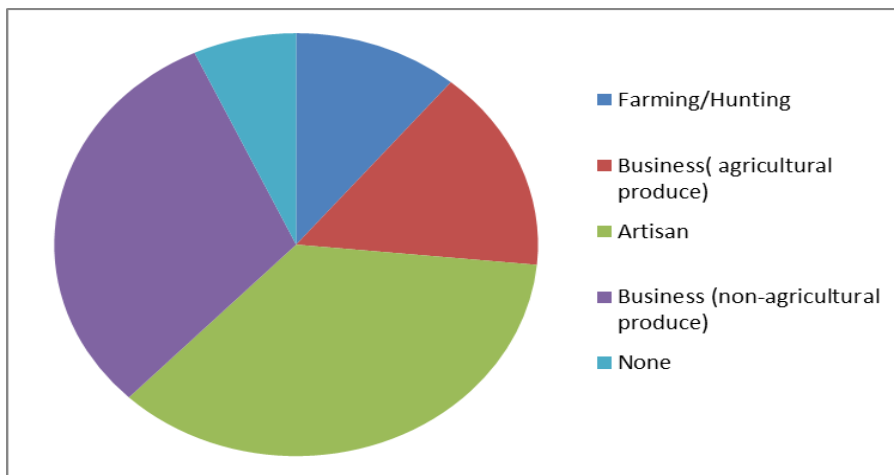


Figure 4: Secondary Occupation of the respondents

Income

Greater percentage of the respondents (63%) were those in the income range of ₦100,000–₦199,000 per annum . Others include respondents with the income range of < ₦100, 000/annum (21%), ₦ 200,000- ₦ 300,000 (12%). It was observed that the farmers/hunters that constitute part of the respondents do not keep proper record of their annual income. The researchers therefore result to the use of parameters such as how many children do you have, how many of them are in school(primary, secondary or tertiary), how much do you pay on each one of them, what is the estimate amount paid on feeding, hospital bill . The respondents were also allowed to indicate the value of capital project being embarked upon in a year.

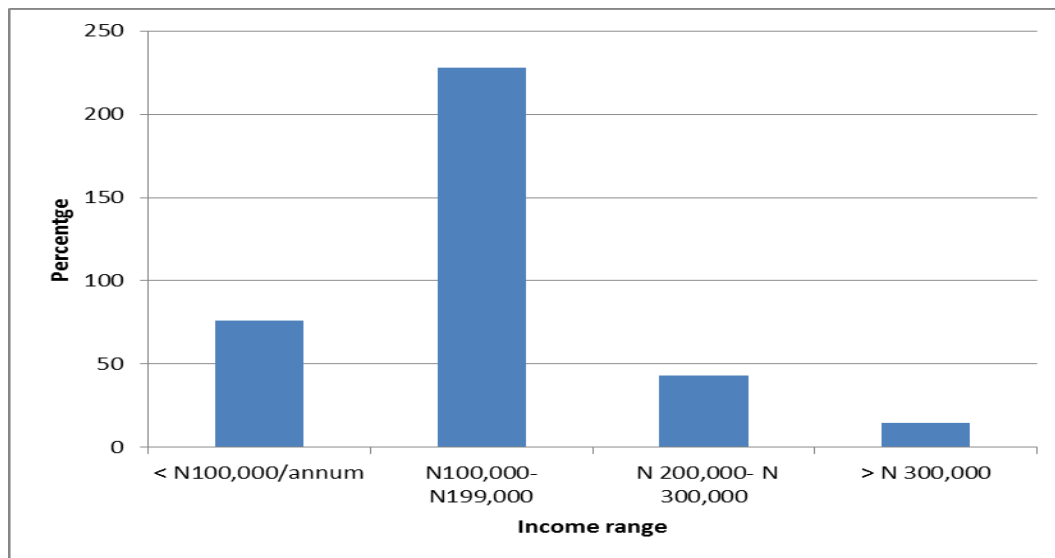


Figure 5: Income range

Employment

The rate of unemployment in these communities is high as indicated by 65% of the respondents while those considered employed were 35%.

Educational Background

The literate level is high in these communities (64%) while illiterate level is low (36%)

Qualitative analysis of the Focus Group Discussion

Result of the analysis of Focus Group Discussion held in Ifon and Elegbeka are quite revealing as shown below.

Table 3: Community's needs ranked in order of priority

Community	Priority needs	Rank	Associated facilities/ activities	Rank
Ifon	Education	4	Primary	3
			Secondary	2
			Tertiary	1
	Health	1	Basic Health Center	3
			Comprehensive Health Center	2
			Maternity Center	4
			General /Specialist Hospital	1
Recreational facilities	5	Outdoor Recreational Center	1	
		Community Event center/town hall	2	
Portable water	6	Pipe borne water	1	
		Borehole	2	
Employment	2	Skilled	1	
		Unskilled	2	
Road network	3	Intercity road network	2	
		Intracity road network	1	
Market facilities	7	Neighbourhood market	2	
		Town market	1	
Elegbeka	Education	4	Primary	3
			Secondary	1
			Tertiary	2
	Health	3	Basic Health Center	4
			Comprehensive Health Center	3
			Maternity Center	2
			General/Specialist Hospital	1
Recreational facilities	5	Outdoor Recreational Center	2	
		Community Event center/town hall	1	
Portable water	1	Pipe borne water	1	
		Borehole	2	
Employment	2	Skilled	1	
		Unskilled	2	
Road network	4	Intercity road network	2	
		Intracity road network	1	
Market facilities	7	Neighborhood market	2	
		Town market	1	

Footnote: 1 represents the need with the highest priority while 7 represent the least priorities .

a. Community needs

Educational facilities

There are government and privately owned primary and secondary schools in these communities but there is no tertiary institution.

Electricity

All the communities are linked to National grid and they enjoy electricity power supply. Although all the respondents indicated that they do experience epileps power supply. It was therefore not listed as part of community need

Transport facilities

Commercial bus and Motor bike are readily available in Motor Park as the means of transportation within the communities or to places outside the community. The cost of transportation depends on the condition of the road and distance. For instance journey to distance farmlands was reported to be very exorbitant due to poor state of the road with resultant hike in transport fare and cumulative effect on the cost of food items. Farmers among the group reported that a journey of 7 kilometers to farmlands with commercial motor cycle cost as high as ₦600 (\$4) to and fro. A sizeable bunch of banana therefore transported through this medium cost as much as ₦ 400-~~₦~~ 500(\$3) when getting to the market this is considered outrageous by the inhabitants.

Health facilities

There were Comprehensive, Basic and Maternity health centers in Ifon with exception of general /specialist hospital. It was only Maternity health center that was in Elegbeka . All these are government owned with other privately owned clinic and hospitals. Complicated health related problems are referred to Federal Medical Centre in Owo or State Specialist Hospital in Akure .

b. Culture

Festival

Seven cultural festivals were identified to be celebrated across the communities. The names of the Festival, the time of celebration are as stated below. The time of celebration of the cultural festival is based on lunar calendar, the time of celebration therefore vary annually.

1.Ogun festival

This festival is celebrated between the month of August and September among the hunters, blacksmith , drivers especially commercial divers and other worshippers . Some of the items used in celebrating include dog, palmwine and palm front.

Some worshippers do use dye or powder in disguise . Ogun is a deity referred to as GOD OF IRON. Both indigene and non-indigene including male and female are allowed to participate in this event

2. Ajo festival

This is a celebration to bridge the gap between the Elders and the junior ones . The festival is Celebrated annually between the month of Aughust and September . Coconut and sugar cane are used for the celebration. Both indigene and non-indigene including male and female are allowed to participate in this event.

3.Umoroko

This celebration afford the slave or the servant the opportunity to dine and wine with their Masters once in a year. It is equally celebrated between the month of August and September .

4. Obaloro festival

This festival is refered to as the king festival .It is the festival that permit the king to eat the new yam for the first time in the year . The king represents the last man to eat yam in the community. The festival comes up every month of September during which the king will dance round the town in company of friends, indigene and non-indigene with cultural music. It signifies amity and absolute loyalty to the king. It is also a time for other village heads to pay homage to the king. Various items could be brought to honour the king.

5. Ero festival

This is a kind of graduating ceremony to the elder hood. It can also be regarded as a time of retirement from active service to elder status of age of 70 years. This event comes up once in every year.

Others include Oro festival and Agbuke which are masquerade festivals when special masquerade come out. In the case of Agbuke this might be celebrated once or twice a year and sometimes it may not be celebrated at all in a year.

Local Music

Names of identified local music include

1. Asiko
- 2.Ajeegidi
3. Ayuu
4. Ireso
5. Agidigbo
6. Kokomu
7. Ladhalojho
8. Ijala

9.Idan

Heritage sites

Heritage / Sacred sites such as river, rocks, shrines were also identified across the communities where the people appease to their gods (e.g Ogun shrine) .

Table 4: Heritage sites in the adjoining communities

Heritage site	Location
Oogun shrine	All the communities visited
Oroju rock	Ikaro
Alawunrin sacred site	Ifon
Atorisan sacred site	Ifon
Osooro sacred site	Ifon
Oma river	Omi-arafa

Result of the field observation

The result of the field observation revealed the fauna and flora resources composition in the Park as presented in table 5 and 6.

Table 5: Flora resources identify in the Park

S/N	LOCAL NAMES	COMMON NAMES	SCIENTIFIC NAMES
1	Iroko	<i>Iroko tree</i>	<i>Melicia excelsia</i>
2	Opepe	<i>African peach</i>	<i>Nauclea diderichii</i>
3	Idigbo	<i>Black afara</i>	<i>Terminalia ivorensis</i>
4	Paapo	<i>Bush candle tree</i>	<i>Canarium sweinfurthii</i>
5	Oriro	<i>False Iroko</i>	<i>Antiaris africana</i>
6	Apa	<i>Mahogany</i>	<i>Afzelia africana</i>
7	Ebony	<i>Ebony tree</i>	<i>Disopyros spp</i>
8	Iru	<i>Locust bean</i>	<i>Parkia biglobosa</i>
9	Agbon-olodu	<i>African fan palm</i>	<i>Borrassus aethiopum</i>

Table 6: Fauna species identify in the Park

LOCAL NAME	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	INFORMATION FROM THE HUNTERS	INFORMATION FROM THE GUARD	FIELD OBSERVATION
Okete	Giant rat	<i>Cricetomys gambianus</i>	*	*	+
Elede Igbo	Red river hog	<i>Potamocheirus porcus</i>	*	*	+
Ato	Anubis baboon	<i>Papio anubis</i>	*	*	+
Edun	Mona monkey	<i>Cercopithecus mona</i>	*	*	+
Aaya pupa	Red patas monkey	<i>Erythrocebus patas</i>	*	*	+
Aparo	Forest Francolin	<i>Francolinus lathami hartians</i>	*	*	+
Adaba	Laughing dove	<i>Streptopella senegalensis</i>	-	*	+
Ibadan malimbe	Ibadan malimbe	<i>Ibadanensis malimbus</i>	-	*	+
Etu	Maxwell's duiker	<i>C. Maxwelli</i>	*	*	**
Alepa	Monitor Lizard	<i>Veranus sp</i>	*	*	+
Ofafa	Tree hyrax	<i>Dendrohyrax sp.</i>	*	*	-
Elekute	Rock hyrax	<i>Dreccavin capensis</i>	*	*	-
Efon	Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	*	*	-
Igala	Bush buck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>	*	*	**

*/+ = Present either through information collected or sighted directly

- = Not observed present/ no information collected

** = Indicate animal activity

The efforts of the Park aimed at developing the site for ecotourism was obvious through the identified hospitality facilities that were under construction. The names of the type of hospitality facilities being constructed and their GPS readings were as shown in table7.

Table 7 : Hospitality facilities in the Park with their GPS readings.

S/N	FACILITIES	GPS READINGS
1	Office	07.20789 ⁰ N 005.39121 ⁰ E
2	Quarters	07.20779 ⁰ N 005.39187 ⁰ E
3	Rangers post	07.21727 ⁰ N 005.49831 ⁰ E
4	Restaurants	07.20828 ⁰ N 005.39187 ⁰ E
5	Eco-lodge	07.21754 ⁰ N 005.49636 ⁰ E
6	Uwesse comfort station	07.19002 ⁰ N 005.41152 ⁰ E

DISCUSSION

The place of ecotourism industry in the demographic characteristics of the respondents

Demographic Information collected on the age, sex, marital status, and household size of the respondents' is quite revealing and they were indicators of ecotourism industry to thrive successfully in these communities. This support the research findings of HLA and ARA , 1994 as used to construct a market profile by TIES 2000. According to TIES, 2005 the result of the market profile shows the age range of ecotourist to be between 35 - 54 years, similar result was obtained among the host communities of Osse River Park with the respondents in the age range of 21—40 years recorded the highest percentage (31-33.3%). TIES, 2005 equally opined that gender was found to be 50% for the female and 50% for the male and in term of education 82% were college graduates (a shift in interest in ecotourism from those who have high levels of education to those with less education was also found indicating an expansion into mainstream markets). This research findings support TIES, 2005 with male constituting 63.3% and female 36.7%. Also, in term of level of education literate constituted the highest percentage (64%) of the respondents and illiterate with 36%. Greater percentage of the respondents in Osse river Park as observed in this report were those in the income range of ₦100,000—₦199,000 per annum(63%) which are those in the higher income bracket this equally compliment the Global Ecotourism Fact Sheet updated in September 2006 compiled by TIES, 2005.

Ecotourism and Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

The ability of ecotourism as an industry to provide employment for the unemployed youth has been emphasized by many authors (Denman, 2001, Ceballos-Lascurain, 2001). According to Denman, 2001, total tourist trips are predicted to increase to 1.6 billion by 2020. As such it has a major and increasing impact on the economic livelihood of the people. Development of Osse river Park as an ecotourist industry will go a long way in addressing the high rate of unemployment being faced by

the host communities and this was listed as part of the community needs (table 4). The rate of unemployment in these communities is high as indicated by 65% of the respondents while those considered employed were 35%. Development of the rich ecotourism potentials of the Park will also provide job opportunity for the rural host communities. This research finding revealed that greater percentage of the inhabitants in the adjoining communities to the park is rural dwellers engaging more in farming compare to other form of occupation (lumbering, trading, civil service e.t.c.). This supports the findings of Ekong 1988 and Oladele 2001 that the term rural embraces those places in Nigeria in which a greater proportion of the inhabitants (50% or more) are engaged in farming. According to Ceballos-Lascurain (2001), tourism creates jobs, both through direct employment within the tourism industry and indirectly in sectors such as retail and transportation. The researcher opined that tourism leads to what is known as the "multiplier effect," creating more jobs and providing opportunities for small-scale business enterprises, which is especially important in rural communities. According to WTO, 2002 Tourism directly responds to poverty reduction objectives since it unlocks opportunities for pro-poor economic growth by providing formal and informal employment, skilled (tourist operators/mangers and unskilled (tour interpreters or guards) labour. Existing recreational facilities in these communities and those being constructed by the Park Management authority will go a long way in generating employment opportunities for the locals. Tourism and hospitality are vital to many countries due to the large intake of money for businesses and opportunity for employment in hospitality services such as recreational centers, hotels and resorts, amusement park e.t.c. (WTTC, 2006). According to Gobena 2008, 65% of the total employee in hotels and lodges in Ethiopia were employed from local community and 35% of them are temporary or seasonal. Development of the rich ecotourism potentials of the Park and its environs will also give room for diversification of the economy from farming/ hunting (65%) as revealed. Percentage contribution of ecotourism to International travel has been reported by different authors (Reingold, 1993, Lew, 1997). Other information as provided by Drum and Moore, 2005 show that more than two-thirds of tourists in Costa Rica visit protected areas and reserves, a survey of U.S.-based outbound ecotourism operators shows that the number of operators grew by 20% between 1970 and 1994, or an average of 34% a year. The global destinations of U.S.-based outbound ecotourism operators' clients were: Central America 39%, South America 25%, North America 18%, Mexico and the Caribbean 5% and other regions 13% (Higgins, 1996 cited in Drum and Moore, 2005). In 2004, ecotourism/nature tourism was growing globally 3 times faster than the tourism industry as a whole (WTO, 2004). Many countries whose primary attractions are natural areas are experiencing dramatic increases in tourist arrivals (ICT, 2001). Ecotourism industry reduces vulnerability of resources by helping to diversify income opportunities (WTO, 2002).

Ecotourism development and its impacts on local enterprise and culture

This research study also revealed information on the art and craft practices in these communities as parts of the local enterprise that will be positively impacted through development of the rich ecotourism potentials of Osse River Park. The people were observed to be skillful in bead making and black smiting, products from these local industries could serve as souvenirs for the interested tourists. This is another way of generating employment for the locals with improve living standard and additional income (Theodros Atlabachew 2002). According to Elper 1998, indigenous people have found tourism to be an attractive development alternative because it sells traditional knowledge and permits the commercial

utilization of natural resources without outright exploitation and immediate destruction. The Seven cultural festivals with the associated six different local music as identified in this research work can also be of attraction to the visiting ecotourists as a means of entertainment. According to Imerbore, 2010 festival has a relevant role to play in the development of a state because it enables realization of culture. This is a form of self-defense because there is a need to protect their communities, traditional economies, and remaining wild places from the tourism mass culture which can bring “competition and polarization among families, a spread of the consumer monoculture, privatization of common resources, and infrastructure that facilitates industrialization of indigenous resources” (Elper, 1998). According to Horn and Tahi, 2009, Indigenous groups, including those outside New Zealand, are looking to ecotourism as a form of development that promote conservation of their culture, utilizes their knowledge and resource bases. Indigenous and non-indigenous are allowed to participate in any of these festivals. Apart from cultural festivals other cultural values identified include presence of shrines and availability of locally prepared food like pounded yam, vegetable soup/ okro soup in any of the local restaurant (The World Conference on Cultural Policies 1982). Cultural Heritage Tourism (CHT) has been source of inspiration and attractions for tourists drawing hundred and thousands of people yearly and it is often being reported that CHT is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry; it is a form of tourism that has history, customs and traditions (i.e. our “heritage”) at its core. CHT is the story of the people who live in a region, is regarded as the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry simply because of its ability to offer tourists unique products they can’t find elsewhere (Dan, 2000). Ecotourism creates a value for local knowledge and with this comes increased awareness and pride in the local community. Oladeji and Akinrinola, 2010 opined that development of cultural heritage tourism has potential to attract upscale visitors to the community. Ecotourism can act as a lever for protecting this local knowledge, local culture and local environment (Bushell, 2001 b).

Infrastructural Development and community needs

The community’s socio-economic needs were enumerated and ranked in order of priority. The needs were observed to vary from one community to the other. According to Spenceley, 2003, in addressing the policy shift towards more private sector ownership and management of wild resources, it is important to understand what factors tend to maximise net benefits for the rural poor and how are social concerns ranked in terms of importance against other priorities. For instance, provision of pipe borne water was ranked highest among the Elegbeka community while provision of well equip health care centres was considered of highest priority among the people of Ifon. Construction of access roads linking villages and farms (intercity road network) was the rated next to employment generation in Ifon and rated fourth in Elegbeka. This was perceived will facilitate accessibility and minimise the cost of transporting farm produce to the neighbouring markets. For instance farmers among the group reported that a journey of 7 kilometers from the Ifon to farmland with commercial motor cycle cost as high as ₦600(\$4) to and fro. A bunch of banana transported through this medium thus cost as much as ₦ 400–₦ 500(\$3) on getting to the market. Ormsby and Mannle (2006) opined that ecotourism venture have sustained the economy of most nations for example East Africa countries like Kenya, Tanzania and part of West Africa rural economic development and diversification, particularly in regional areas. The community also solicited for financial assistance towards the completion of recreational center being constructed through community efforts at Ifon as a way to boost commercial activities and

generate employment for the youth . The locals reiterated their commitment to support sustainable tourism practices that is capable of meeting their community's needs with minimal damage to their environment.

Ecotourism and conservation of biodiversity

This research finding revealed that the Park has suffered serious biodiversity loss of ecotourism values and as a result of the increasing anthropogenic activities of the host communities. This support the research finding of Oladeji et.al, 2011 that if the rate of Hunting, fishing, grazing and logging going in and around Protected areas should continue the natural resources being conserved and considered to be of ecotourism values may be greatly lost. Similar result was reported by Boo, 1990. The anthropogenic activities threatened Osse river formerly Ifon Game reserve was reported by Agbelusi and Afolayan, 1992, according to the researchers Ifon Game reserve (now Osse River Park) is beset with many problems, including poaching, illegal logging, land encroachment, staffing and equipment. There are indications that these problems has persisted over sometime and is beginning to have negative impacts on the Park ecotourism resources especially the decline in fauna and flora resources composition. For instance, thirty different mammalian species were recorded in Ifon Game reserve by Agbelusi and Afolayan, 1992, one third of the total species observed in the forest were ungulates, 20% were primates, 16% were rodents, 10% were carnivorous species and of others were just over 20%. However, discrepancy was observed in the data obtained through this research study. It was revealed that fauna species like Elephant, Leopard as recorded by Agbelusi and Afolayan, 1992 were neither sighted nor was any information received on the animal. However, despite the decrease in fauna resources composition there are indications that there are presence of fauna species like mona monkey, Maxwell duiker, Red patas monkey, Bush baby, Buffalo, Bush buck, Rock hyrax, Ibadan malimbe (endangered and endemic to South Western Nigeria,), Francolin e.t.c. These show that the Park has potentials to support ecotourism activities such as game viewing, bird watching as well as wilderness experience especially in the rain forest area of the Park. The number of tourists seeking interactions with wildlife in their natural environment is increasing across the world as opposed to those in captive or semi-captive situations (Higginbottom 2004, Reynolds and Braithwait, 2001). Presence of river Osse and Uwesse with relics of wildlife resources clustering around these axes also increased the potential of the Park to support ecotourism activities such as sport fishing /angling (fishing for pleasure), boating /canoeing and swimming (due to the steady flow of the rivers especially during the dry season (December-January) and the early part of rainy season(March-April). Osse river Park is about 15km from the entrance of the Park. The presence of species of plant such as *Melicia excelsa*, and *Diospyros spp* listed as endangered species on the list of threatened biodiversity species in Nigeria (First National Biodiversity Report, 2001) is a clear indication that the Park is a gene pool of biological resources. Socio-economic values of these flora species and *Parkia biglobosa* as sources of food and medicine cannot be over emphasized . These ecotourism resources equally offer opportunities for biodiversity conservation education and ecological awareness to the student, researchers especially those in the field of zoology, wildlife ecotourism, botany e.t.c as well as the ecotourits . According to Oladeji and Afolayan, 2009 forest and game reserve serve as gene bank of immeasurable values to offer conservation education and promoting awareness to the populace. The benefits of providing conservation education and awareness as emphasized by these authors include strengthening biodiversity conservation, minimizing ecological pollution, generate employment and additional revenue. Conservation education offers by ecotour guides provide vital information on distribution and breeding patterns of certain rare and endemic species (particularly birds and mammals thereby increase the participation of ecotour operators and

their clients in specific conservation tasks such as reforestation with native species, cleaning up garbage , e.t.c (Ceballous-Lascurain,2001)

CONCLUSION

This research finding revealed that Osse river Park is rich in ecotourism resources that could support ecotourism activities such as game viewing, bird watching, swimming; sport fishing/angling, canoeing/ rapid boating, primitive camping and wilderness experience. In addition to these the host communities are rich in cultural resources such as festivals, local food, heritage site that could be of interest to the visiting tourists. There are indications that these resources are capable of providing job for the teeming unemployed youth, diverse the local economy, promote and preserve rich cultural values of the host communities and generate additional revenue needed in meeting social and economic needs of the local if they are properly harnessed. Thus, ecotourism development of Osse River Park will impact positively on the social, economic and cultural values of the adjoining communities. The ecological impact will also be felt in term of promoting conservation of fauna and flora resources. All the accruable benefits from ecotourism industry will be mirage except there is a synergy between the government, non-governmental organisations, local communities and private sectors. Ecotourism thrive successfully in the atmosphere of peace, tranquility, security, adequate provision of infrastructural facilities, local community participation and involvement, increasing conservation education and awareness creation. This however, is impossible without paying necessary attention to the various supporting activities that will help to increase the demand for ecotourism in the state.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The support of the Staff in the Department of Wildlife, Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Ondo-State that oversee the Management of Osse River Park is hereby acknowledged for assigning park guards to accompany the researchers during the field work and for providing other logistics such as accommodation, vehicle to facilitate this study. Staff of Nigerian Conservation Foundation that was encountered at the Park is also appreciated for making available useful information in form of secondary and primary data in order to establish unpretentious and authenticity of the work.

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