Residents' perceived effects of ecotourism development in Ibodi monkey forest, Osun state, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism has been recognized as a strategic highway for increased growth and development without harming the ecosystem. The potential for ecotourism development in Ibodi Monkey Forest (IBMF) was assessed from the perspectives of the host communities in this study. Residents' perceived impacts of ecotourism development in IBMF, their acceptance of visitors and willingness to support ecotourism and factors influencing the attitude and perception of the residents towards the development of ecotourism were determined. The study made use of questionnaire to elicit information from respondents from five communities (Iremo, Iroye, Isua, Odolede, Ayetoro) in Ibodi. Data obtained were analyzed using frequencies, mean, percentages, standard deviation and Chi-square.

The result indicates that 96.0% of the residents were willing to accept tourists and support ecotourism development (95.0%) in IBMF as it was perceived to have positive economic impacts; employment opportunities (24±1.49), improved standard of living (4.14±1.46), pride of being host community (4.11±1.47) and benefit from recreational and infrastructural facilities created for visitors (4.10±1.51) as positive social impacts. Increase in local culture awareness (4.16±1.47) and preservation of cultural identity (4.11±1.46) were positive cultural impacts, while environmental impact was perceived as the preservation of natural beauty and tranquility (3.91±1.43). Age, marital status and religion had significant effect ($p< 0.05$) on the attitude towards ecotourism development in IBMF. However, there were some perceived negative impacts which included disruption in traditional/cultural belief, possibility of damage to historic sites and traffic/parking congestion. The awareness of residents of the positive economic, social, cultural and environmental impact through ecotourism development in IBMF informed their positive attitude and support towards its development.

Keywords: Perception, Ecotourism, Communities, Impacts, Attitude

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a form of tourism widely considered as an opportunity for local people to derive positive socioeconomic benefits from tourism development whilst conserving forests. According to Aseidu (2002), rural ecotourism development can help sustain viable rural communities and at the same time meet the needs of tourists. This is because unlike conventional tourism, ecotourism thrives in relatively untouched natural environments commonly found in rural areas and does not make huge demands on investments in facilities and infrastructure. It has therefore been proposed as a viable economic activity that can minimize negative impacts on wildlife habitat and provide an incentive to preserve natural areas. Ecotourism promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and allows for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations (Jaafar and Maideen, 2012) and have widely been promoted in many countries and regions as a sustainable development tool that contributes to the dual goals of conservation of threatened ecosystems and sustainable development (Lindsay, 2003). However, successful management of ecotourism often require local people's support for conservation which is strongly influenced by perception of the conservation impacts that are experienced by the local communities (Sekhar, 2003).Therefore, for tourism development to be successful in a given region, it is essential to involve a broad range of stakeholders (Ribeiro *et al*, 2013; Imran *et al*, 2014), including residents of the nucleus of the destination.

Eshliki and Kaboudi (2012) stated that the degree of host community's participation in tourism is strongly related to the perceived tourism effects and Hanafiah *et al*. (2013) concluded that participation is connected to personal benefits obtained from tourism. If costs are greater than the perceived benefits to be obtained, residents will oppose tourism activity, but if they can benefit from this activity without substantial cost, they are most likely to support it (Lee, 2013). This theory was tested among many communities around the world where tourism activities exist, using the three main pillars of sustainability: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental (Presenza *et al.*, 2013; Stylidis *et al.*, 2014).This approach is actually the essence of the social exchange theory applied in

tourism, which explains the community attitude and involvement based on the benefits obtained, whether they are economic, socio-cultural or environmental (Andereck *et al*., 2005).

Despite the growing influence of ecotourism and its potential to boost local, regional and national economy in developing countries and all over the world, there has been paucity of reliable data and the information on existing tourism assets especially in developing countries (Bisong, 2002). So, understanding the impact of tourism on the local communities is becoming a major topic for researchers, while being the key element in building sustainable and long-term tourism strategies (Presenza *et al*., 2013; Abdollahzadeh and Sharifzadeh 2014; Almeida-Garcia *et al*., 2016). Thus, this study assessed residents' perceived effects of ecotourism development in Ibodi Monkey Forest (IBMF) Osun State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to determine residents' willingness to support tourism development, their acceptability of tourists into IBMF and the perceived effects of ecotourism development. Association between demographic characteristics of residents and their support for ecotourism and acceptance of tourists were tested.

METHODOLOGY

The study area is situated within Ibodi, Osun State, Southwest Nigeria (Figure 1). It lies between latitude 7^0 34 60^o North of the equator and longitude 4^0 $34'60^0$ east of the Greenwich meridian. Ibodi town is bounded in the East by Ilesha, Odoigbo and Irogbo, in the West by Iferawa. Iwara, Itagunmodi, in the South by Osu and Iloba, while it is surrounded in the North by Ila, Oke Osin and Iregun (Fapounda, 2005).

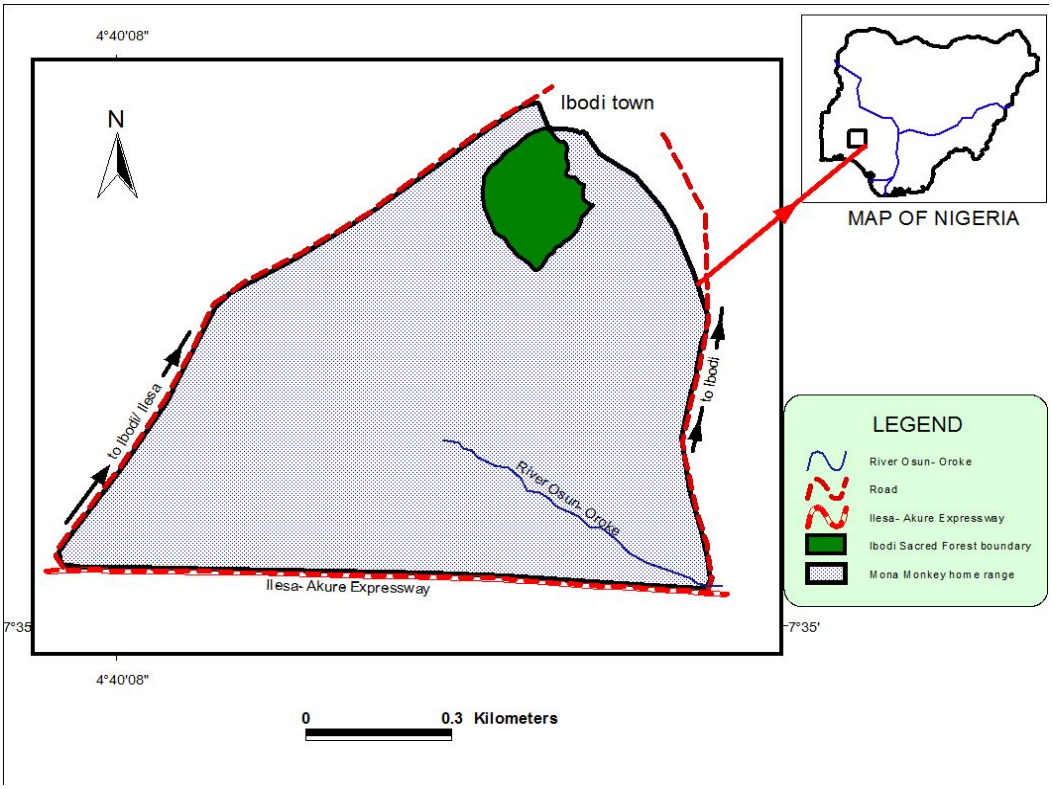

Figure 1: Location of Ibodi Monkey Forest in Osun State, Nigeria

Source: Fayenuwo, 2014

Quantitative data were used in this study. The primary data involved the use of questionnaire which was self-administered. The five communities in Ibodi (Iremo, Iroye, Isua, Odolede, Ayetoro) were purposively selected and 20 questionnaires were randomly distributed among the residents in each of the five communities. In all, 100 questionnaires were administered.

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive (frequencies, mean, percentages, standard deviation) and inferential (Chi-square) statistical tools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents as presented in Table 1 shows that there were more male (57.4%), than female in the study area. Also, most (59.0%) were between 21-40years which suggests that majority of the respondents were in their active age. This is in tandem with Nigeria's age distribution in 2008 that indicated that the dominant age group was 15-64 years (NMEC, 2008). The married respondents were more (46.7%), as others were single (38.6%), divorced (5.9%) and widowed (7.9%). Also, 34.0% had primary and secondary school education, while 15.0% attained tertiary level of education, and 17.0% had no formal education. Christianity (51.0%) and Islam (42.0%) were the major religion of the respondents with just few Traditional worshippers (7.0%). The occupation of majority of the respondents was trading (28.7%) while others were students (19.8%), artisans (16.8%), farmers (15.8%), livestock rearers (10.9%), fishermen (1%), hunters (3.0%) and civil servants (3.0%).

Figure 2 presents the resident's willingness to support tourism development in Ibodi Monkey Forest (IBMF) as majority (95.0%) of the residents indicated willingness to support ecotourism development; while only 5.0% of the respondents were not willing to support ecotourism development in the forest. The residents' acceptability of tourists into IBMF as presented in Fig 3 shows that majority (96%) of the respondents expressed their willingness to accept the proposal to turn IBMF to Ecotourism destination and accept tourists, while only 4% rejected the entering of tourists into the forest. Moreover, Age, marital status and religion had significant effect ($p< 0.05$) on the attitude towards ecotourism development in IBMF (Table 2). This implies that since majority are in their active age, married with significant responsibilities and with religious inclination which permit tourist, these positively influence the adoption of innovation that will enhances diversification of their livelihood options through ecotourism development.

As revealed in Table 2, residents perceived employment opportunities (mean=4.24±1.49), improved standard of living (mean =4.14±1.46) and increased income (mean=4.06±1.44) and business opportunities (mean=4.06±1.46) as positive economic impact. On the other hand, some negative economic impact such as little or no access to natural resources within IBMF (mean=0.47±1.42), minimal involvement of local residents in the management of IBMF, increased cost of living and increased economic instability were also indicated by respondents. Gjerald, (2005) stated that ''in order to see how tourism affects small local communities, one has to look into the residents own perceptions of the tourism impacts" which is consistent with the findings of Aref, (2011) who opined that ecotourism had a major impact on the quality of life of the local residents. As regards factors which influence the perception of the benefits and costs of tourism, Royo and Ruiz (2009) cited dependency on tourism, the level of local development, the use of public resources by the local community, feelings toward the community, and commitment to the community. These factors or determinants vary the intensity or the perceived sense of the impact, be it positive or negative. This is consistent with this study as the residents of IBMF communities perceived employment opportunities), improved standard of living, as positive economic impacts of ecotourism to their community as host communities generally perceive tourism activities positively within their region, especially because of the economic benefits, including job opportunities, which are, by far, the most important (Hanafiah *et al*., 2013; Jaafar and Bakri 2015).Residents pride for being the host community of IBMF (mean=4.11±1.47) and the benefits from recreational and infrastructural facilities created for visitors (mean=4.10±1.51) are positive social impacts . However, they also highlighted negative social impacts which include the disruption in their traditional/cultural belief (mean=0.42±1.29), loss of native language (mean=0.35±1.18) and tourism intensified labor burdens (mean= 0.34±1.07). Moreover, increase in local cultural awareness (means=4.16±1.47), preservation/strengthening of cultural identity of hosts (mean=4.11±1.46) and increased demand in local arts and crafts (mean4.10±1.45) were seen as positive cultural impacts. . Improvements in the appreciation of local culture were cited as benefits by residents in IBMF which corroborates the findings of Besculides *et al*. (2002) as tourism enhances pride and cultural identity, cohesion, the exchange of ideas, and knowledge of the local culture as it creates opportunities for cultural exchange and the revitalization of local traditions, increased quality of life and an improved image of the community.

The environmental component of the social exchange theory is often perceived by the host community in negative terms, because of some the costs brought on by tourism development like pollution, crowding, destruction of natural habitats, noise, etc. (Naidoo and Sharply, 2015) which is in tandem with results from this study that indicated perceived negative environmental impacts to be

over-crowding, increased pollution and increased traffic caused by tourism development in IBMF while the natural beauty and tranquility was opined as positive environmental impact.

The perceived economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts from the development of ecotourism in Ibodi community provided a satisfactory ground for their willingness to allow tourist into IBMF and supports ecotourism development.

Table 1: Distribution of Ibodi residents by their demographic information

Variable	Frequency (N=100)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	58	58.0
Female	42	42.0
Age		
<20 years	20	20.0
21-30 years	33	33.0
31-40 years	26	26.0
41-50 years	13	13.0
>50 years	8	8.0
Marital Status		
Single	39	39.0
Married	47	47.0
Divorced	6	6.0
Widowed	8	8.0
Religion		
Christianity	51	51.0
Islam	42	42.0
Traditional	7	7.0
Household Size		
1-5	68	68.0
6-10	32	32.0
Occupation		
Farming	16	16.0
Fishing	1	1.0
Hunting	3	3.0
Rearing of livestock	11	11.0
Trading	29	29.0
Artisan	17	17.0
Civil Servant	3	3.0
Students	20	20.0
Education		
No formal education	17	17.0
Primary education	34	34.0
Secondary education	34	34.0
Tertiary education	15	15.0

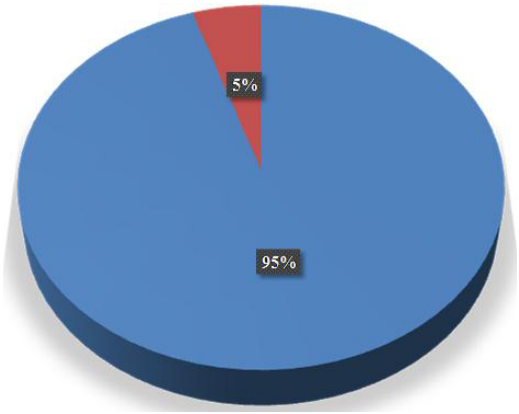

Figure 2: Resident's willingness to support ecotourism development in Ibodi monkey forest

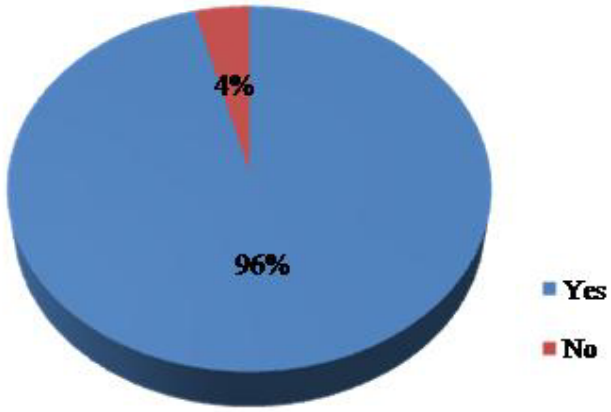

Figure 3: Resident's acceptability of tourists and the proposal to turn IBMF to ecotourism destination

Table 2: Distribution of Residents by Perceived Effects of Ecotourism Development in Ibodi Monkey Forests

Perceived effects	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	SD
Positive Economic Impacts							
Employment Opportunities	65	24	0	0	0	4.24	1.492
Increased Income	46	44	0	0	0	4.06	1.441
Improve Standard of living	54	36	0	0	0	4.14	1.463
Road system and infrastructure improvement	49	41	0	0	0	4.09	1.450
Better economic condition for the poor from low-paying/business opportunities	49	38	0	0	0	4.06	1.462
Negative Economic Impacts							
Increased cost of living	3	7	1	0	0	0.46	1.329
Increased economic instability	0	4	3	0	0	0.33	1.006
Local resident's minimal or no involvement in the management	7	3	0	0	0	0.47	1.425
Little or no access to natural resources within IBMF	7	3	0	0	0	0.47	1.425
Positive Social Impacts							
Greater pride in community as host	53	35	2	0	0	4.11	1.470
Opportunity to understand and communicate among people of diverse backgrounds	46	39	5			4.01	1.460
A possibility of public space creation for the	53	32	5	0	0	4.08	1.482

community							
Benefit for local people from recreational and infrastructural facilities created for visitors	90	10	0	0	0	4.10	1.508
Negative Social Impacts							
Disruption in tradition/cultural belief	4	5	1	0	0	0.42	1.296
Loss of native language	4	3	3	0	0	0.35	1.184
Tourism lead to loss of authenticity	2	7	1	0	0	0.32	1.024
Tourism intensifies labour burdens	0	6	3	1		0.34	1.066
Tourism destroys community relationship/character	3	1	3	1	2	0.32	1.072
Positive Cultural Impacts							
Local cultural awareness increases	56	34	10	0	0	4.16	1.468
Increased demand in local arts and crafts	50	40	10	0	0	4.10	1.453
Preservation/strengthen cultural identity of host	51	39	10	0	0	4.11	1.456
Revenue creation from tourism for preservation of archeological sites, historic buildings and districts	91	9	0	0	0	3.50	1.534
Negative Cultural impacts							
A possibility of damage in historic sites	3	0	2	0	1	0.30	1.010
Long-term damage to cultural traditions and erosion of cultural values	3	0	0	4	3	0.26	0.939
Positive Environmental Impacts							
Natural beauty and tranquility	37	47	6	10	0	3.91	1.429
Negative Environmental Impacts							
Increased pollution	1	8	0	0	1	0.38	1.187
Overcrowding	4	5	1	0	0	0.43	1.312
Over-harvesting	3	6	1	0	0	0.42	1.281
Traffic and parking congestion	7	3	0	0	0	0.47	1.425
Crushing out clearance of vegetation	3	0	0	6	1	0.28	0.968

Table 3: Chi-Square test of association between demographic characteristics of respondents and their support for ecotourism development and acceptance of tourists

Variable	χ^2	p-value	Remark
Support for ecotourism			
Age	10.121	0.038	*
Marital status	10.564	0.014	*
Religion	23.810	0.000	*
Occupation	11.452	0.120	Ns
Education	3.571	0.312	Ns
Acceptance of visitors			
Age	110.859	0.018	*
Marital status	13.749	0.003	*
Religion	29.936	0.000	*
Occupation	7.829	0.348	ns
Education	5.025	0.170	ns

*Significant at 0.05 level of significance

CONCLUSION

Ecotourism can develop a destination economically, socio-culturally and environmentally. It is evident from this study that residents were aware of the possibility for positive economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts through ecotourism development in Ibodi Monkey Forest which informed the positive attitude of majority of the respondents towards the development of ecotourism in IBMF. However, if not properly managed tourism development may also have negative socio-cultural effects on traditional family values and purchasing power between the host community and tourists which can lead to socio-cultural conflicts. Therefore, it is essential for the active participation and involvement of local people if ecotourism development is to be sustained in the destination.

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