Forests and Forest Products Journal 8:21-26

Community Participation in Protected Area Management: Case of Osse River Park, Ondo State, Nigeria.

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Abstracts

Communities participation in the management of Osse River Park was studied using questionnaire, interview and key informant in four communities (Ifon; Ikaro; Ido ani; Ipele) surrounding the park. Results showed that the communities participate more by passive means (51.5%). The involvement of the support zone communities in Osse River Park is low since 63.2% confirmed that they were not involved in park activities. Volunteering information is one major way through which the communities participate in the management of the Park. Results also showed that 93.4% of the support zone dwellers were willing to support the management of the park to realize the conservation objectives while 6.6% were not willing. Problems encountered from the communities by the Park staff in the discharge of their duty were in the use of park land for farming, hunting and tree felling within the park. It is important for the protected area staff to establish a good relationship and proper rapport with local communities and encourage their participation from design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation because neglecting this may have weighty and intense influence on the success of the protected area.

Key words: Participation, Protected area, Management, Biodiversity, Osse River Park

Introduction

Protected areas are the strongholds of biodiversity conservation worldwide and are established with the aim of conservation and preservation of other cultural artefacts contained therein. The success of the protected areas in achieving the objectives for its establishment is dependent on the support and cooperation of the surrounding communities. According to Dudley (2008), protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.

Protected areas do not exist as islands; they are surrounded by communities whose lands were collected for the protected area establishment. Many factors influence the perceptions of the protected areas held by residents living in their periphery. These include the history of park management, degree of awareness about protected areas existence and education level (McClanahan *et al*., 2005). Other factors are reference to future generation, gender and ethnicity Gillingham and Lee, (1999) and Mehta and Heinen, (2001).An understanding of all these factors is important to improve the relationship between local residents and protected areas, as it will improve people awareness about biodiversity conservation within these areas (Dudley, 2008).

The importance of local communities' participation in biodiversity conservation cannot be over-emphasized as they are the custodian of the resources prior to establishment of the protected areas. Local community's participation has been a subject of interest to specialist in protected area management due to their role in sustainable management of the resources. Protected area managers have therefore identified dangers inherent in excluding local stakeholders and conclude that their participation is fundamental to the successful management of protected area especially those that have people living in them (IUCN, CNPPA, 1994).Participation is a means to improve protected area management and to assure long-term conservation by staff of the protected areas and headquarters staff of the managing institutions (Elke, 2008).Participation is

broadly considered an important factor in nature conservation. Pimbert and Pretty (1995) identified seven levels of participation, these are:

Passive Participation: People participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened. It is a unilateral announcement by an administration or project management without listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.

Participation by information giving: People participate by giving answers to questions posed by extractive researchers and project managers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches. There is no opportunity to influence proceedings or decisions, as the findings of the research or project design are neither shared nor checked for accuracy.

Participation by Consultation: People participate by being consulted and external agents listen to views. These external agents define both problems and solutions and may modify these in the light of people's responses. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision-making and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.

Participation for Material Incentives: People participate by providing resources; for example, labour, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Much in site research falls in this category, as rural people provide the fields but are not involved in the experimentation or the process of learning. It is very common to see this called participation, yet people have no stake in policy activities when the incentives end.

Functional Participation: People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project, which can involve the development or provision of externally initiated social organization. Such involvement does not lead to be of early stages of project cycles or planning, but rather major decisions have been made. These institutions to be dependent on external structures, but many become independent in time.

Interactive Participation: People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local groups or the strengthening of existing ones. It leads to involved interdisciplinary methods that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systematic and structure being processes. These groups take control over local decisions as that people have a stake in maintaining structures or practices

Self-mobilization/active participation: people participate by taking initiatives independent of materials institutions to change system. Such self-initiated mobilization and collective action may or may not challenge existing distribution of wealth and power. (Pimbert and Pretty, 1995.)

The focus here is on the more controversial participatory processes in protected areas with stricter conservation status that do not provide for direct use of natural resources. Projects aim to compensate local stakeholders affected by resource-use restrictions, loss of income, or other hardships caused by the establishment of a protected area. Participation of local stakeholders in planning and implementation of such activities is seen as essential for their long-term success (O'Riordan, 2002).

Participation and cooperation is increasingly seen as a better approach to co-management of protected areas as they promote integration of protected areas with local stakeholders and minimize existing conflicts and negative impacts on the areas. The threats and pressures experienced by most protected areas could be greatly reduced if these communities agree with the protected area management and participate in its management.

Although Osse river park, formerly known as Ifon Game Reserve had been existing for decades, the management of the protected area still encounter difficulties in relating with the support zone communities which results in conflicts most times. The study therefore investigates the participation of the surrounding communities in the management of the park and also examines

their level of participation thus far. This will aid in understanding reasons why the protected area has not been able to achieve its objectives and therefore help protected area management to better relate with the support zone communities of the protected area.

Study Area.

Osse River Park formerly known as Ifon game reserve is located in Ondo State, southwestern Nigeria. It is situated between latitude $6^0$40' and $7^0$15'N and longitude $5^0$55'E (NCF, 2008). It lies between the transition of forest and derived savannah of the northern edge of Ondo State (MNR, Ondo State, Nigeria 2003). The reserve covers an area of about 282.70km^2. It is made up of three vegetation types;rainforest (159.22km^2) which covers 50% of the reserve, derived/Guinea savannah (123.48km^2) and the riverine forest. (NCF, 2008). It is bounded by four major towns; Ipele, Idoani, Ifon and Ikaroand including few villages. Prior to the creation of Ondo State in 1979, the reserve was managed as a Forest reserve which was originally gazetted by notice No. 24 order 15 of 1930 as one of the wildlife sanctuaries through government gazette No. 2 of 14/01/1951. Since 1979, the status of the forest is a game reserve until when it was renamed Osse River Park.

Materials and Methods

Osse River Park is presently surrounded by several communities/villages; four of these communities which existed at the inception of the park were selected for the study. They are Ido Ani, Ifon, Ikaro and Ipele. Twenty five copies of questionnaire were distributed in each of the community making a total of one hundred in the four communities, out of which seventy seven copies were retrieved. Also, fourteen of the members of staff of the Park were sampled for questionnaire administration. Key informants within the four communities were also used to extract information relevant to the study. They include community leaders, youth leaders and a few elders of the land. Data obtained from the study were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and charts.

Results and Discussion.

The study revealed that the level of awareness of the protected area was high (92.2%), only 7.8 % were not aware of the existence of, Osse River Park (Table.1).

Table 1: Respondents Awareness of the Existence of Osse River Park

Awareness	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	71	92.2
No	6	7.8
Total	77	100

The various ways by which the local communities participate in the management of Osse River Park are shown in Figure 1. Passive participation (participation by being told what to do) was highest (51.5%), this was followed by participation through giving of information (35.3%), consultation (5.9%), material incentives (4.4%) while participation through functional and interactive means was 1.5% each. Table 2 shows that the park was established with the consent of the communities and the elders of the communities were aware of the decision of the government to set up the protected area. Although most of the elders that were privy to the decision were dead, 78.4% of the respondents agreed that the elders were contacted and consulted before Osse River Park was established while 21.6% were of the opinion that the elders were not consulted before the park was established.

The study revealed that the relationship between the park management and the support zone communities was hostile as 75% of the park staff stated that relationship between the management and the surrounding

communities was hostile while only 25% stated that it was cordial (Fig. 2). On the willingness of the communities to support the management of Osse River Park in realizing the objectives of the park, result of the study shows that 93.4% of the respondents were willing to support the management of the park while 6.6% of the respondents were not (Table 3). However, out of the respondents who were willing to support the management of the park, 40.3% were ready to support the park by obeying rules and regulation of the park, 19.4% by safe guarding the park against hunting while the remaining 40.3% were ready to support the park by giving them necessary information (Table 4). This implies that there is likelihood that conservation efforts will yield positive results and the objectives of creating the park will be realized in the long run.

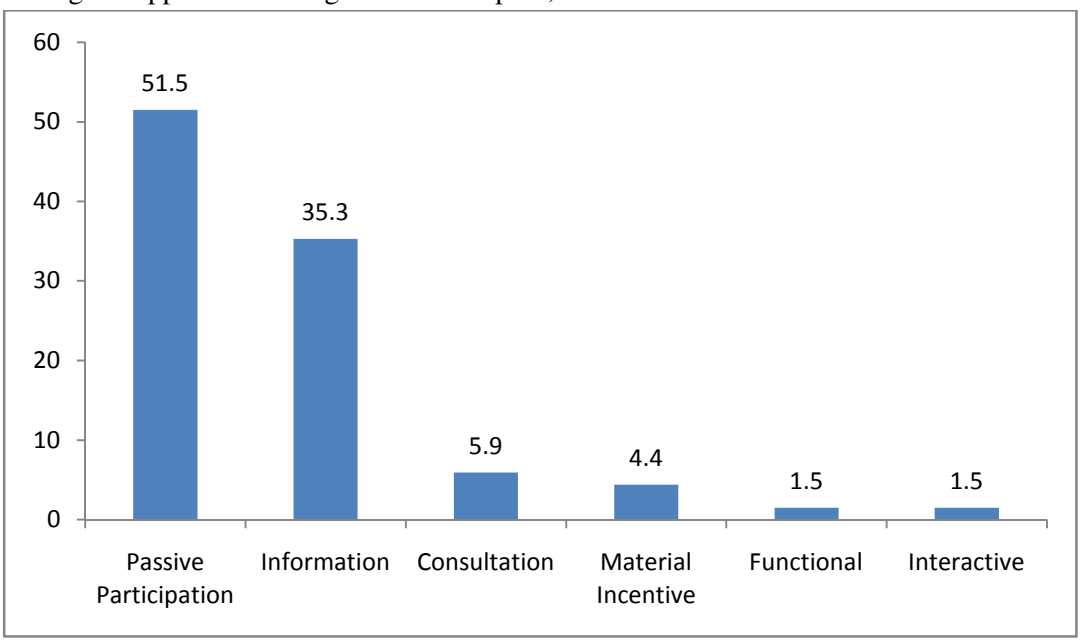

Figure 1: Ways through which communities participate in Osse River Park

Table 2: Consultation with Elders before Park establishment

Consultation	Frequency	Percentage %
Elders Consulted	60	78.4
Elders not Consulted	17	21.6
Total	77	100

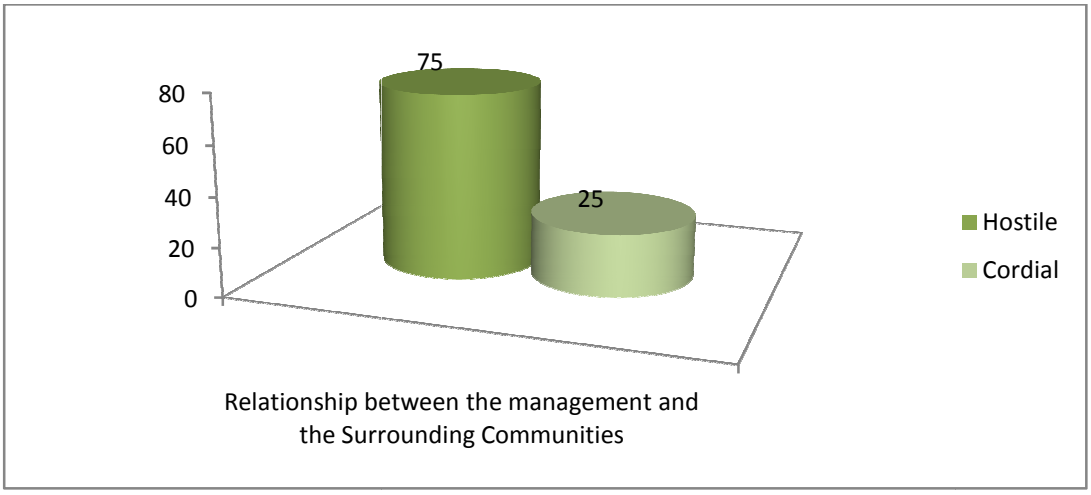

Figure 2: Relationship between Park management, staff and the surrounding communities

Table 3: Communities' willingness to support management in realizing park objectives

Willingness to support management in realizing park objectives	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Willing	72.0	93.4
Not willing	5.0	6.6
Total	77	100

Table 4: Ways communities are willing to support the management of the park

Ways communities are willing to support the management of the park	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Obeying rules and regulations	31	40.3
Safe guarding against hunting	31	40.3
Giving adequate information	15	19.4
Total	77	100

Eighty percent (80%) of the staff stated that the surrounding communities' participation in fulfilling the objectives of the park was passive while 20% stated that the communities participated more through information giving. The major problems encountered from the communities in the discharge of staff duty in conserving the areas are in land use for farming, hunting and tree felling.

Conclusion

Communities surrounding protected areas are very important to achievement of conservation objectives. Their cooperation, participation and involvement are needed if the area is to be well conserved and protected. From the result of the study, it is evident that the participation of the local communities in the management of the area has been passive, very low and most of the time through giving of information. From the staff perspectives, the communities had been hostile to conservation efforts. They do not see themselves as stakeholders in the conservation of the resources of Osse River Park.

There is the need to increase community participation in the management process through active involvement of the youths and other representatives of the communities in conservation programmes. Management board of the reserve should have the local community representative as

membertorepresent the interest of the various groups within the communities and present their grievances, if any, to the park management. Issues already discussed and voted upon at communities' meetings would be brought to management meeting by the selected representatives. If this means increasing efforts to organize community groups, then all stakeholders need to take part in doing so, as the sustainability of the protected area rests upon such action.

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