

AN APPRAISAL OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE NATIONAL PARK TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN OBAN DIVISION OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Forest encroachment has been noted as a major hindrance to forest conservation in Nigeria. This study, therefore, sought to appraise the level of success attained by the Cross River National Park (CRNP) in its support zone development programme in Oban Division of the CRNP and its inputs on the benefitting peripheral communities. Structured questionnaires were administered with the assistance of local enumerators in the selected communities of Obung, Ifumkpa, Aking and Orem of the support zone. Result from the study shows that the highest percentage of the respondents (38.46%) had only primary school education, while 30.00% had no education, thereby having negative effect on the conservation programmes in these communities. There is low participation of the communities in the park project, with

attendant effect felt in some areas, especially in Orem. Generally the chi square analysis shows that the annual income obtained by the villagers after the establishment of the park continues to increase. However, the support zone development programme of the park has no effect on the level of employment in the communities. There is the need for the CRNP to attach more importance to its support development programme, as this is the only way the objective of establishing the park will be realized while ensuring more enduring partnership between the Park and the local communities.

INTRODUCTION

Biodiversity is built over millions of years. Consequently extremely diverse habitats, such as the tropical forest take stretches of geologic time to develop. Scientist have also estimated that as many as one third of all species alive today would nearly be extinct by 2020 (Reuter, 2004). The rainforest ecosystem is disappearing at an estimated rate of 250km²per year in Nigeria. The destruction of natural habitats has persisted, resulting in the depletion of the country's biodiversity (Soladoye and Oni, 2001). Habitat destruction is attributed to exploitation of the forest resources to generate income in order to survive. The activities include timber exploitation, clearing of forest for farming as well as hunting of wildlife on an enormous scale.

Establishment of national parks in Nigeria began in 1979 when Decree 46 of 1979 was promulgated to constitute Kainji Lake National Park. Decree 36 of 1991 replaced Decree 216 and established four additional national parks. These are Chad Basin National Park, Cross River National Park, Gashaka Gumti National Park and old Oyo National Park. Yankari game reserve was upgraded to a national park in August, 1991. These national parks have their main objectives as the conservation and preservation of national resources (biodiversity) which are managed to provide recreational, scientific/research sites, protection of watershed and development of local communities.

The history of the establishment of the Cross River National Park dates to 1950 during colonial period, when the then Chief Conservator of forest for eastern Nigeria initiated a proposal for constitution of Boshil extension of forest reserve as a gorilla sanctuary. This effort was complimented in 1988 when the Cross River State Government submitted a proposal to the federal Government of Nigeria for the establishment of a national park in Oban group forest reserve and Boshi Okwango areas. These proposals were finally approved by the Federal Government of Nigeria through the promulgation of Degree No 36 of 1991. The Cross River National Park was thus adopted a new approach to wildlife conservation involving active participation of local people in order to resolve many socio-political problems and reduce the contravention of resource conservation laws and regulation. Conservation programmes succeed better with inclusion of local people, since full participation of local communities in the design and representation of a park project is a vital process if the main objective is wildlife conservation. This study was, therefore, designed to appraise the effect of Cross River National Park support zone development programme on communities in Oban Division of the national park.

METHODOLOGY

Study area

The study was carried out in Oban Division of Cross River National Park. These communities in Akamkpa Local Government Area are Obung, Ifumkpa, Aking and Orem. The Oban Division is located on longitude $8^{\circ} 15^1 - 8^{\circ} 45^1$ E and latitude $5^{\circ} 5^1 - 5^{\circ} 45^1$ N and occupies about 3,000 sq.km. The area is characterized by an evergreen tropical forest, forming closed canopy with scattered trees reaching the height of about 40-45m.

Sampling Method

The study was carried out between May and July, 2007. First, a preliminary survey was conducted to elicit information from the

National Park officials on the various contributions to the communities from the Park under the support zone development programme. Structured questionnaires were designed, tested and administered on four randomly selected sections seeking information on biodata of respondents, operations of the CRNP, occupations of the community, among others. Local people who could communicate fluently with the villagers were recruited for the questionnaire administration.

Data Analysis techniques

Chi Square analysis contingency tables and simple descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data generated and to test for independence in contingency table. Variables tested include income, employment, education, benefit derived from the Park. The statistics used is shown below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 5.1 shows the sex distribution of respondents.

Table 5.1: Sex distribution of respondents

Community	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Obung	23 (43.40)	30 (56.60)	53 (100)
Aking	14 (50.00)	14 (50.00)	28 (100)
Ifumkpa	24 (68.57)	11 (31.43)	35 (100)
Orem	9 (64.29)	5 (35.71)	14 (100)
Total	70 (53.84)	60 (46.16)	130 (100)

Table 5.1 shows that 53.84 % of the total population sampled were males, while 46.16 % were females. Specifically, 56.50 %, 50 % 31.43 % and 35.71% were females in Obung, Aking, Ifumkpa and Orem communities respectively. The increase in the number of males compared to females could be due to the fact that farming and hunting is exclusively meant for males which is why they stayed back in the village to ensure that there is enough food for their families.

The level of education of the respondents is shown in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Educational Qualification of respondent

Qualification	Obung (%)	Aking (%)	Ifumkpa (%)	Orem (%)	Total(%)
Primary	20 (37.73)	12 (42.86)	10 (28.57)	8 (57.44)	50 (38.46)
Secondary	16 (30.18)	9 (32.14)	6 (17.64)	4 (28.57)	35 (26.92)
HND/Bachelors degre	2 (3.77)	3 (10.71)	1 (2.86)	-	6 (4.62)
No formal education	15 (28.30)	4 (14.28)	18 (51.43)	2(14.29)	39 (30.10)
TOTAL	53 (100)	28 (100)	35 (100)	14 (100)	130 (100)

About 38 % of the total population had primary education, 26.92 % had secondary education, 4.62 % had higher national diploma or bachelors degree, and 30 % of the respondents had no formal education. The low level of education poses difficulty for awareness programme on conservation.

Table 5.3 shows the occupational distribution of the respondents.

Table 5.3: Occupational distribution of respondents

Community	Occupation				Total
	Farming	Trading	Mining	No Job	
Obung	17 (32.08)	12 (22.67)	15 (28.30)	9 (16.93)	53 (100)
Aking	15 (53.57)	8 (28.57)	2 (7.14)	2 (10.71)	28 (100)
Ifumkpa	18 (51.43)	10 (28.57)	-	7 (20)	35 (100)
Orem	6 (42.85)	4 (28.57)	-	4 (28.57)	14 (100)
TOTAL	56 (43.08)	34 (26.15)	17 (13.08)	23 (17.69)	130 (100)

About 43.08 % of the respondents are farmers, 26.15 % are traders, 13.08 % are miners and 17.69 % had no job. Farming is the chief source of income in local communities, while agriculture is the major cause of deforestation in Nigeria (Kio, 2000). Hence, serious sensitization should be done to reduce the effect of deforestation that could be caused by farming in the national Park.

Table 5.4 shows that 42 respondents, representing 32.31 % of the population surveyed, agreed that their community by benefited from the park activities, while 88 respondents representing 67.69% disagreed to this.

Table 5.4: benefits derived from the park

Community	Support (%)	Not in support (%)	Total (%)
Obung	9 (16.98)	44 (83.02)	53 (100)
Aking	12 (42.86)	16 (57.04)	28 (100)
Ifumkpa	12 (34.29)	23 (35.71)	35 (100)
Orem	9 (64.29)	5 (35.71)	14 (100)
Total	42 (32.31)	88 (67.69)	130 (100)

The low involvement of the communities in the park project and programme will negatively affect the sustainability of the programmes, as involvement of the local communities are essential for natural resource manangmt and participatory process builds the local level capacity for sustainable development (Catriona, 1999).

Table 5.5: Response of the people towards the park development of the educational sector

Community	Support (%)	Not in support (%)	Total (%)
Obung	44 (83.02)	16 (57.04)	60 (100)
Aking	28 (100)	-	28 (100)
Ifumkpa	31 (88.57)	4 (11.43)	35 (100)
Orem	10 (71.42)	4 (3.08)	14 (100)
Total	113 (86.92)	24 (18.46)	130 (100)

From Table 5.6, most of the respondents sampled (86.02%) in the four communities agreed that their educational sector has been developed. This is more evident in Aking where the entire respondents supported it.

Table 5.6: Response of the people towards the park development of the health sector

Community	Support (%)	Not in support (%)	Total (%)
Obung	22 (41.51)	31 (58.49)	53 (100)
Aking	12 (42.86)	16 (57.04)	28 (100)
Ifumkpa	31 (88.57)	4 (11.43)	35 (100)
Orem	14 (100)	-	14 (100)
Total	79 (60.77)	51 (39.23)	130 (100)

From Table 5.6, about 60.77 % of the respondents were in support of better health facilities provided by the national park. The level of development of the health care facilities was even more prominent in Orem community where the community health centre was renovated and drugs supplied. This has greatly relieved members of the community from travelling long distances for treatment. On the other hand, 39.23 % of the respondents were in disagreement with the better health facilities provision claim.

Table 5.7 reflects the annual gross income of the respondents from each community from various sources.

Table 5.7: Annual income of communities (Sample)

Community	Source of income	Income before establishment of park	Income after establishment of park	Total
Obung	Hunting	6,000	7,000	13,000
	N.T.F.Ps	4,000	4,000	8,000
	Farming	8,000	14,000	22,000
	Mining	30,000	80,000	110,000
	Others	3,000	5,000	8,000
	Total	51,000	110,000	161,000
Aking	Hunting	5,000	6,000	11,000
	N.T.F.Ps	5,000	5,000	10,000
	Farming	7,000	12,000	19,000
	Mining	4,000	11,000	15,000
	Others	2,000	3,000	5,000
	Total	23,000	37,000	60,000
Ifumkpa	Hunting	6,000	7,000	13,000
	N.T.F.Ps	5,000	4,500	9,000
	Farming	9,000	13,000	22,000
	Mining		-	-
	Others	3,000	4,000	9,000
	Total	23,000	28,500	35,000
Orem	Hunting	3,000	3,000	6,000
	N.T.F.Ps	2,000	2,000	4,500
	Farming	6,000	10,000	16,000
	Mining		-	-
	Others	4,000	5,000	9,000
	Total	15,000	20,000	35,000

A chi-square analysis shows that the calculated frequency is greater than the annual tabulated frequency. The null hypothesis was,

therefore, rejected. This showed that the annual income obtained after the establishment of the park continued to increase. This is significant as the park activities do not have any negative effects in the economy of the communities. At Obong, the highest amount of money was made by the respondents engaged in farming and hunting. The least amount of money was made from the sale of NTFP. This is expected due to the regulation of the collection of these products by the national park authorities.

CONCLUSION

Indigenes of the support zones are purely agrarians who depend solely on the resources of the forest for their livelihood, hence, they tend to resist conservation because the forest resources they need are now protected by park authorities and what is provided by the National Park as alternative source of livelihood is considered inadequate. The park management had tried to put the necessary resources in place by means of support zone development programmes.

RECOMMENDATION

The cross river National park (CRNP) should attach more importance to its support zone development programme as this is the only way the objectives of establishing the parks will be realized while ensuring a more enduring partnership between the park and the local communities.

The local communities should be encouraged by involving them in the implementation and execution of programmes of the park. Creating employment opportunities for the people and providing alternative sources of protein through snail farming, poultry or aquaculture to divert attention from the resources in the park.

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