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107

ROLES OF LOCAL LEADERS ON WILDLIFE CONSERVATION EFFORT IN OLD OYO NATIONAL PARK, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Active involvement of local communities has become an integral part of approaches to sustainable biodiversity conservation. This study assessed the roles local leaders play in the management of Old Oyo National Park. It also assessed the level of interaction and perception of people within the host community on the park. A well-structured self-administered questionnaire was used to obtain information from 100 leaders randomly selected in the study area. Twenty leaders were randomly sampled from each of the five ranges in the park. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics. Majority (85%) of the respondents were males, reflecting the fact that males play a major role as leaders in the study area compared with females. Many (65%) leaders were involved in decision making while 30% were occasionally engaged in protection exercises. Provision of jobs (70%) is the most appreciated form of help easily recognised by respondents. However, training of community members on self-reliance jobs is less popular (10%). Most (70%) respondents have one or more of their relatives working with the park. All (100%) respondents agree to support the establishment of the park in their communities. Illegal arrest of leaders' subjects (50%) and lack of recognition of some communities are the leading causes of conflicts. Half (50%) of misunderstandings between the park and host community were resolved out of court. This study shows that Old Oyo National Park management is in good touch with the leaders of the host communities. However, constant assessment of leaders' understanding and loyalty is highly recommended in order to strengthen the current relationship.

Keywords: Biodiversity Conservation, leaders, local communities, park management.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of actively involving local communities and other stakeholders has become an integral part of approaches to sustainable biodiversity conservation. In a period of growing demands on resources and shrinking government budgets, new approaches are required to ensure that protected areas can continue to make their contributions to society (McNeely, 1992). Since the late 1980s numerous conservation basics of biodiversity management initiatives, where central government assigned a form of participating, monitoring or enforcement role to local users have been funded (Western and Wright, 1994, McNeely, 1995). It is already widely accepted that communities living around the buffer zone of the protected areas are critical to the success of conservation efforts (Ratsimbazafy, 2012). Peoples' participation in the

management of protected areas has been observed to be the best option for sustainable resource management (Kaimowitz, 2003). Leaders appear to be the arrowhead of many communities and majority of people may most likely follow the idea of their leaders. Functions of local leaders (Kings/ Emirs, religion and situational leaders) in Wildlife extension service are to bring about local support for extension activities and to increase the amount of extension teachings that can be done. National Park officers cannot do the job expected of them all alone. They need assistance and friendly people to help them. No doubt there is need for a large number of workers to reach a large number of the populace. One way out is to utilize local leaders. In order to do this, conservation extension workers need to know how to: identify leaders, develop and use them in moving the extension programme forward (Hunter and Malcolm, 1996).

The establishment and effective Management of conservation or protected areas has been observed to be one of the best ways to safeguard biodiversity (Chapel, Spalding, and Jenkins 2008). The survival of any protected area is partly depends on the disposition of local communities to conservation and effectiveness and faithfulness of Park officials saddled with responsibility of protecting the integrity of the park area. In a situation where park staff is colluding with poachers, this will spell doom on survival and safe keep of natural resources in such environment Ogunjimi et al.,(2008). Wildlife management has to do with judicious use of wildlife resources toward the attainment of scientific, ecological, economical, ethical, aesthetic and recreational values for the benefits of human-being and for the improvement of nature, upon which all the components of ecosystem depend.

The conservation movement has embraced the idea that, protected areas cannot exist as island, but are a part of large, or more complex landscape. Mackinnon *et al.*, (1986), argues that protected areas are just one type of specialized land use within a mosaic landscape. Therefore, it is unlikely that protected areas alone will be successful in conserving biodiversity if they are surrounded by degraded habitat that limit gene flow, alter nutrient and water circle, and lead to regional and global climate change (McNeely, 1993). As pointed out earlier, the integrity of the surrounding landscape also needs to be maintained if the biological systems inside protected areas are to be preserved. Clearly, regional planning at a landscape level is critical to long term protection of ecosystem processes and rural as communities directly depend on these, processes must be organized for the ecological landscape. It follows therefore that proponents of extension methods must for ever be searching for new ways, new dimensions, processes and methods of meeting the challenges which life presents, (Sahney, and Benton, 2008).

Wildlife conservation and management in Nigeria have been facing many social and ecological Problems (Meduna, Ogunjimi and Onadeko, 2009). Many conservation projects are failing primarily due to misunderstanding between the project managers

and the host communities. Effective way to carry along the local leaders is a current challenge in most conservation area in Nigeria. The study therefore assessed the role of traditional rulers on wildlife conservation effort in Old Oyo National Park as well as achievement of the Old Oyo National Park towards community participation in wildlife conservation. The need for thorough understanding of anthropogenic activities around the protected area cannot be over emphasized and is very critical to continuous existence of any park. This understanding can become obsolete within a very short period of time. Hence, there is need for regular appraisal of working or failing methods of any approach per time. This study therefore assessed the role of leaders on wildlife conservation in Old Oyo National Park. It also assessed the level of interaction between the park management and the host communities and as well appraised the people perception about the park in their community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study area

Old Oyo National Park is one of Nigeria National Park located between the northern part of Oyo State and southern part of Kwara State. The park is 2,512 km² of land at latitude 8° 15' and 9° 00'N and longitude 3° 35' and 4° 42' E. The Park derives its name from the ruins of Oyo-Ile (Old Oyo) the ancient political capital of 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 a National Parks in 1991. It is majorly located in Ifedapo Local Government Area in Oyo State, Nigeria. It is surrounded by eleven Local government areas in the state. The major settlements at the buffer zone of the park include; Sepeteri, Tede, Ikoyi, Igbeti, Kajola, and Ago Amodu. The Park has five ranges; Yemeso, Marguba, Oyo Ile, Sepeteri, and Tede (Adetoro, Oyeleye and Ijeomah 2011).

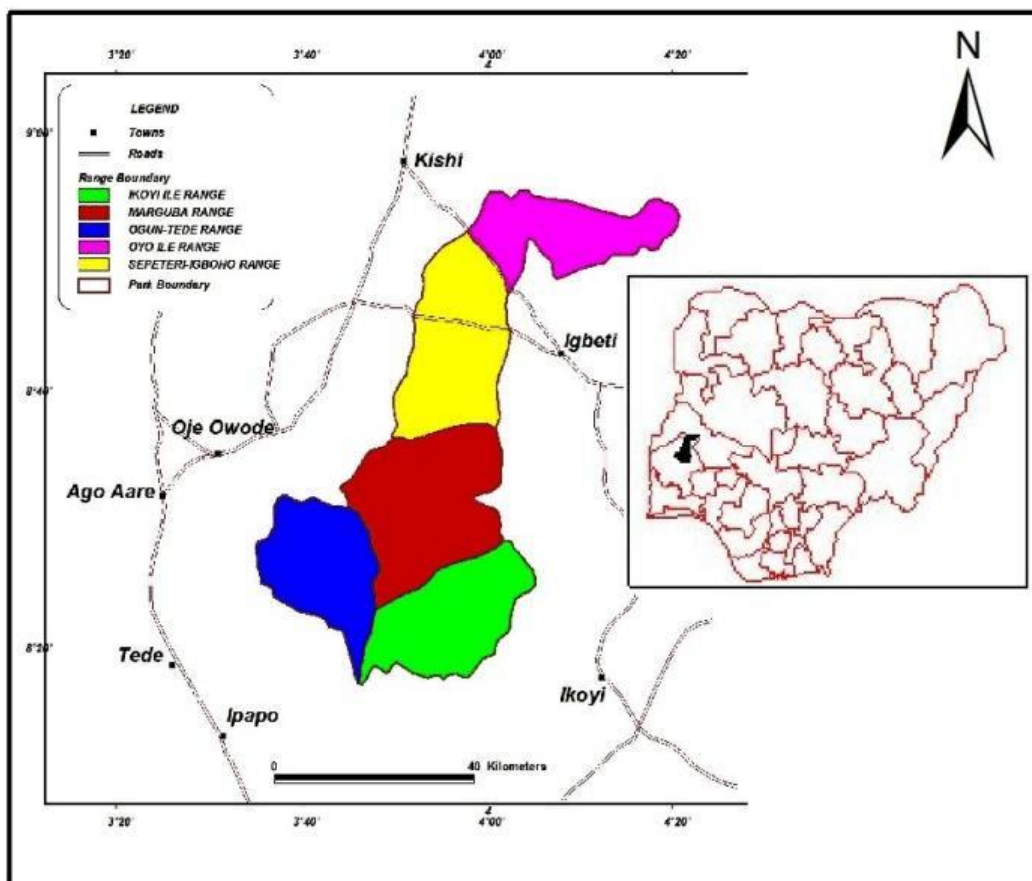


Figure A: Map of Old Oyo National Park and major communities at its Buffer Zone

Source: Ogunjimi, *et al.*, (2016)

Experimental Design

A well-structured self-administered questionnaire was used to gather information from 100 respondents (leaders) randomly selected from the five (5) ranges (Yemeso, Marguba, Oyo Ile, Sepeteri, and Tede) of the Park. Twenty (20) respondents (Leaders) from each of the ranges were interviewed.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and results presented in tables and charts.

RESULTS

The demographic characteristics of respondents are presented in table 1. The study revealed that most (85%) of the respondents were males. The study also indicated that many (50%) of the leaders were matured adults in their active years (30-50 years) of age category and age category of 60 and above was the least (15%). Majority (70%) of respondents had tertiary education showing the bias attached to education status while selecting leaders in the study area in recent time.

Table 1: Social Economic Characteristic of the Respondents

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Mode
Gender			
Male	85	85	Male (85%)
Female	15	15	
Total	100	100	
Age			
20-29	18	18	30-39 (30%)
30-39	30	30	
40-49	20	20	
50-59	17	17	
60 and above	15	15	
Total	100	100	
Marital status			
Single	30	30	Married (70%)
Married	70	70	
Divorcé/Separated	-	-	
Total	100	100	
Educational Status			
No formal education	5	5	Tertiary (70%)
Primary	10	10	
Secondary	15	15	
Tertiary	70	70	
Total	100	100	
Occupation			
Trading	14	14	Farming (35%)
Farming	35	35	
Hunting	26	26	
Civil servant	25	25	
Total	100	100	
Nativity			
Native	90	90	Native (90%)
Non Native	10	10	
Total	100	100	

Source: Field Survey, (2016)

Table 2 revealed ways communities have been contributing to the management of the Park resources. From the result, providing informing to the park authority on operations of poachers was

highest (50%) followed by protection of the park (30%), decision making/advise (15%) and product marketing (5%) was the least.

Table 2: Capacities contribution of local leaders on management of Old Oyo National Park.

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Decision making/advise	15	15
Product marketing	5	5
Source of information on Park's security	50	50
Protection of the park	30	30
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, (2016)

All of the respondents agreed to support the establishment of the Park in their communities. They also were encouraged by good management strategies by the Park management who has agreed to carry along the host communities in their conservation project plans (Table 3). In Table 4, majority (70%) of the leaders have at least one or

more of their relatives working with the park. The table 5 shows suggestions by the respondents on what the Park can do that will be beneficial to them. The result reveals that, provision of employments had the highest (40%) followed by educating the people about conservation (30%) and the least was provision of loan (10%).

Table 3: Communities Support for the Establishment of Park

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	100	100
No	0	0
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 4: Respondents with Relatives Working in the Park

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	70	70
No	30	30
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 5: The respondent's suggestions on what the Park should do to ensure communities benefits from her Activities.

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Educating the people about the park	30	30
Provision of good road, borehole and hospital	20	20
Provision of loans	10	10
Provision of employments	40	40
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

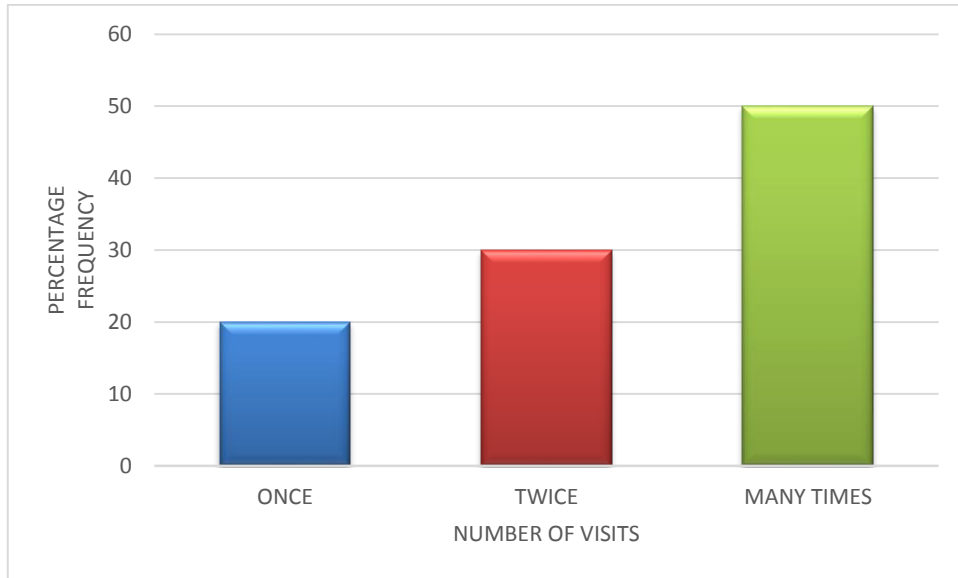


Fig. 1: Number of Times Respondents visited the park
Source: Field Survey, (2016)

Half (50%) of the respondents have visited the park on several occasions (Fig1). This is good as the visit of these leaders is

expected to improve their perception about the park and make them potentially more favourable to the park development.

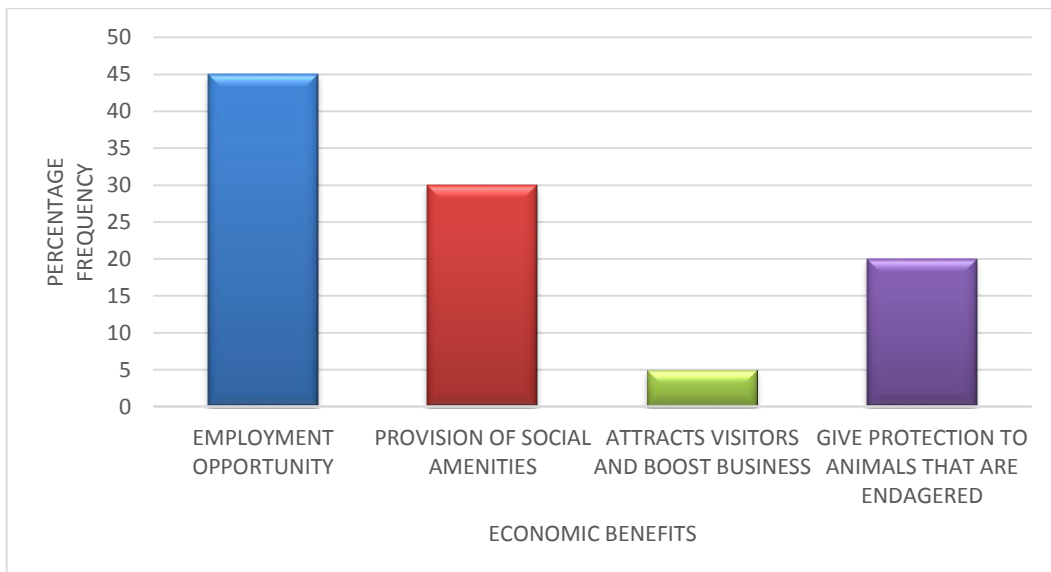


Fig. 2: Perception of Respondent on Economic benefits they derived from the establishment of the Park.
Source: Field Survey, (2016)

Many, (45%) respondents perceived job provision as the main benefits of the park to their communities. The second perceived benefit was

provision of social amenities (30%) while Protection of endangered species (16%) came third in respondent’s consideration (Fig 2).

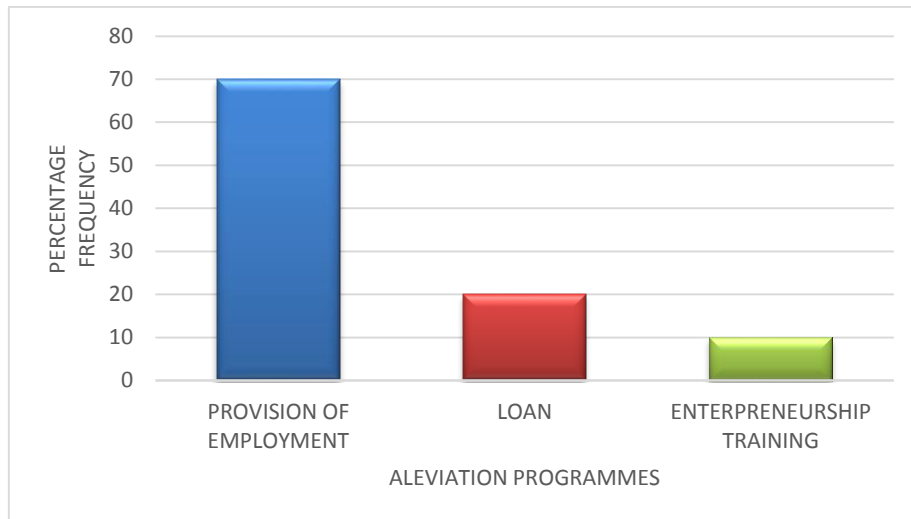


Fig. 3: Appreciation of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in the Study Area
Source: Field Survey, 2016

Results in Figure 3 revealed the way Old Oyo National Park has been helping to alleviate poverty in the study area. Provision of employment was the

highest (70%) from the respondents. However, training of community members on self-reliance job was not very popular (10%).

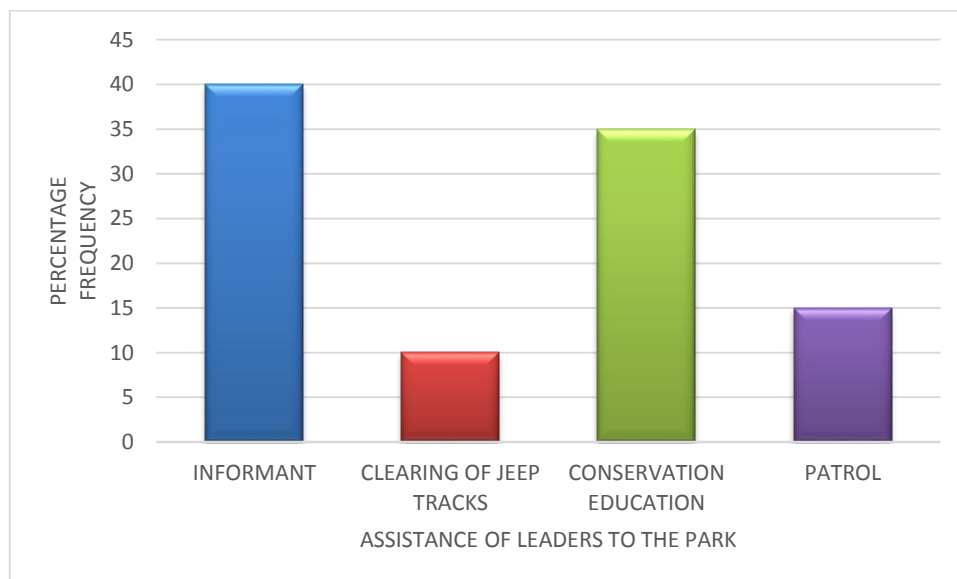


Fig. 4: Areas of Assistance of the Leaders to the Park Management.
Source: Field Survey, 2016

Fig. 4 shows the areas where community leaders have been serving as help to the Park’s management and maintenance. Informant had the highest (40%) followed by conservation education (35%) and the least was tracks clearing (10%). From fig. 5, the

position or role occupied by the respondent in their communities, religious leader had the highest percentage (40%), followed by the local chief (30%) and the least was Baale with 3%.

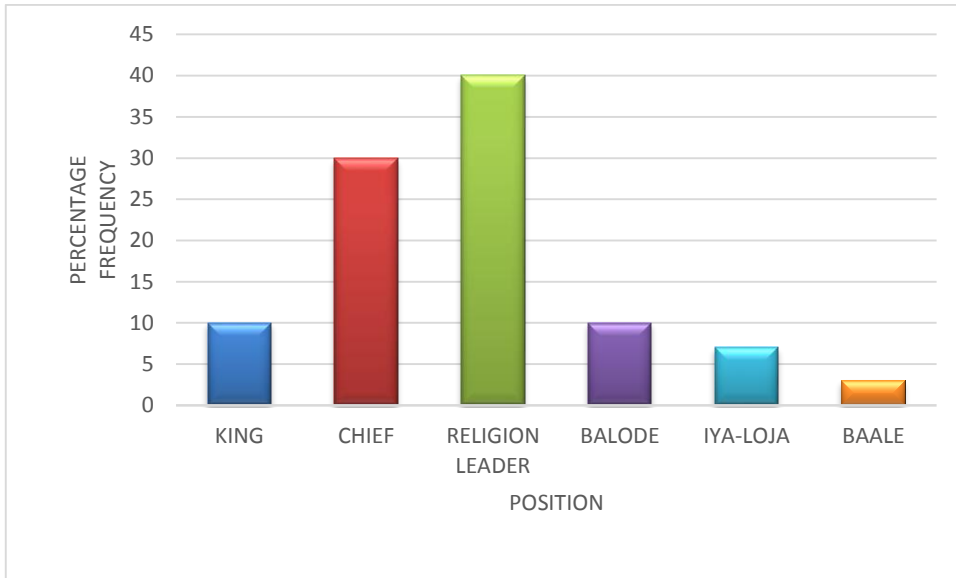


Fig. 5: The Position or role occupied by the respondents in the community.
Source: Field Survey, 2016

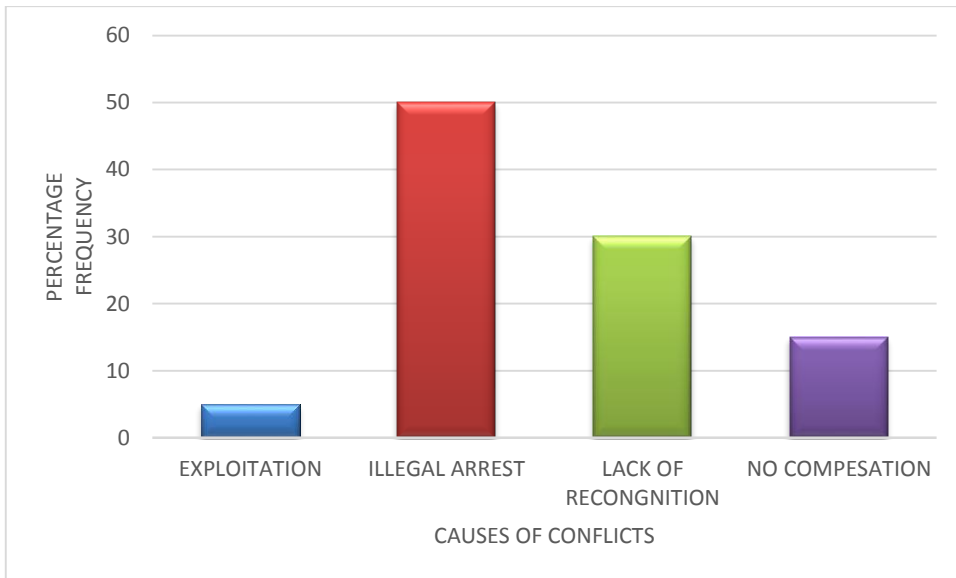


Fig. 6: Causes of Conflicts between the Park Staffs and Communities.
Source: Field Survey, 2016

Illegal arrest of community members (50%) and lack of recognition (30%) of some communities were the leading causes of conflicts in the study area. However, 5% of respondents agreed that their

subjects were been exploited by Rangers (Fig. 6). In Fig.7 most conflicts between the park and host community were settled out of court.

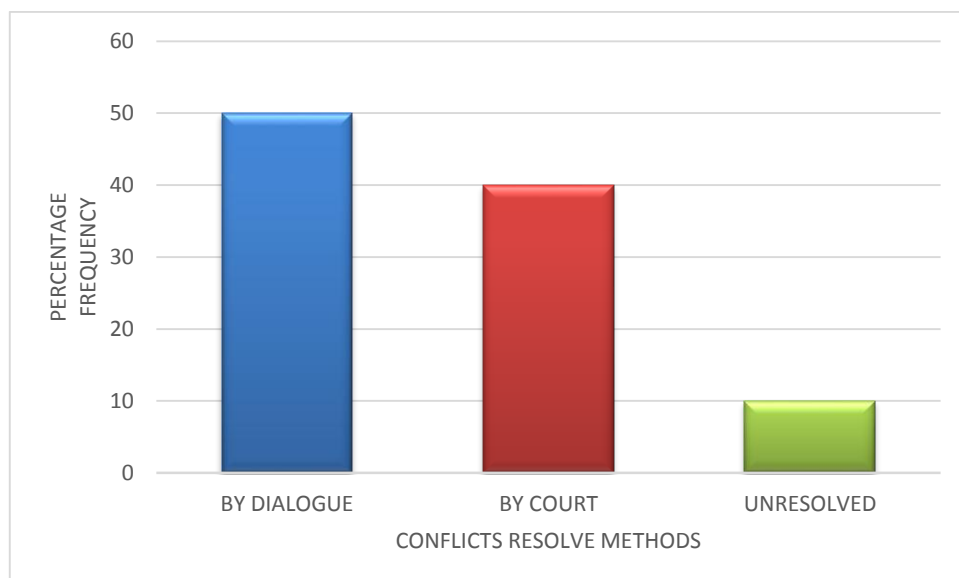


Fig. 7: Methods of Resolving Conflicts in the Study Area.

Source: Field Survey, 2016

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that Majority of the respondents were males, reflecting the fact that males play major role as leaders in the study area compared to females. The study also indicated that many of the leaders were matured adults in their active years. Majority of leaders interviewed had tertiary education indicating the bias attached to education status while selecting leaders in the study area in recent time. Religious leaders were the most common form of leaders encountered in this study, followed by chiefs and kings and the least were Baales. However, leadership role could not be correctly tied to numbers, as just one king in charge of a big community may be far more influential than many other leaders with far lower radius of influence. McNeely, (1992) observed that the cultural and socio-economic characteristics of local people form the basis for measures to promote the sustainable use of natural resources, alleviate poverty, raise the quality of human life and create positive support for protected areas. In all cases, a good working relationship with these leaders was the only guarantee for successful protection of the natural resources.

Most respondents perceived job provision for their people as the main benefits their communities derived from the establishment of the park. The second perceived benefit was provision of social amenities such as bore hole, entrepreneur training centres etc., while Protection of endangered species came in distance third in respondent's consideration. This showed the overriding interest of people that usually tend towards personal needs and level of understanding. Park managers should

therefore realise that, her own first priority (Protection) was occupying third place in the local people's agenda and must therefore strike a balance by given required attention to perceived needs of these people as the simplest way to gain their much needed loyalty and support in order to achieve the park primary goal (Conservation of resources). This observation gives credence to McNeely (1992) argument that It is important to identify the various "stakeholders" involved in the conflict, as well as to identify their interests. Almost everybody desired to have civil service jobs while only few people needed an entrepreneur by embracing provision of soft loan and training on self-reliance job. The park must therefore relate with host community with this understanding as suggested by Sahney and Benton (2008) that proponents of extension methods must continue to search for new ways, new dimensions, processes and methods of meeting the challenges of the people. The usual civil service job is not easy to come by in Nigeria but this has been made possible for many youths in the study area largely due to the park establishment in their locality. In table 4 It is highly revealing to see that majority (70%) of the leaders have one or more of their relatives working with the park. This will give many of them a sense of ownership of the park and an organisation that must not fail if they must keep their job and even to get more opportunity in the future. This is consistent with Hunter and Malcolm, (1996) who advised that local people should be involved at every stage so that they can feel that the programme is really their own.

Illegal arrest of community members and lack of recognition of some communities were the

leading causes of conflicts in the study area. However, some respondents stated that they were being exploited by Rangers as was equally observed by Ogunjimi *et al.*, (2008), who reported that some Rangers engaged themselves in illegal activities. Most of conflicts between the park and host community were resolved out of court, demonstrating a good level of working relationship between the park and the host communities. It is highly revealing that majority (70%) of the leaders have one or more of their relatives working with the park. This will give many of them a sense of ownership of the park and as organisation that must not fail if they must keep their job and even to get more opportunity in the future. Peoples' participation in the management of protected areas has been observed to be the best option for sustainable resources management (Kaimowitz, 2003).

When the respondents were asked to suggest things the park could do in their communities, job provision was still the commonest request. Conservation education was also recognised, which the leaders observed would help them in their effort to convince their people on the need for continuous sustenance of the protected area and help to change poachers' attitude.

CONCLUSION

The management of Old Oyo National park was in good touch with the leaders of the host communities. Most of the leaders in the study area have one or more of their relative currently working with the park. All respondents expressed their support for the

management of the park, indicating a good rapport by the park management in carrying along the host communities in their conservation project. Illegal arrest of community members and lack of recognition of some communities are the leading causes of conflicts in the study area. Most conflicts between the park and host community were resolved out of court, demonstrating a good level of working relationship between the park and her host. However, host communities living around parks usually pose serious challenges to park management.

Recommendation

1. Constant reassessment of leader's understanding and loyalty is highly recommended in order to strengthened the current relationship
2. Regular conservation education among the host communities as suggested by most leaders will foster better understanding among the general populace.
3. Special attention must be given to change of leadership among the host communities as this may lead to change of community relationship with the park due to new leader's personal sentiments and ideology which could be in favour or against the park management interest. Whichever way, early orientation of such leader toward conservation goal will produce better results.
4. Conservation education or seminar that is specially design for leaders should be carried out often. Community members respect their leaders and will most likely follow them to do either the right things or otherwise. If the leaders are shown the right way, then the community will follow suit.

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