LOCAL PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND TOURISM IN KAINJI LAKE NATIONAL PARK SUPPORT ZONE, NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

WAHAB Munir Karounwi Adegoke[1][*]

HALIDU Shafiu Kilishi[2]

[1]Department of Wildlife and Ecotourism Management, Osun State University, P.M.B. 4494, Ejigbo Campus, Osun State, Nigeria
[2]Federal College of Wildlife Management, Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria, P.M.B. 268, New-Bussa, Niger State, Nigeria

*Corresponding Email: oriobatemyl@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The common opinion of many conservationists is that protected areas are likely to fail unless residents are somewhat involved in conservation efforts that led to the development of community conservation. This study contributes to providing insights into the local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation and tourism in Kainji Lake National Park Support Zone, Niger State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used in the selection of 112 respondents. Primary data were obtained on respondents' characteristics and their perceptions of wildlife conservation and tourism through the use of a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. Results showed that the majority of the respondents were male (94.98%), married (81.99%) and had no formal education (72.13%). The mean age and household size were 43 years and 8 members respectively. The local people had slightly positive perceptions of wildlife conservation (3.4) and wildlife tourism (4.1). Pearson Product Moment Correlation showed that the local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation significantly associates with their perceptions of wildlife tourism ($r = 0.72$; $p < 0.05$). Based on the results of the study, it was recommended that conservation organizations should foster positive local people perceptions and address potential causes of negative perceptions of wildlife conservation and tourism.

Keywords: National Park, Support Zone, perceptions, wildlife, conservation, tourism

INTRODUCTION

A protected area, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, is a geographical area that has been specifically designated, acknowledged, managed, and protected to preserve the natural world and its ecosystem services as well as cultural values over the long term (Phelan et al, 2020). Protected areas are typically seen from a biological or ecological perspective, but they also serve several functions that are crucial to human well-being and are valued by people. Protected areas are set aside for the preservation of biodiversity while permitting human access for a variety of significant purposes (Hulme, 2018).

Therefore, protected areas are important resources for wildlife, which encourages other activities like wildlife tourism with benefits for the general economy. While tourism refers to individuals travelling outside of their usual areas of employment and residence, the activities they engage in while there, and the facilities built to meet their demands, wildlife conservation refers to the practice of safeguarding wild plant and animal species and their habitats (Sofronov, 2018). Protected areas can act as accelerators for sustainable regional and rural development because wildlife tourism is sometimes the most significant component of the local economy. Therefore, any negative environmental effects could deprive nations of potential wildlife tourist income and hurt many people working in the industry (Ananya, 2021).

However, the establishment of numerous protected areas compelled local populations to move from their original residences, depriving them of access to resources in the protected areas like meat, grazing pastures, and firewood (Woods, 2019). Local communities appear to have lost contact with the nearby protected areas as a result of this deprivation. A large portion of African conservation has been governed by such protectionist and coercive conservation strategies, afterwards described as "fortress conservation". Local communities and protected areas frequently have strained relationships as a result of local protected areas excluding them or restricting their participation (Bortolamiol et al., 2018). This has led to conflicts and issues like increased illegal hunting, habitat destruction and encroachment, violence, and poverty among indigenous communities.

The perceptions of the locals toward tourism and animal protection have been shaped by this history. Locals that refuse to work with protected area authorities or take part in conservation efforts by protected area agencies, to the detriment of wildlife conservation and tourism, can pose a direct threat to protected areas (Rasheed et al., 2021). In response to the widespread conviction among conservationists that protected areas are likely to fail unless residents are somewhat involved in conservation efforts, new tactics like "community conservation" or "participatory management" have been created (Wilebore et al., 2019). Strategies to balance the demands of protected areas and local populations promote community participation in natural resource management while enhancing their standard of living. African wildlife conservation is frequently discussed in terms of a win-win discourse that includes community involvement and benefits (Rasheed, et al., 2021).

Communities may gain from involvement and participation in tourist-related activities inside and outside of protected areas (Pham, 2020), but unequal distribution of the advantages of tourism within a community may result in negative attitudes and opinions of the industry (Wang, et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to evaluate how the community views both tourism and conservation. The links between communities and protected areas are shaped by people's beliefs and attitudes toward conservation, which are crucial to the success of wildlife protection. Understanding how people feel about protected areas can help conservation organizations manage them better, and much research on animal conservation has focused on how people feel about conservation (Thondhlana et al, 2020). Different socio-demographic parameters, including household income levels, education, age, the size of the livestock herd, the period of residency, gender, the sources of revenue, and household size, have an impact on perceptions (Kriegel et al., 2021).

The opinions of the local populace regarding tourism and conservation in areas affected by political and economic upheaval are poorly understood (Onyena & Sam, 2020). Tourists may avoid an unstable location, which would decrease tourism activity and economic benefits for the nation and particularly for the local population, who could then have a poor view of both tourism and conservation (Jude & Ukekwe, 2020). Thus, this study seeks to examine the local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation and tourism in Kainji Lake National Park Support Zone, Niger State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY
The study was conducted in the Support Zone (SZ) of the Borgu Sector of Kainji Lake National Park (KLNP). It lies between 90 40'–100 30' N and 30 30' – 50 50' E. It is 3,970 Km2 in size. The Support Zone (SZ) of the Borgu Sector of Kainji Lake National Park (KLNP) is a 3 - 15 Km border (boundary demarcation not stable) surrounding the park; created to focus conservation and development assistance on those villages that bear the brunt of impacts arising from the creation of National Park close to them and whose income and livelihood have been adversely affected by the creation of KLNP. The objective of the SZ is to protect and maintain the biological diversity and other natural values of the area in the long–term, promote sound management practices for sustainable production purposes and protect the natural resource base from other land-use purposes that will be detrimental to the areas biological diversity, also to contribute to local development of the SZ settlements.

Primary data were collected through the use of a structured questionnaire administered in selected settlements in the peripheral support zone of Kainji Lake National Park (Borgu Sector), Niger State. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select respondents. In the first stage, the study area was sectionalized into four sub-areas and thereafter identifying the settlements that are within 15 Kilometre borders of the surrounding four sub-areas of the Borgu sector boundary of Kainji Lake National Park. Following this, a minimum of three settlements were selected using a random sampling method in each sub-area while a minimum of ten respondents (because of the unequal

population in the settlements in the sub-area) were purposively selected at random within these limits. 125 respondents from 12 settlements were interviewed. Only 112 respondents from 9 settlements were later used for data analysis due to incomplete responses. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics such as means and percentages.

The local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation and tourism construct were measured using 13 items adapted from Mutanga et al., (2015). Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale their perceptions of wildlife conservation and tourism in the Support Zone of the Borgu Sector of Kainji Lake National Park. Data collected were subsequently subjected to descriptive statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents

The results in Table 1 showed that the majority (94.98%) of the respondents were male. This implies that the respondents are more male. The marital status of the respondents indicated that the majority of the respondents (81.09%) were married while about 72.13% of the respondents had no formal education. About half (53.87%) of the respondents are more than 40 years old. The respondents' mean age was 43.38 years. A majority (85.01%) of respondents had household sizes less than and equal to 10 members with an average household size of 8 members.

Table 1: Personal characteristics of the respondents

Personal Characteristics		Percentage	Mean
Sex	Female	17.02	
	Male	94.98	
Marital Status	Not Married	30.91	
	Married	81.09	
Educational status	No Formal Education	72.13	
	Formal Education	39.87	
Age	≤ 40	53.87	≈ 43
	>40	58.13	
Household size (Persons)	≤ 10	85.01	≈ 8
	> 10	26.99	

Table 2 showed the perceptions of respondents on wildlife conservation. The table revealed that the respondents perceived wildlife conservation as it is important to protect plants and trees (4.3) and protect wild animal species in the Park (4.2). They remarked that it is good that the land is protected (3.4) and thought the Park was

created for the betterment of the community (3.2). They stated that poached people should be punished (3.1) and are happy that their village borders the park (2.3). The grand mean perceptions of respondents on wildlife conservation are 3.4 and this indicated that the local people had slightly positive perceptions of wildlife conservation.

Table 2. Local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation

Conservation perception	Mean
The Park's vegetation, including its trees, must be protected.	4.3
The Park's wild animal species need to be protected.	4.2
This land's protection is a positive thing.	3.4
The Park, in my opinion, was established for the benefit of the neighbourhood.	3.2
Poachers should face consequences.	3.1
My village's proximity to the park makes me happy.	2.3
Mean	**3.4**

Table 3 showed the perceptions of respondents on wildlife tourism. The table revealed that the respondents perceived wildlife tourism to benefit their communities (4.7) and they would be happy to see more tourists in their communities (4.5). Also, they stated that their families have more money because of tourism (4.4) and that because visitors want to experience their culture, tourism strengthens their cultural tradition (4.1), and thus, they would be happy if their children worked in the tourism industry (3.8). They indicated that tourism offers financial opportunities for those that have adequately offset their losses from conservation (3.6) and that tourists respect their culture and traditions (3.3). The grand mean perceptions of respondents on wildlife tourism are 4.1 and this indicated that the local people had many positive perceptions of wildlife tourism.

Table 3. Local people's perceptions of wildlife tourism

Tourism perception	Mean
The entire community benefits from tourism.	4.7
I would welcome additional visitors to this place.	4.5
Tourism has given my family extra money.	4.4
Tourism reinforces our cultural traditions since tourists want to experience our culture.	4.1
My children working in the tourism sector would make me happy.	3.8
I have income opportunities from tourism that has more than made up for my losses from conservation.	3.6
Visitors are respectful of our customs and culture.	3.3
Mean	**4.1**

On the other hand, the study further sought to establish a significant association with local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation vis-à-vis their perceptions of wildlife tourism. As presented in Table 4, the local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation and tourism are positively and significantly related. It was established that there was a strong positive and significant ($p < 0.05$) association between local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation and tourism ($r = 0.72$). This indicated that the more local people perceived the positive of wildlife conservation, the higher their perceptions of wildlife tourism and vice versa (Afriyie, Opare, & Hejcmanová, 2022).

Table 4. **Association between local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation and tourism**

Variables	Local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation	Local people's perceptions of wildlife tourism
Local people's perceptions of wildlife conservation	1	
Local people's perceptions of wildlife tourism	0.72**	1

Note: ** = ($\alpha_{0.05}$)

CONCLUSION

According to the study's findings, the local population has a mixed opinion of wildlife conservation but a very favourable opinion of wildlife tourism. Therefore, conservation organizations must focus more on fostering favourable perceptions, which quickly translate into favourable attitudes toward animal protection and tourism. To increase community appreciation of conservation, it is advised that conservation organizations foster positive perceptions and address potential causes of negative perceptions. As a result, there is a need to increase community involvement and the benefits of tourism by forming connections between community support and conservation for better planning.

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