



Assessment of Nature Reserve Park Management for Sustainable Development: Insights from Idanre Hills in Ondo State Southwest, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Despite Nigeria is gifted with a wealth of natural resources and rich cultural heritage, is still backward in terms of economic development. Thus, the study empirically evaluates the current state of ecotourism in Oke Idanre hills in Idanre Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. Primary and secondary data were collected and sourced with the aid of questionnaire and scheduled Interviews. The data involved qualitative analysis using descriptive statistics. The results revealed that although ecotourism is still at an early stage, some socioeconomic benefits for the Idanre community exist such as the employment of locals as tourist guides and other investments as a result of this destination. Covid-19 pandemic has brought about a decline in tourist population in Idanre hill. The site offers rich cultural artefacts and a tour guide is usually attached to educate the tourists. Hence this study is necessary to ascertain the current state of ecotourism in Idanre hills.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a special class of tourism concerned with nature conservation, with great concerns towards improving and sustaining the livelihood of the locals in any giving community where the site lies. The Australian National Ecotourism sees ecotourism to be ecologically sustainable tourism that focuses on natural areas in a bid to foster cultural and environmental understanding to improve conservation. Though often misinterpreted as merely taking a holiday in a natural environment, watching wildlife, or engaging in outdoor activities or adventure sport, ecotourism is renowned from conventional tourism in the sense that it employs measures to guarantee that the negative impacts on the cultural and natural environment are reduced and alleviated. Ecotourism has been in existence for years since the mid-twenty centuries but was known as excursions just like the Victoria National Parks Association in Australia back in 1952, the African Wide Life Safaris, and early tourists who toured the world in search of new land, cultures, and species were Eco-tourists (Tugba, 2013).

Today, the concept and practice of ecotourism has been accepted widely and is used by the government all over the globe as a sustainable development tool, giving rise to lots of ecotourism attractions, strategies, management, information, research, and professional bodies. In the context of this study; a cultural and natural landscape is being considered. Fatimah (2015) opined that Idanre hills have been described as a landscape with aesthetic and recreational qualities comprising of rich biodiversity features, with lots of structures linked to religious, tombstones, unique handcraft which displays their traditions and has been the source of attraction for tourists. As a natural landscape, it is subject to changing conditions due to its natural characteristics. Hence, as Fatimah (2015) suggested, there is a need for adaptive management.

Again, from the analysis of available literature, while the importance of protected area management and community-based conservation approaches have been extensively studied; several cultural and natural landscapes such as Idanre hills have suffered challenges with managing and sustaining attractions due to low education in environmental conservation (Adebayo 2017). According to USAID (2008), in the past, the Nigerian state had been able to sustain its ecotourism industry owing to the development of programs and institutions to educate, train, and enlighten people on issues relating to the environment and conservation. A good example is the Nigerian Conservation Foundation program. Ejidike and Ajayi (2013) opined that the effective management of nature reserves such as Idanre hills needs to be prioritized to harness the benefits of its presence in the Idanre community. Following the covid 19 pandemic ravishing the globe which has brought economies to a standstill, with the tourism sector not left out, covid 19 has affected the funding of ecotourism conservational works which in turn has increased the threat to protected areas such as poaching by locals in the bid for survival in the absence of income generation from ecotourism. Thus, this begs the need to evaluate the current state of ecotourism in Idanre hills.

The work aims at evaluating the present state and the current nature reserve park management and also to provide suggestions for the future state of ecotourism at Idanre hills in Ondo State, located in the Southwest region of Nigeria, determining its significance to the local community and the preservation of biological diversity. It will also add knowledge to existing ecotourism literature and evaluations with recent findings on ecotourism in Idanre. Finally, it will generate relevant results as well as strategies for other destinations and communities to tap into towards improving their capacity to profit from ecotourism.

It is against this background that the study aimed at exploring how issues of sustainability are being conceptualized and incorporated into the management system of Idanre hills a location that has attained global recognition located in Ondo State, Nigeria and endowed with numerous rich cultural and natural tourist attractions. This study, therefore, gives an overview of the current state of ecotourism in Idanre hills, Ondo State, the Southwestern region of Nigeria.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Study Area

Located in Ondo State, South-West Nigeria is Idanre Hills (known as "Oke-Idanre" by the native people), it is an ancient natural landscape that has existed among the Idanre community for thousands of years (Idanre net, 2014). From literature, the hills of Idanre received global recognition when it was added to the tentative list of the UNESCO world heritage sites in 2007 (UNESCO, 2007). The tourist attraction is managed by the government of Ondo state (Adigun *et al.*, 2016; Adegroye *et al.*, 2023) and it is unique for being a natural home of vast biodiversity of plant and animal species (National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), 2007). The Idanre people have been known to hold the *Usé* - an annual celebration of bats that takes place in February (UNESCO, 2012).

As indicated below in Figure 1, Idanre Hills is bounded by longitudes 5°00' E to 5°30' E and latitudes 7°00' N to 7°30' N, covering an area of 750 km² to the west of Idanre is Ore-Odigbo local government area, to the north by Akure and Ifeodore local government area, and to the east is Owo local government area. The southwest region is within the tropical rainforest and experiences 2 main seasons, the rainy season which starts in April and ends in October, and the dry season which starts in November and ends in March. The annual rainfall in Ondo state ranges from 1150mm to 2000mm in the Northern and Southern parts of the state separately (Oluwalade *et al.*, 2023a,b; Adegroye *et al.*, 2023).

Idanre is made up of some major towns and several villages, the Idanre hills have sheer sides, are smooth and hemispheric shaped in nature, with unified landforms. The different hills were named after some historical figures in the socio-cultural development of the Idanre community.

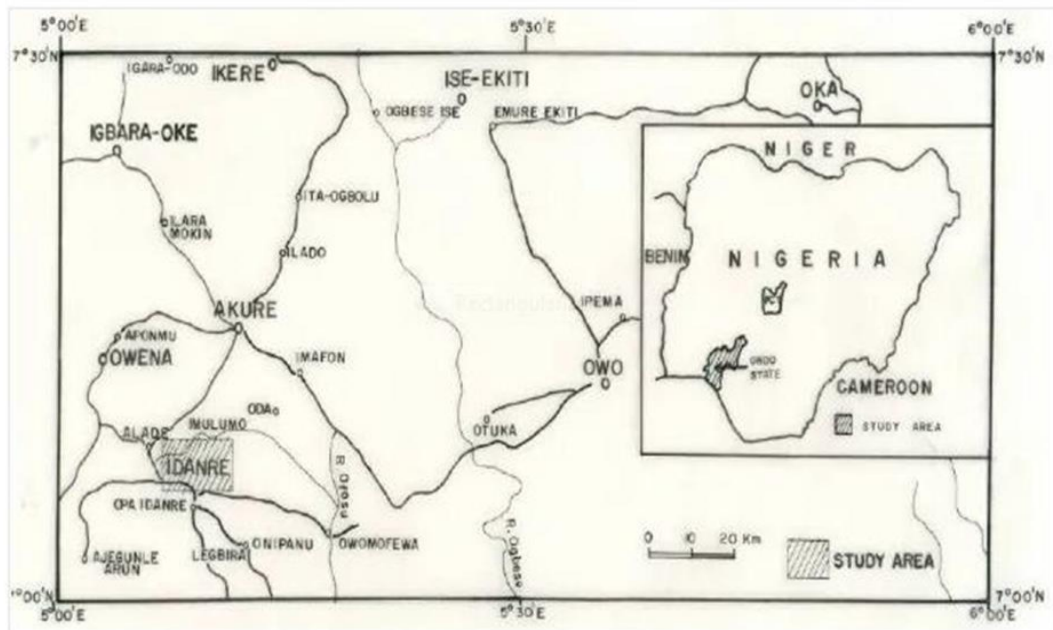


Figure 1 - Ondo State map showing the location of Idanre (study area).
Source: Adopted from Ikusemiju and Osinubi, (2020)

Idanre Hills: The Study Setting

The study area is a well-known cultural and natural landscape that has gained recognition for its ‘outstanding universal value’ (UNESCO, 2019). The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) classification system (which is aimed at ensuring effective management and the sustainability of the tourist attractions); groups Idanre hills under categories II, III, and V as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Management Categories of Protected Areas

Category	Description
Ia	Strict Nature Reserve: Protected area managed mainly for science.
Ib	Wilderness Area: Protected area managed mainly for wilderness protection
II	National Park: Protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation
III	Natural Monument: Protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features
IV	Habitat /Species Management Area: Protected area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention
V	Protected Landscape/Seascape: Protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape conservation and recreation
VI	Managed Resource Protected Area: Protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems

IUCN 2004

Source: Adapted from Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), 2004; International Union for Conservation Nature (IUCN), (2007).

METHODOLOGY

As a result of the exploratory nature of the research, qualitative analysis was most suitable given its history of use in tourism and travel research. In order to get data necessary for the evaluation as well as data on tourism-related concerns, open-ended questions were used for interviews to get a response from residents, business owners, and other officials. In a bid to limit personal and methodological biases, primary and secondary sources of information were used. Primary sources include open-ended interviews, secondary sources from journals, documentaries, academic literature, online books, newspaper articles, site official documents as well as online promotional materials on Idanre hills.

Primary data were collected through direct personal interview and a well-structured questionnaire to obtain pertinent information on the evaluation of the present state and the current nature reserve park management and suggestions for the future of Idanre hills, the existing tourism site community relationship and impacts were explored thereby enabling us to provide planning direction. This required attaining input from stakeholders at the Idanre hill site. Precisely, site data collection was aimed to obtain information on Idanre site operation, management, facilities, community opinions, and tourists' expenditures.

There are different means of communication as some respondents are illiterate, they could only speak Yoruba and their local dialect, fortunately some of the researchers understood Yoruba and one of the site workers also assisted us in sourcing for available stakeholders, workers and respondents that are willing to be interviewed, also the site worker served as an inter-cultural mediator to help in understanding some local customs. Prior to commencing the interview process, the interview questions were tried with the research aide to certify that they were concise, thoughtful, and sensitive to the culture of Idanre people. Our interviewers include- Resort Manager, Local community residents, business owners, hotel managers, tourists, and tour guides. Idanre Resort Manager and other Hotel Managers were asked questions on current facilities in Idanre resort, business periods, the number of people that can be accommodated. Responses were also gotten from the manager to get facts on protected areas and to gain an understanding of the current state of tourism and resource management at Idanre hills. However, twenty-seven local community residents and 21 business owners were also interviewed, the local community residents and the business owners were asked the same questions because both are community residents. The study used snowball sampling procedure to select a total of 48 respondents which comprises both business owners and residents were interviewed.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

Table 2 presents the the demographic profiles of the sampled people of Idanre. It was revealed that many (66.7%) of the respondents were male households while about 33.3% of them were female households. It could be deduced that males are dominated in the livelihood activities compared with the female counterparts. The result was similar to many studies in the area (e.g.,

Adegoroye et al., 2021; Ogunyemi et al., 2022; Oladoyin et al., 2023 and Oparinde et al., 2023) who also reported male dominance. The age distribution also showed that majority (89.9%) of the sampled respondents were aged below 50 years, implying that the respondents are averagely young and still in their economic active age. This might contribute to their level of productivity and ability to be more creative in tourist enterprise. The result was in line with the findings of Badamosi et al. (2023) and Adegoroye et al. (2024). It was revealed that about 11.1% of them were below 20 years, 37.1% of them were between age 20 and 29 years and 22.2% of them were within the age bracket of 30 - 39 years. Respondents that fell between the ages of 40 and 49 years were 18.5% while 11.1% of them were above 49 years. It is also signified that many of them are agile and have ability to diversify to make ends meat.

Lastly, the business activities of the people were also examined and distributed based on the gender. It was observed in the Table that both genders were equally engaged bars and restaurant enterprise (2). Male households were fully engaged in transportation and pharmacy businesses with no female in attendance. As expected, female households (3) were more than male households (1) in food stuff and provision businesses. Likewise, stylist business recorded more female households (2) than male households (1), while more male households were found in clothing enterprise than female households (1).

Table 2: Demographic Distribution of Respondents in the Area.

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	18	66.7
Female	9	33.3
Total	27	100
Age Category	Frequency	Percentage
> 49	3	11.1
40 - 49	5	18.5
30 - 39	6	22.2
20 - 29	10	37.1
< 20	3	11.1
Total	27	100
Trade type	Male	Female
Bars and Restaurant	2	2
Transportation	4	0
Pharmacy	2	0
Foodstuff/ provisions	1	3
Stylist shops	1	2
Clothing	3	1
Total	13	8

Source: Computed from Field Survey, 2021

Biodiversity Protection

Diversity of Rocks and Minerals in Idanre hills- The development of different landforms in Idanre hills was controlled by erections such as density, joint direction, and lithology. Numerous rock types can be found on the Idanre landscape as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Rock Diversity in Idanre Hills

Rock diversity in Idanre hills includes-	
Older porphyritic granite rocks	Plentiful
Fine-grained granite aplite rocks	Plentiful
Quartz rocks	Plentiful
Feldspars rocks	Plentiful
Biotite rocks	Little

Source: Olugbenga et al. (2011)

The people of the ancient Idanre kingdom lived in caves in the rocks on the hills for a millennium before moving down the hill in a quest for preservation. These rocks still exist and are protected example is the Owa’s cave. Some of the rocks are said to be protected by traditional beliefs. The Arun river runs via the rocks and is believed to possess healing powers. Diversity of invertebrates and vertebrates: Idanre hills has lots of insects of over 170 different species which are also being preserved. Fishes and Mammals in Idanre are of different species, but, conservation is not practiced in this diversity. The people of Idanre hunt animals and catch fish for consumption. The Barbus spp which is relevant for the aquarium at the global level is of food value in Idanre. The children in the Idanre community go fishing for the Clarias species known as "catfish" in Nigeria, the sales of which gives money to the school children in the community. The people of Idanre need to be educated on the need for conservation of fishes, they can be encouraged to practice catch and return policy, or fish farming for the production of sufficient fish for consumption and sale. The mammals within Idanre are numerous but, the Carnivores and Artiodactyls are more in number. Idanre area is a free wildlife hunting area (Figure 2), there are no restrictions or wildlife conservation practices, and history has it that in recent time elephant was killed in Idanre hills. With no fauna and flora conservation, Idanre hills the biodiversity profile of Idanre hills is constantly under threat of overexploitation and climate changes. Diversity of Cultural Artifacts – Idanre is blessed with a rich cultural heritage, with over 200 different cultural artifacts such as the beads, pots, and metal coins that have been well preserved and passed down for generations. It contains lots of cultural attractions, the Owa’s palace with lots of cultural molds. One interesting feature is the Abogun footprint on the rock floor and unreadable letters writing on the wall. The geological formation of the settlements has been preserved, but there is a huge threat of erosion wash (Ige et al., 2011).



Figure 2. Pictures showing some artifacts in Idanre hills.

Source: Ige et al., (2011)

Shows an artifact known as the In-situ pot. Shows a mud wall from an abandoned building with some pottery fragments. Shows the footprint of Agboogun, the story of Agboogun's footprint of legacy. The footprint is belief to resize into any foot put into it, it was used in Idanre to discover witches and determine who is guilty when an offense is committed. Shows the unreadable letter on the wall, it's a writing on the rock written millenniums ago. Shows the burial mausoleum at Uke -ofe. Shows burial mausoleum at ode-ode. Shows an archaeological material that was exposed as a result of erosion.

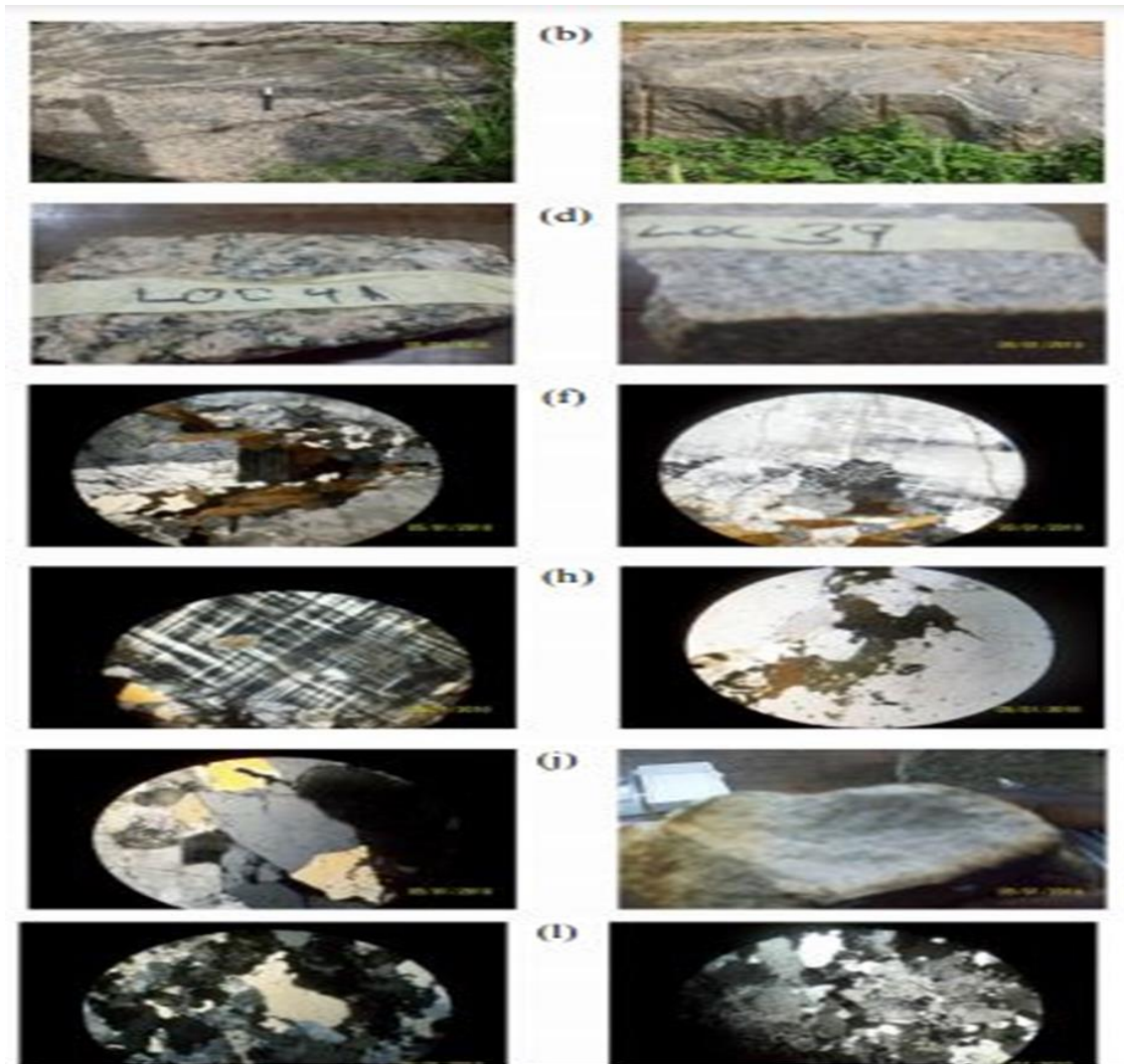


Figure 3 – Rocks and Minerals in Idanre Hills
Source: Ige et al., (2011)

Idanre Forest Reserve

Idanre forest reserve is a lowland rainforest with an elevation of about ten (10) to four hundred (400) meters. It coordinates 6.657787° North and 5.105558° East with an area of 561 square kilometers, located in Idanre local government area of Nigeria, Ondo State in the southwest region of Nigeria. Idanre forest reserve is one of the protected area systems in the southwestern region of Nigeria. In Nigeria, the forest reserves are controlled and managed by the state forestry department. In Nigeria, protected areas are generally susceptible to limited funds and resources. Most face a lack of protection staff as well as sound working equipment especially patrol vehicles and modern weapons. Poachers and cattle herders who drive their livestock to graze inside protected areas are also a threat. The reserve is divided into three zones – the main area where no activities are allowed, a shielded area in which scientific research is piloted, and a multi-management/ experiment zone that authorizes a broader range of activities and infrastructure including planting and ecotourism. Currently, in Idanre forest, only the multi-management zone is operational, with

timbering activities taking place in most parts of the forest under government licensing and there is no full conservation of forest in Idanre.



Figure 4: Location Map of Idanre Forest Reserves.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idanre_Forest_Reserve

Interpretation and Presentations of Findings (Case Study: Oke Idanre)

Findings of the study was done in Idanre hills. This study evaluated the current state of eco-tourism in Idanre hills, this was done from a community-based perspective.

- **Management and Administration of Site**

Park management arose after the site was listed on the UNESCO world heritage tentative list in 2007. Before listing, the area was preserved by traditional means; people were not encroaching as a result of fear of taboo from the gods of the land. Presently, the park is solely owned and managed by the Ondo state government. The manager explained that the people of Idanre moved down the hills decades ago as a result of civilization. Presently, there is a threat of loss of archaeological and historical value as a result of logging activities and herdsmen activities. The manager who sells tickets to tourists also ensures there is peace in the area. The park opens for the day at 8am daily and closes by 6pm daily. Staff are expected to arrive at the park by 7:30am daily, all staff are employed by the state ministry but, are still indigenes of the Idanre community. Tour guides work in shifts, depending on the rate of tourist inflow. According to the manager, there

is no specific number of visitors that can be accounted for more than 5 years now, moreover, in Nigeria, data are not being kept, but he noticed that visitors dropped by about a quarter since the inception of the covid-19 pandemic.

The present insecurity situation of the country has also affected tourism which is not just Idanre hills, but tourism as a whole in Nigeria. The resort manager and some residents noted that before now, one will see lots of foreign white tourists around in the park on tour, but presently visits have declined, as tourists are scared of being kidnapped with the rising level of insecurity, and tourism has been restricted as a result of the covid 19 pandemics. Some residents noted that the Mare Festival which holds annually and brings people from every nook and cranny of the world has not been held for five (5) years now, also citing insecurity and funding as the major challenges. Some tourists were concerned about the lack of health facilities on the hills.

The manager revealed that there are plans to renovate the resort and bounce back even better than the initial state, fixing all recreational facilities such as the swimming pool and canopy walk which are no longer in use. There is no management board because it is solely controlled by the state government, and it is government workers that work at Idanre hills, the tourist center is fully controlled by the Ministry of culture and tourism of Ondo State while the forest reserve areas are controlled by the forest department all under the state government.

- **Protection Management**

The Idanre hill is vulnerable due to abuse by indigenes of the town, this is so, because there are so many routes which leads to the hill apart from the main entrance, but the measures put in place such as the employment of more security guards for morning and evening shifts to protect the area have helped improve the state of the vulnerability. Tourists only go up the hill through the great steps which are 682 in number, going through the step enables the tourists access so many areas on the hill. Part of the forests extends to the Ore-Benin expressway. A lot of cultural heritage is preserved from the cultural beliefs and taboos of the local indigenes.

- **Local Community Relations Access to Resources**

Idanre is well known for the production of cocoa, timber, and bitumen, and these products are exported to other countries. The area is now a major plantation for cocoa cash

crops. The manager also pointed that more people have engaged in cocoa farming after a big chocolate factory was built in the community by a partnership between the state government and a foreign private company. There are lots of cocoa plantations in Idanre, it is the chief exporter of cocoa cash crops in southwest region of Nigeria. Residents who are farmers complained about logging activities that poses a threat to their cocoa farms. They further claimed that these loggers who encroach into their cocoa farms to cut mature trees are certified by the government and granted access to cut trees in forest reserves. There are more than 20 sawmills on the road that leads to Idanre which describes a thriving log trade and destruction of forest habitats. Timber when cut down is used for furniture works, roofing of buildings and construction of drainages and bridges, etc. Timber is also transported to other states and outside Nigeria. In other words, timber when turning to powder is used for making paper. Timber is transported in a large quantity outside the state virtually every day. There is no protection from poaching due to the vulnerability of the area. There is no ban on hunting activities; the area is easily accessible to the public for the wildlife hunting of bushmeat. As stated earlier, an elephant was killed in Idanre hills not so long ago.

Business owners described business activities as slow due to poor tourist inflow; stating a lot of their colleagues are now out of business as they decried the poor state of tourism in the area. They expect better from the government, some business owners say unsteady electricity has been a source of concern and a threat to their businesses. They claim they make more sales during festive periods but, since festivals haven't been taken place.



Figure 5 - Logging activities in Idanre
Source- Future agriculture (2016)



Figure 6 - A picture showing poaching in Idanre.
An elephant was killed in Idanre.
Source: Informationng.com (2018)



Figure 7. A Picture Showing Agricultural Activities
Cocoa Farming in Idanre Hills.
Source: pmnewsnigeria.com (2016)

- **Cultural Artifacts**

These are being preserved by the community they are still intact and are not tampered with. Some as a result of religious/cultural beliefs, while others believe in ecotourism, conservation, and its benefits.

- **Management Challenges**

During interviews, a lot of management issues affecting the hills and the forest reserves were raised. One of the biggest management challenges is funding, the site has

suffered from limited fund. Funding in the park is majorly raised from the money derived from the tourists in terms of tourist fare ₦1000 per tourist equivalent to €2. The accommodation and most resort facilities are dilapidated so; no money is raised from the chalets. Money is also raised from shop rents from business owners. But, due to the declining turn out of tourists, some business owners have closed their shops. Tourists who need to tour around the entire hills which may take virtually 9-10 hours, may need to come along with their tents to camp on the hills due to lack of good accommodation. The managers complained of encroachment of reserved areas by people involving in logging activities and grazing activities by Fulani herdsmen. They also noted using of flammable materials by tourists on the hills.

- **Infrastructure and Accommodations**

Infrastructure (streets, villages) Idanre streets are still languishing in poor social infrastructure, with dilapidated roads. The roads are getting bad and narrow; the tarred road leading to Idanre community is splitted and now narrowed by cocoa seeds. Also, farmers have turned a part of the road into parched soil ground. No Street lights, no portable water, epileptic power supply. Village roads are not motorable during the rainy season which makes timbers and other products to be more expensive. Farm produce also gets rotten when being transported from the farm to where its use will take place. The business owners in their interview complained about lack of good electricity which has posed a threat to their business. Some residents also have the same complaints of electricity, with one resident noting in Yoruba dialect "I do not feel much benefit in terms of infrastructure as a result of the site", one of the tourists in her interview noted that she got bruised on her way up the hill but could not get first aid or any health care around the hills.

In the park resort, there used to be so many facilities such as games, a swimming pool, and chalets but presently, the current state is appalling. There is no more accommodation in the park resort as the chalets are all dilapidated, tourists can no longer lodge in the chalets due to the poor maintenance culture. Some tourists who wish to spend the night or days to explore, now come with their tents to camp on the hills, or as an alternative, they go to other hotels in the town which is a loss of benefit for the community. The tourists complained badly of the poorly managed state of facilities on the site, with the preservation of flora and fauna species needing special care which is not possible at the

moment. The hotel manager interviewed in the town confirmed the inflow of tourists from the park to spend a night and relax. Tourists who were interviewed also complained of the lack of good signal maps on the hills. One respondent noted, "without a tour guard one will indeed get lost on these hills".

- **Ecotourism Potentials and Challenges in Idanre Hills**

Idanre harbors huge natural forest reserves, rich fauna and flora, and a great cultural heritage, including other natural attractions. But the potentials are threatened due to agriculture expansion especially widely practiced logging activities, wildlife hunting, cocoa production in the natural forest, and more recently indiscriminate grazing by cattle herders, hereby cutting most indigenous flora. Idanre is faced with deforestation, with the cutting down of matured and immature trees for timbering activities by loggers. Based on the data collected from interviews and secondary sources, Idanre has a rich historical, natural and cultural heritage and landscape, reasons for its enlisting in UNESCO 2007 as a world heritage site. Some of the major natural attraction sites are explained within.

- **Attractions in Idanre Hills**

The main attractions are derived from engagement with certain features of the locality of Idanre itself such as the agbagba hill, carter hill, ilesun hill, arun river, thunder water, the ancient primary school, tourist chalets, ancient buildings, the ancient palace, the mausoleum, ancient court and prison. This is in addition to other features namely the religious festivals such as the Mare festival, the Use festival, and the Orosun festival. (Olu et al., 2018).



Figure 8: Views of Idanre town and hills.
Source- travelwaka.com (2020)



**Figure 9. A Climber during Mare Festival
Source: Idanre.net (2014)**

DISCUSSIONS

Over the years, tourism has proven to be a global force measuring its growth and impact in different societies. Environments that are natural with good cultural heritage attractions most times are usually loved by tourists. The tourism industry has been highlighted in the growth of some of the leading economies today (Livina & Reddy, 2017; United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2017). Ecotourism involves the environmental contribution and the environmental yield. People are tired of traveling to the same destinations with the same experiences and prefer new areas to explore and learn about endangered life, landforms, and different species of animals in their habitats. (Ijeomah, 2017) further argues that since the increased capitalistic nature in all economies, fees are now required from tourists in many choice destinations. (Ijeomah & Herbert, 2012) opined that these fees collected from tourists have become widespread, and also become one of the major sources of funds for ecotourism investments, bringing about good national development and has been a success in terms of poverty alleviation for locals when monitored properly and well managed, hence a lot of stakeholders have keyed in intending to derive benefits. Ecotourism has become a conservation tool in and around protected areas. In other to avoid pursuing and spending time on ecotourism projects which may likely fail, an initial assessment is necessary before instigating a community-based strategy.

Idanre hills possess great features of interest to tourists with their rich and natural cultural heritage, artifacts, cultural landscape, and wildlife. Idanre hill is home to many plants and animal diversity. There is weakness in marketing and promoting its potential attractions which result in a lower number of domestic and foreign tourist visits and a lot is still unknown on its current status and potentials. Findings of the study area is important for the sustainable benefit of the Idanre local community, for biodiversity conservation as well as other stakeholders in the area on information for future ecotourism development.

Ecotourism in Idanre is still at an early stage, with a majority of protected areas and wildlings in Idanre under pressure from the local communities in search of timber, arable land, food values for cash, and different purposes. In promoting ecotourism in Idanre, it is necessary to consider benefits to the local community residents, diversifying their source of livelihoods and sustainably managing the site resources. Lots of untapped ecotourism potentials exist in Idanre but are being threatened by residents' activities of timbering, poaching, agricultural encroachment, deforestation and erosion. Findings from respondents, also revealed that mismanagement is also another cause of biodiversity loss in Idanre, one will see such in the dilapidated resort facilities, resulting in loss of revenue which affects the standard of living of the locals in turn tilt towards utilizing their resources to better their lives, tilting away from conservation. Lack of development as a whole in Nigeria has increased the pressure on forests across the country to meet the basic needs of the human population. Ecotourism at the site has contributed to the preservation of the natural resources and attractions but, still, at an early stage, a lot needs to be done on ecotourism to benefit locals.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ecotourism is a sensitive part of tourism, ecotourism in Idanre hills has been limited. There is a prevalent understanding that the Idanre hills were set up for forest protection and to preserve natural cultural heritage in other to develop tourism. Idanre hills which is blessed with so many natural and cultural resources have been the destination for many domestic and international visitors, especially during the festive period. The hills alone is an attraction to behold, the orosun hills which smoke all year round, so many cultural artifacts, Arun river believed to have healing powers, thunder water, agboogun footprint, ibikasu the great steps 682 steps, burial molds, beautiful caves, hills and landscapes, large mammals, rich natural environment, owa's palace, cave and lots more. The Idanre resort has dilapidated chalets, old worn-out game sports like table tennis, snooker board which are out of use, bars, and restaurants past their glory days, etc.

There is a prevalent understanding that the Idanre hills were set up for forest protection and to preserve natural cultural heritage in other to develop tourism. The majority of the residents interviewed believe that forest protection is important. Most respondents mostly business owners see the Park as having had positive effects, mostly in terms of increased incomes and jobs in the local community which has, in turn, increased the people's standard of living. Some business owners, who are into transportation, claim the site has brought about increased traffic to the Idanre community.

Nevertheless, the socio-economic benefits for people of the Idanre community have been limited while some say they have benefited a bit, some others say the site has no positive outcome on their lives but has rather brought about reduced access to resources. Some locals complained of having to adjust in terms of religious rites, in which they are now compelled to perform only at night. A lot of locals practice such as logging, poaching, and fishing of even

endangered species, a class of fish used for aquariums in developed countries. The administrative body of Idanre expects a lot from ecotourism, they hope improved ecotourism will help in the conservation of the protected areas by putting up some infrastructures that can bring about better sources of income for the local people of Idanre to enable them to tilt away from poaching and logging activities. They also expect the ecotourism agencies to work with the local people and the government to set up infrastructures and improve the living standard of the people of the Idanre community. The dilapidated state of accommodation in Idanre leads to loss of revenue to Akure town, as tourists who need to pass days in Idanre while on tour patronize the hotels down in Akure town, thereby depriving the community of the revenue.

There is also a great expectation in terms of future developments and renovation of dilapidated resort facilities neglected by the government. This is necessary to avoid leakage of revenues to other towns. The people of the Idanre community expect to be more engaged in management, planning, and decision-making. The Nigerian government has failed to set up policies with strong implementations for the protected areas. On the other hand, the government is also slow in supporting the community in terms of diversifying means of livelihood to keep them away from protected areas. The administration expects the government to set up laws for protected areas and monitor implementation.

Based on the findings, recommendations were made based on findings in Idanre, they include the need for improved community engagement in terms of planning, management, decision making, training, and education. Education of locals on the benefits ecotourism can bring to them to enhance sustainable practices on protected area management, and funds should be used to achieve visible projects that will encourage the locals on the need for conservation. Capacity building and mentoring strategies would go a long way in moving locals away from poaching and logging to forest protection, uphold traditional ecological knowledge, and make them see conservation reasons. Locals and site staff can be further motivated through a reward for conservation scheme, or other conservation and management initiatives.

The rising state of insecurity should be taken more seriously and tackled with utmost priority to enhance tourist visits not just to the Idanre community but Nigeria as a whole. Laws and policies should be put in place, implemented, and monitored to curb logging activities, with an increased effort by the government on projects not just for the economic benefits of the community but for socio-economic benefits. The locals in Idanre communities should be involved in decision-making through the integration of state government policies with community-based management to lessen conflicts that may arise between all stakeholders in achieving biodiversity conservation goals as well as socio-economic goals. The adoption of programs that promote the culture and heritage of the Idanre people in the park would help improve the socio-cultural benefits of the park. The dilapidated resort facilities and accommodation should be fixed so tourists can lodge and generate money for the site thereby avoiding fund leakage. This and other economic activities can be geared towards increasing revenue to sustain the tourism destination. Lastly, an aggressive marketing

campaign promoting the features of Idanre could be used to attract tourists once the park is in a good state in a bid to develop ecotourism and increase payment for ecotourism schemes (PES).

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