

# ROLES OF INDIGENOUS CONSERVATION METHODS IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF OSUN SACRED GROVE IN OSOGBO, OSUN STATE NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*The study focused on assessing the roles of indigenous conservation methods in the sustainable development of Osun Sacred Grove in Osogbo, Osun state Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to draw 86 respondents to carry out the study. Data was collected by structured questionnaire and personal observation. The result on socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that 74.0% are male gender, by age, the majority representing 28.0% are within 20 – 30 years of age, the majority representing 33.0% have between HND & Bsc educational qualifications and they are mostly civil servants by employment representing 31.0%. The results further revealed that combinations of local and foreign conservation methods are used to sustain the grove. Among the indigenous methods being used include; structural demarcation of the site with mud fence, use of local taboos and local courts to try offenders among others. The major foreign conservation systems as being practised by the National Museum Osogbo is the application of national protection law to try offenders in the court of law and surveillance by the museum authority. The result also revealed that the most prominent role of the local conservation as shown by a mean of 4.87, is the full integration of community interest and the facilitation for the declaration of the site as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The major challenge facing indigenous conservation is the cynical campaigns adherents of foreign religion with a mean value of 4.47. It is concluded the local conservation methods have supported the sustenance of Osun Sacred Grove in Osogbo. It is however recommended that indigenous conservation should not be neglected if the management authority wants to carry the indigenous people along.*

**Keywords:** Indigenous Conservation, Methods, Sustainable Development and Roles

## Introduction

Knowledge, both pre-scientific and scientific, is a vital component of model making about the workings of the natural world and societies and enables people to make sense of how the natural world behaves and how to apply these findings to guide practices of the environment (Gadgil et al., 1993). Indigenous knowledge is the knowledge often used by local people to make a living in a particular environment (Waren, 1991). It is the unique traditional, local, local knowledge which exists within, and has developed around, the

specific conditions of people indigenous to a particular geographic area. It is embedded in the community and peculiar to a given culture, location or setting. Such a systematic body of knowledge is usually acquired through the accumulation of practical experiences and intimate interactions and understanding of the environment in a given culture (Rajaseka, 1994). Haverkort and Millar (1994) has gone further to explicate indigenous knowledge as the actual knowledge of a given population that reflects the experiences based on traditions and which includes more recent experiences with modern technologies. Nature has endowed human communities with various environmental resources through which they were earning their living as people before modernisation. Such resources include rivers, land, forests, rocks and some unique landscapes. These resources in some cases, have assisted in their social, economic and cultural subsistence. In the attempt to continue to benefit these resources, endowed communities usually come up their local initiatives to protect and preserve them for coming generations. These local ways of protecting valuable environmental resources are called indigenous conservation methods. Indigenous conservation methods predated exotic or modern systems that were introduced only during contacts with an alien civilisation.

According to Johnson (1992), indigenous knowledge is a body of knowledge built up by a group of people through generations of living in close contact with nature. Generally speaking, such knowledge evolves in the local environment, so that it is specifically adapted to the requirements of local people and conditions. It is also creative and experimental, regularly incorporating outside influences and inside innovations to meet new conditions. Osun Sacred Forest is one of such nature endowments in Osogbo community in Osun state. The forest has a diversity of fauna and flora species, mythical objects (cultural and religious deities' symbols) and a river that meanders through it (River Osun) after which the state was named. The forest also known as Osun Grove was that ancient settlement of modern Osogbo and equally represents the totality of the cultural history of Osogbo. Besides this, this forest is the cultural symbol of unity of the community as a nation irrespective of their religious divides as being witnessed in the Osun Osogbo cultural festivals. Osun forest had been solely managed and protected through indigenous methods long before colonisation of Nigeria by the British in 1900 and even beyond, until the last few decades of the 20th century when it was acquired by government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as a heritage site for

tourism development purpose under the management of National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). This development transferred the management of the forest to the government, with Osogbo community playing a partnership role in its affairs. By this partnerships management structure, modern conservation methods were now introduced alongside with the existing indigenous protection strategies (Adedayo, 2007) At the moment, Osun Sacred Forest has been declared as a world heritage site by UNESCO to become the second of its kind in Nigeria after Sukur World Heritage site in Adamawa state. Today, this site remains one of the oldest natural forests remaining in the south-western region of Nigeria with a long history of community protection and still retains authenticity (Aremu, 2006). The acquisition and interventions by the government would have altered the existing local control and conservation methods of the site.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of environmental resources conservation has become one of the cardinals focus on sustainability discourse. This issue becomes significant as a result of the global depletion of our environmental resources due to the unwise use and failure to properly manage these resources especially with the increasing population growth, urbanisation and modernisation (Tanui, Webb and Muriuki, 2013). Indigenous methods of preservation were being used long time immemorial in traditional communities to sustain our environment. In the opinion of Ogunjinmi, Oyeleke and Adewumi (2017) modern conservation methods even when they have been criticized for not unilaterally capable of providing solutions to conservation problems especially of resources within a community have relegated traditional conservation approaches to the background. Today, many indigenous environmental conservation methods are at the risk of becoming extinct because of the rapidly changing environment and fast-paced economic, political, and cultural changes on a global scale (Liu. 2006). This does not augur well for the sustainability of our environment on which our living activities depend.

Osun Sacred Forests had been subjected to indigenous protections for over a century and was effectively sustained before the advent of modern conservation systems that are alien to the community who regarded the site as their cultural heritage and property. This challenge warranted this study to examine the roles of

indigenous conservation methods in the sustainable development of Osun Sacred Forest to address the following questions

### **Research Questions**

- 1 What are the indigenous and foreign conservation methods deployed to sustain Osun Sacred Forest?
- 2 What are the roles of indigenous conservation methods in the sustenance of the site?
- 3 What are the challenges confronting indigenous conservation in the study area?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to assess the roles of indigenous conservation methods in the sustainable development of Osun Sacred Forest Osogbo. The specific objectives are to:

1. Find out the indigenous and foreign conservation methods that are deployed in the sustenance of Osun Grove
2. Determine the roles of indigenous conservation methods in the sustenance of Osun Grove
3. Identify the challenges confronting indigenous conservation methods in the study area.

### **Materials and Methods**

The study was carried out in Osun Sacred Grove which is located along the banks of Osun River in Osogbo Local Government Area of Osun State in South Western Nigeria. Its geographical coordinates are 71451 021 N and 40331 081 E. It covers an area of 75 hectares and is encircled by a buffer zone of 47 ha (IUCN, 2005). The sacred grove is situated on the margin of the southern forests of Nigeria on a raised parcel which is about 350 meters above sea level. In the east, it is bounded by Osun State Agricultural Farm Settlements. The grove is bounded in the north by Laro and Timehin Grammar Schools, in the south by the entrance of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Teaching Hospital (LAUTECH) which runs parallel to form a western boundary (NCMM, 2010). The Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove is a sacred forest that forms part of Yoruba cultural tradition dedicated to Osun goddess of fertility. The sacred grove is an organically evolved cultural and landscape site associated with the Yoruba traditional religion and culture. The site consists of forty shrines, two palaces and several sculptures and artworks in honour of the Osun goddess and other deities. It harbours over four

hundred species of plant of which two hundred are found to be of high medicinal value to the Yoruba people and others alike who believe in its efficacy. The sacred grove is a Nigerian National Monument and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2005. The grove consists of vibrant flora and fauna life. The number of flora population encountered in Osun grove is 400 species belonging to 63 families. The grove is a mature, reasonably undisturbed forest canopy which supports a broad diversity of small mammals, birds, reptiles and associated insects (NCMM, 2010).



Figure 1: Map of Osun State Major Cities showing Osogbo

Source: <https://www.google.com>

The survey research design was adopted in this study. The study adopted probability and non-probability sampling methods to draw a sample from the unit compositions to represent the entire population. Data were collected through personal observation and structured questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed by descriptive statistics and results were presented in tables. Composition of the study population is illustrated below:

- ✓ Staff of National Commission for Museums and Monuments in Osogbo
- ✓ Members of Osun Grove Support Group
- ✓ Osogbo Traditional and Heritage Council (OTHC)
- ✓ Osun Traditional Worshippers Group in Osogbo
- ✓ Other indigenous members of Osogbo community.

Due to the heterogeneous nature of the study population, multistage sampling was used. This involved the combinations of

purposive, convenience, simple random and networking sampling techniques. 1<sup>st</sup> stage: The units in the population were purposively selected because they are very relevant to the problem of the research. 2<sup>nd</sup> stage: The National Museum Osogbo has 26 staff, 25% of the population size were randomly picked and this gave a sample size of 7 subjects. 3<sup>rd</sup> stage From Osun Grove Support Group with 60 members, 25% were randomly selected; this gave 15 samples from the unit. 4<sup>th</sup> stage From Osogbo Traditional Heritage Council that comprises of 16 members, 25% were randomly selected and this gave a sample of 4 subjects. 5<sup>th</sup> stage: The population size of Osun Traditional Worshipers is unknown, networking sampling was used to pick 15 members. 6<sup>th</sup> stage: The population size of other members of Osogbo community outside those that were captured in the population unit is also unknown. Accidental sampling was used to pick 45 members because they are the largest in the composition of the population. This gave a total of 86 subjects as the sample size. An illustration of the procedures of sampling is provided below:

Table 1: Procedures of Sampling

Population Unit	Size of Unit (N)	Sampling Method	Sample (n)
National Commission for Museum and Monument	26	Simple random	7
Osun Grove Support Group	60	Simple random	15
O T H C	16	Simple random	4
Osun Traditional Worshipers in Osogbo Community	-	Networking	15
Other indigenes of Osogbo community	-	Accidental	45

Primary data were collected for the research. Personal observation and structured questionnaire were used for data collection in this study. The personal observation was used to acquaint the researcher with the situation of the art in Osogbo community. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire captured the problems of the research and was tested for validity and reliability before administration to the respondents. The fieldwork was undertaken for two weeks with the support of two hired field staff who were very familiar with Osogbo community and knowledgeable in research

fieldwork. Questionnaires were administered by hand on the respondents through insiders within each population unit in order to secure their acceptance and quick completion. Completed questionnaires were retrieved through the various internal links. Data collected were analysed by descriptive statistics particularly simple percentage, frequency and mean calculations. Results from the analysis are presented in tables.

**Results and Discussions**

Table 2- Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Category	Sub-category	Frequency n=86	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	64	74.0
	Female	22	26.0
Age of the respondent	20-30 years	24	28.0
	31-40 years	21	24.0
	41-50 years	22	26.0
	51 above	19	22.0
Education qualification	Primary Education	8	9.0
	Secondary education	14	16.0
	ND/NCE	24	28.0
	HND/BSC	28	33.0
	Others	12	14.0
Marital Status	Single	43	50.0
	Married	41	48.0
	Divorce	2	2.0
Occupation	Private employee	25	29.0
	Civil servant	27	31.0
	Self-employed	19	23.0
	Unemployed	15	17.0

Table 3: Indigenous and Foreign Conservation Method Deployed in Osun Sacred Forest

Indigenous Conservation Methods	Foreign Conservation Method
Proper demarcation of forest boundary Protection through the local taboos Punitive measures by the local judicial system The common consensus among Osogbo indigenes to protect the site as a community heritage Provision of local vigilante Daily surveillance at the forest by traditional worshippers	Protection by national law Strict prohibitions of unlawful acts by museum personnel Periodic sensitisation campaigns in Osogbo on conservation need of Osun Sacred forest

Table 4: Role of Indigenous Conservation Methods in the Sustenance of Osun Grove

Variable	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	X	
Strengthen community involvement and its World Heritage status	44 (51)	36 (42)	6 (7)	-	-	4.87	Agreed
Instills fear in the mind of users and hence the wise use of the resources	13 (15)	52 (61)	21 (24)	-	-	4.29	Agreed
There is quick attention to repair any damaged traditional sculptures	50 (58)	29 (33)		7(9)	-	4.17	Agreed
Justifies the basis for the community integration by government	24 (28)	32 (33)	-	12 (12)	18 (18)	3.33	Agreed
It improves the image of the site to attract tourist	42 (49)	15 (17)	-	-	19 (19)	4.01	Agreed
It enriches the traditional value of the site	40 (52)	29 (30)		17 (12)	-	4.17	Agreed

**Key:**

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

U = Undecided

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 5: Challenges Confronting Indigenous Conservation

Variable	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	SD (%)	D (%)	X
Negative campaign from adherents of foreign religion in Osogbo community	49(51)	41(42)	6(7)	-	-	4.47
Occasional conflicts with the museum management in the site	-	52(54)	13(13)	-	31(32)	2.90
Tourist activities in the site	50(52)	29(30)		17(17)	-	4.17

Modernization factor	24(25)	32(33)	10(10)	12(12)	18(18)	3.33
Problem of funding	-	-	35(36)	42(43)	19(19)	2.10
Activities of illegal entrant	-	52(54)	13(13)	-		2.90

**Discussion**

Table 2 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. In the course of the research work, it observed that the male respondents had the highest percentage of 74% while the female had the lowest with 26% respectively. This revealed that male gender has the highest participation. This may not be unconnected with the popular Yoruba traditional belief that women are under restrictions to participate in matters of this nature.

The study also revealed that majority of the respondent are between the ages of 20-50 years representing 81% while those above 50 years constituted 19%. The possible reason for this could be attributed to the activeness of people within 20-50 years age compared with those in the older ages.

The respondents were asked to reveal their educational qualification. It was observed that respondents with the highest percentage indicated that they had HND/B.sc qualification, with 28% while the lowest 8% indicated primary education. By measurement, this goes to show that the literacy level of the respondents is high with almost 90% are educated above secondary school. By implication, it shows that the respondents were knowledgeable enough to understand the problem under investigation.

The table also revealed that the highest percentage of the respondents are single with 50% while married 48% and lastly divorce pulls the lowest with 2%. Furthermore, the occupation of the respondents shows that majority of the respondents are civil servants.

Table 3 revealed the indigenous and foreign conservation methods in Osun Sacred Grove. The table also revealed that the indigenous and exotic methods deployed to protect and conserve the forest are enormous. The deployment of varieties of conservation methods in Osun Sacred Forest could have been influenced by the importance of the forest to Osogbo community and the multiplicity of stakeholders (Nigerian government, Osun State government, UNESCO and more importantly Osogbo Community). This site represented a cultural heritage to Osogbo community and had been under community protection for many centuries before the advent of modern tourism which brought external influences. The combinations of these

conservation methods are directed towards the protection of the site so that incoming generation can benefit from it

Table 4 reveals the roles of indigenous conservation in the sustenance of Osun Sacred Grove. The most prominent role according to the finding is that through the indigenous conservation techniques, the authenticity of Osun Sacred Grove has been maintained for many decades before government intervention and this paid off with the declaration of the site a World Heritage by UNESCO in 2005. This view was maintained by 80% of the respondents. This finding corresponds with the opinion of Adedayo, (2006) which asserts that the authenticity of Osun Sacred Forest had been maintained for almost a century making it one of the heritage sites with the longest history in community protection in the southwestern region of Nigeria and this unique attribute facilitated its rating as a world heritage.

Figure 1 shows the perception of respondents on whether indigenous conservation method has helped the site. 86% believed that indigenous conservation methods had helped immensely in the conservation of the sacred forest, while 16% had a contrary opinion. This implies that majority of the respondents believed that the conservation of the sacred forest over a long period is a function of the people's cultural beliefs about the forest. From the opinion of the majority, it could be inferred that the forest is being conserved due to favourable conditions of the forests.

Table 5 revealed that the indigenous conservation in the site is faced with many challenges, both internally and externally. However, the biggest challenge is from adherents of Christian and Islamic religions who consistently run counter campaigns against Osun Sacred Forest and traditional religions by stigmatising them as idol worshippers. This opinion was maintained by 90% of the respondents. This outcome is in reality with the challenges that usually confront indigenous culture through the influence of modernisation as posited in Olukole (2018) that when indigenous culture comes into contact with a stronger foreign culture, the indigenous culture will be affected in many ways and the culture of assimilation will evolve.

### **Summary**

Indigenous knowledge can be defined as a set of perceptions, information, and behaviours that guide local community members' uses of land and natural resources. Indigenous knowledge is created

and sustained by local community members as a means to meet their needs for food, shelter, health, spirituality, and savings. Indigenous knowledge is usually adapted and is specific to local ecological conditions and community members' social and economic situations and cultural beliefs. Indigenous knowledge has importance; hence it should never be neglected or devaluated in any part of our life. It should be considered that it has various benefits in our life and any concerning body should recognise its significance. Policymakers at all levels, academics, non-governmental organisations and all other concerning bodies should give due attention for its importance by considering that it has many benefits that are equally valuable to modern knowledge.

### **Conclusion**

This study has confirmed that the deployment of indigenous conservation methods can play a significant role in the protection and sustenance of environmental resources within its domain. Indigenous knowledge is one of the long-existing practices which has equally aged by human's life. Every society has its own naturally endowed knowledge on their environment in which they are living. It will be noted that indigenous knowledge is base for modern knowledge and it can be said mother of modern knowledge. For every society, in every place, have their ways to respond for a specific issue or their own life in their locality. For the environmental problems or any external pressures and threats to their life, they experience their remedy for the problems that they may face. Indigenous knowledge is also a large part of the culture of every society; hence it can also be said building block of any culture. It makes a culture unique to individual society and differentiates one culture from other culture.

### **Recommendations**

Indigenous knowledge has various importance: hence it should never be neglected or devaluated in any part of our life. It should be considered that it has various benefits in our life and whatsoever has to do with human wellbeing should be given cognisance by policymakers. Policymakers at all levels, academics, NGOs and all other concerns should give due attention to its importance by considering that it has many benefits that are equally valuable to moderns knowledge.

Indigenous knowledge certainly has a prominent advantage in environmental protection; hence owing attention should be given and

steps to be climbed to register and employ into national, regional and local programs and policies.

The stakeholders in areas of sacred forest protection should never ignore the indigenous knowledge while they are dealing with its impact, cause, and how to handle its problem that is related to the environment. This is because of indigenous knowledge has its own ways and practices to handle and conserve the environment.

The principal and fundamental problems of environment, which are the primary source for other environmental problems, land degradation, soil erosion, and vegetation, lose and deforestation can be protected by indigenous knowledge or traditional practices under the study area.

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