



EVALUATION OF THE PERCEPTION OF FOREST COMMUNITY DWELLERS ABOUT CONSTITUTED FOREST RESERVES IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Forest reserves are protected areas that conserve forest resources and provide benefits to communities living around them. But, several illegal activities have been occurring in Nigeria constituted forest reserves which has been reported through different media, however, it is still largely unknown how forest community dwellers' perceive these illegal activities in the forest reserves close to them, considering them been a major stakeholder in the environment. This study examined the perception of forest community dwellers towards constituted forest reserves in Ondo state, Nigeria. Four forest reserves out of 16 forest reserves in the state were randomly selected. Two forest communities were selected based on their closeness and accessibility to the sampled forest reserves to make a total of 8 forest communities. Semi-structured questionnaires were used to acquire primary data while descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that 62.5% of respondent's derive some benefits from the forest reserve close to them which include fuel wood (23%), income (14%), medicinal uses (22%), and so on. Few of the dominant challenges faced by the community dwellers due to the closeness of their community to the forest reserve include extreme coldness, wild animal invasion, and hideout for kidnappers/herdsmen. In addition, 65.0% of respondents in Akure forest reserve, 35.0% in Idanre forest reserve, 60.0% in Owo forest reserve, and 40.0% in Oluwa forest reserve all agreed that forest reserves are protected, but are still faced with the aforementioned problems. In conclusion, the study shows that communities' perceptions toward forest reserves to an extent are generally favorable but however are influenced by socio demographic characteristics such as Age, Education level etc. Also, there is need for the Government to work closely with community dwellers close to the forest reserves to help protect the reserves nationwide.

Keywords: Communities dwellers, Constituted, Forest Reserve, Perception, Protected

Introduction

Forests are groups of living things that are characterized by the presence of trees and their symbiotic relationships with one another and their surroundings (Lund, 2006). They are involved in our lives in numerous, varied, and complex ways (Amusa, 2002; Agarwal, 2009). The biodiversity of the globe depends on forests since they serve as a habitat for numerous animal and plant species, local

communities also depend on these forest resources for food, medicine, and fuel wood (Sunderland *et al.*, 2014). Additionally, it is important for spiritual, cultural, and recreational activities, and also provides us with a sense of calm and closeness to nature. Given these vital roles in sustaining human life, the United Nations mandated that 25% of the surface area of every country should be set aside under permanent forest cover as the minimum ecological requirement for the



socio-economic survival of the people (Ladan, 2014). According to Adekunle (2006), only 9% of the country's land area was legally designated as a forest reservation as of 1915 and an additional 1% was reserved subsequently making a total of 10% of the country's land area. This is below the planned aim of 25% of the country's land for forest reservation.

Nigeria at the close of the 19th century, began to establish forest reserve lands which was championed by the colonial authority and at the start of the 20th century, forest reserves has covered about 970 square kilometers (Simwa,2017).According to Usman and Adefalu (2010), government-designated forest reserves are defined as places where trees are grown or planted for ecological reasons. They are areas of managed forests that have been set aside for protection and to offer special research opportunities. The forestry department of the Ministry of Environment was saddled with the responsibility of guarding the reserves when these lands were surveyed and gazetted. It is however unfortunate to note that despite many benefits that can be derived by forest community dwellers living close to forest reserves, these reserves (especially in Nigeria) have continued to diminish at an accelerated rate through deforestation, over-exploitation of forest resources and insecurity challenges. The worst part of the story is that managing and protecting these forest reserves in Nigeria is no easy task.

Butler (2005) reported that between 2000 and 2005, Nigeria approximately lost 55.7% of its primary forest. He added that Nigeria's yearly deforestation rate is 3.5% or about 350,000 acres. Historically, Nigeria is one of the countries in the world that have lost over 50% of its primary forest to illegal forest activities such as undue mining and looting of trees and

other valuable crops (FAO, 2012). In addition, Adedayo (2016) opined that the level of deforestation in Nigeria has accelerated as a new millennium approaches. This action has undermined the livelihoods and cultural practices of forest communities that depend on forests for food, medicine, and other natural resources.

To have a broader understanding of how forest reserves have degenerated, the involvement of the communities dwellers living close to forest reserves is significant in providing first-hand information of happening around them, they are often the first to recognize the threats to their local forests and are in a unique position to take action to protect them. However, community participation in forest protection can take many forms, such as participating in patrols, organizing awareness-raising campaigns, engaging in conflict resolution and mediation, engaging in decision-making processes, and so on. This study, therefore evaluates the views of forest community dwellers about constituted forest reserves around them with the aim of knowing the benefits derived from the forest, the challenges faced, and their general perceptions towards the result of the closeness of forest reserves close to them.

Methodology

Study Area

This study was carried out in Ondo state, which is one of the states located in the Southwestern zone of Nigeria as represented in Figure 1. It lies between longitudes 4°30' and 6° East of the Greenwich meridian and latitudes 5°45'- and 8°15'-North of the Equator and it is bounded in the South by the Atlantic Ocean. The projected population of Ondo state is 5,316,600 as of the year 2022 (City population, 2023), and covers a land area of about 15,500 km². Its capital city is



Akure and also has 18 Local Government Areas. Most of its urban residents are civil servants (working for either the government or private firms) while a considerable proportion of its rural dwellers engaged in various occupations like farming, fishing, trading, teaching, and so on. The state has several forest reserves which can be found in

Akure, Odigbo, EseOdo, Idanre, and Owo. (Iyagin and Adekunle, 2017). Oyo and Ogun States border Ondo State to the west, Edo State to the east, Ekiti and Kogi States to the North, and the Atlantic Ocean to the South. Table 1 shows the sampled forest communities in the study area with their respective longitudes and latitudes.

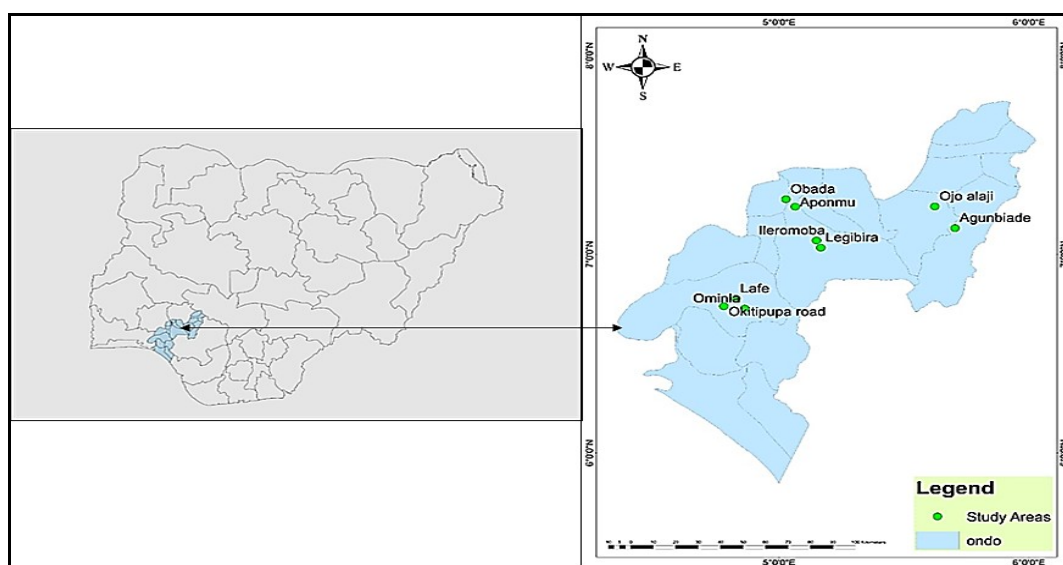


Figure 1: Map showing the study Area

Table 1: Sampled Forest Communities in the Study Area

FOREST RESERVES	COMMUNITIES	LONGITUDE (E)	LATITUDE (N)
Akure FR	Aponmu	5°04'00.06"	7°14'14.80
Akure FR	Obada	4°59'37.84"	7°16'45.45"
Idanre FR	Ileromoba	5°05'38.21"	6°52'35.96"
Idanre FR	Legbira	5°05'30.85"	6°52'39.30"
Owo FR	Ojaalaji	5°37'18.93"	7°00'28.54"
Owo FR	Agunbiade	5°37'22.88"	7°00'30.90"
Oluwa FR	Lafe	4°22'00.84"	6°50'40.97"
Oluwa FR	Ominla	4°21'00.84"	6°50'16.88"

*FR: Forest reserve

Sampling Procedure



Primary data was used for the study. It was collected through the use of a semi-structured questionnaire. Four forest reserves out of 16 forest reserves in the state were randomly selected. Two forest communities were selected each based on their closeness and accessibility to the sampled forest reserves to make the total of 8 forest communities. Thirty (30) individuals who represent each household head were then randomly selected in each of the sampled forest communities to make a total of 240 respondents. Questionnaires were distributed to the respondents for this study.

Data analysis

Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, 21). Descriptive statistics were used to generate the views of respondents in the form of tables, graphs, and pie charts while inferential statistics, specifically the multiple linear regression analysis was used in the study because of its capacity to use a number of independent or explanatory factors to predict the outcome of a dependent variable that is continually assessed (Ijatuyi *et al.*, 2022).

Model specification

Three of the dependent variables were tested using four independent factors such as age, education, occupation, and household size. The conceptual model in Figure 2 demonstrates this. This analysis tested specific hypotheses to determine what

influenced respondents' perceptions.1). H_a: Educational level and Age significantly influenced respondents' perception of forest reserves being well protected.2). H_a: Educational level of respondents' significantly influenced their perceptions of forest reserves helping to conserve forest resources. 3)H₀: Household size and occupation practiced negatively affect the perception of respondents on forest reserves helping to increase the supply of forest products to their households. The general model used to test the stated hypotheses and predict socio demographic characteristics that influenced respondents' perception is thus given as:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_i X_i + e_i$$

The individual model used to test each hypothesis include

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + e_i \dots \dots \dots \text{Hypothesis 1}$$

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + e_i \dots \dots \dots \text{Hypothesis 2}$$

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + e_i \dots \dots \dots \text{Hypothesis 3}$$

Where:

Y = Perception of respondents on forest reserve (Dependent variable to be predicted)

β_0 = the intercept which is the value of our Y

β_1 and β_2 represent the regression coefficients for the corresponding independent variables

X_1 = Explanatory variable (Independent variable)

e = distributed random error term.

i = number of observations

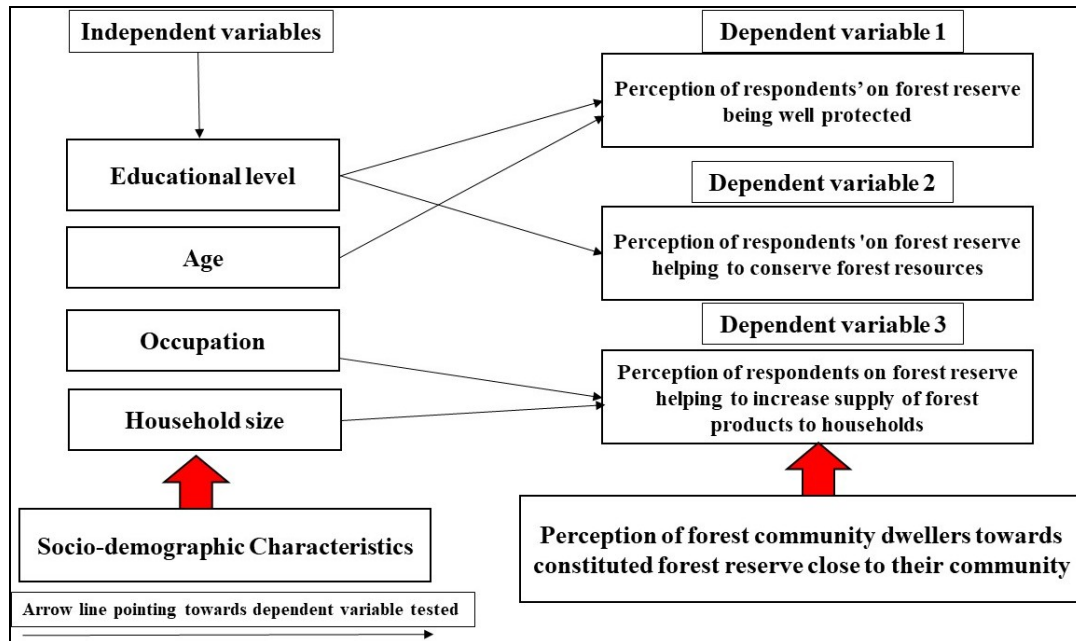


Figure 2: The conceptual model variables used in the study (Author’s concept).

Questionnaire survey analysis

From the two hundred and forty (240) copies of the questionnaire distributed to selected respondents, two hundred, and thirty-five (235) were recovered which represent 95.5% of the total respondent rate. This high questionnaire return rate was as a result of due diligence given to the filling and collection of the questionnaires on-site. Five

(5) questionnaires were not returned. The sum of two hundred and thirty-five (235) questionnaires was imputed and analyzed as given in Table 3 which makes the response rate fit for analysis. This agreed with Fincham (2008) proposition which describes that a questionnaire response rate above 60% is considered fit for analysis.

Table 2: Questionnaire administration among forest reserve communities

FR in the Study Area	No. of QA	No. of QR	Percentage of QR (%)
Akure FR	60	60	100
Idanre FR	60	58	96.6
Owo FR	60	59	98.3
Oluwa FR	60	58	96.6

*FR: Forest reserve, QA: Questionnaire Administered, QR: Questionnaire Returned



Results and Discussions

Results

Socio-economic characteristics of respondents in the study area

The result in Figure 3 shows that 56.50% of the respondents are Male while the remaining proportion (which represent 43.50%) are Female. This is because both gender lives around the constituted forest reserves but male dominated these regions in search for available jobs such as farming, fishing and so on. Figure 3 further shows that, 32.70%, 24.7%, 16.60% and 7.60% are of age range 30-40 years, 41-50 years, 51-60 years, and 60 years and above respectively. Logically, the mature age of the respondents considered them fit to respond to the questionnaires. The educational level of the respondents shows that 44.40% of the respondents have no formal education, 33.20% have primary education, 18.40% have secondary education and 3.60% have tertiary education. The marital status of the respondents shows that 80.30% are married, 12.10% are single, 6.30% are widower/widow and 1.30% are separated/divorced. The household number of the respondents shows that 9.40% have 0 household, 6.70% have 1 household, 12.60% have 2 households, 24.70% have 3 households, 18.80% have 4 households, 18.80% have 5 households and 9.00% have 6 households. The occupation of the respondents shows that 43.90% are farmers, 26.90% are in business, 6.70% are in livestock rearing, 1.80% are civil servants and 20.60% are in other occupations.

and 3.60% had tertiary education. A larger percentage of the respondents in the study area are not educated and this can be attributed to range of factors such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, language barriers, cultural factors, and so on. Most of the respondents engage in farming activities with a percentage of 43.8%. This was so because they are closer to the forest and most of them are predominantly farmers. About 80% of the respondents interviewed were married while the remaining 11.9% are of marriageable age but are still single as at the time of carrying out the field survey. This high number of married respondents might be a result of traditional family values that prioritize marriage and having children as an important milestone in life and this is often encouraged by family and community members. The combined analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of respondents in the host communities are presented in Figure 3.

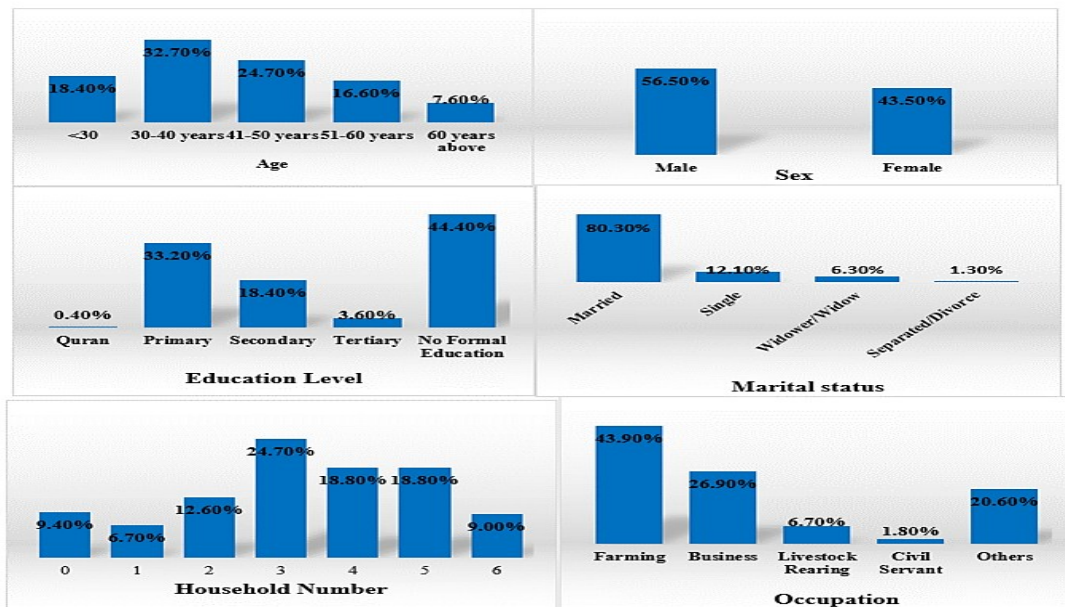


Figure 3: Socio demographic characteristics of host communities



Benefits that Forest Community Dwellers Derived from Constituted Forest Reserve

The result in Figure 4 depicts that forest community dwellers in the study area derived several benefits from the forest reserves. This includes fuel wood (23%), medicinal uses (22%), income from sales of forest products (14%), bush meat (15%), honey (6%), fruits (5%), vegetables (13%) just to mention a few. It is not a surprise that fuel wood ties with medicinal uses in the proportion of benefits. These two factors are quite

important to the survival and healthy living of the forest community dwellers. Fuel wood retrieved from the forest are used for cooking and warming up the body during excessive cold weather while some vital vegetable herbs from the trees in the forest are used both as recipe for cooking soups or for curing common ailments such as malaria fever, measles, chicken pox and rashes. In rare cases, some of these herbs can cure snake or scorpion poisons when effectively prepared and administered timely to the patient.

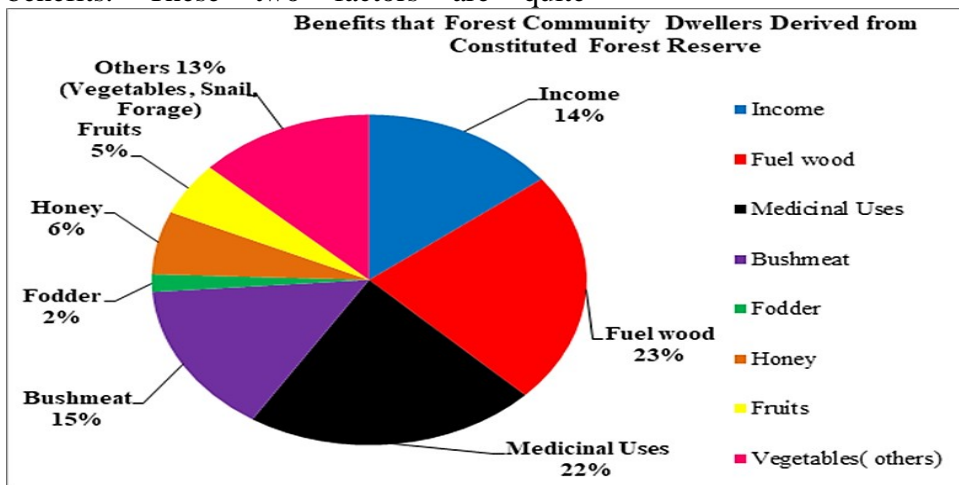


Figure 4: Benefits rural dwellers derive from constituted forest reserves

Problems Forest Community Dwellers Face Due to the Closeness of their Community to the Forest Reserve

Although, there are several benefits that accrue from forest reserves for forest community dwellers, coming with these benefits are some challenges too. As shown in Table 3, the analyses of the main challenges facing forest community dwellers are ranked by the respondents in the study area. It can be seen that the challenges were such as hideouts for kidnappers representing 26%, 22.1%, 26%, and 26% of respondents in Akure forest reserve, Idanre Forest reserve, Owo forest reserve, and Oluwa forest reserve,

respectively, were unanimously agreed upon. As these perpetrators of evil could barely succeed in the mischief's in the cities, they have instead made the forest reserves their alternative abode to serve as hideout from security agencies. Another challenge is extreme coldness representing 25%, 25%, 23.1%, and 26.9% of respondents in Akure forest reserve, Idanre forest reserve, Owo forest reserve, and Oluwa forest reserve respectively.

They also agreed that this challenge is predominant especially during harmattan season at the end of each year. The third challenge faced are wild animal invasion



representing 22.6%, 32.3%, 25.8%, and 19.4% of respondents in Akure forest reserve, Idanre forest reserve, Owo forest reserve and Oluwa forest reserve respectively. Besides the agonies suffered by the forest community dwellers through the acts of kidnapping and terrorism (Larinde and Chima, 2014), their lives are also constantly being threatened by wild and poisonous animals such as snakes, scorpions, foxes, cheetahs and so on. The underlying dangers in the co-existence of humans (especially forest community dwellers) and poisonous wildlife have been reported (Mekonen, 2020; Guégan *et al.*, 2020).

Perception of Forest Community Dwellers towards Constituted Forest Reserve

To understand the perception of the respondents towards the constituted forest reserve, some questions were asked. As seen in Table 4, the cumulative proportion of respondents that agreed that forest reserve has been the major source of forest products for their households in all the forest reserves are more than respondent who disagree, with those at Idanre and Oluwa forest reserves leading the way. In addition, a higher percentage of respondents agree that the forest reserve is not their ancestral land taken away from them in all the forest reserves considered. They tend to see these forest reserves as government acquired assets that do not belong to any individual or family. A sizeable number of respondents agree that the

forest reserve has helped to increase the supply of forest products to their households in all the reserves with the exception of respondents from Idanre forest reserves where the number was a bit lower. This minor decline may have been driven by unknown illegal deforestation or other forms of forest degradation happening within the forest reserve, which may have reduced the supply of forest products available to those who depend on them.

Furthermore, more respondents in all the forest reserves agree that the forest reserve close to their communities is well protected. This is because these forest reserves are protected by security personnel's appointed by the government to prevent illegal activities such as undue felling of trees. Even, permissions are requested from the locals for them to have access to forest resources classified as NTFPs, materials such as snails, herbs, fuel wood, mushrooms, leaves, and so on. This is what seems to motivate their choice. Meanwhile, the respondents were divided on whether the forest reserve close to their communities is helping to conserve forest resources. Taking, for instance, the numbers of respondents that either agree or disagreed for Oluwa forest reserve were the same. It is envisaged that the responses of the respondents seem to be biased as majority of them may not really understand how their communities is helping to conserve the forest resources close to them.

Table 3: Challenges faced by community dwellers closer to forest reserves

Forest Reserve	Kidnappers/Herdsmen Hide Out		Extreme Coldness		Wild animals' invasion	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Akure FR	28	26.0%	18	25.0%	10	22.6%
Idanre FR	24	22.1%	18	25.0%	14	32.3%
Owo FR	28	26.0%	17	23.1%	11	25.8%
Oluwa FR	28	26.0%	20	26.9%	7	19.4%



Total	108	100.0%	73	100.0%	42	100.0%
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*FR: Forest Reserve

Table 4: Perception of forest community dwellers towards constituted forest reserve close to their community

Perceptions		Names of forest reserve							
		Akure FR		Idanre FR		Owo FR		Oluwa FR	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
The forest reserve has been the major source of forest products for your household	Yes	27	47.5%	36	65.0%	28	50.0%	27	67.5%
	No	28	50.0%	13	32.5%	16	40.0%	10	25.0%
	Not sure	1	2.5%	1	2.5%	6	10.0%	4	7.5%
Forest reserve land is your ancestral land taken away from you	Yes	10	17.5%	1	2.5%	14	25.0%	10	17.5%
	No	39	70.0%	49	87.5%	39	70.0%	26	65.0%
	Not sure	5	12.5%	4	10.0%	2	5.0%	10	17.5%
The forest reserve has helped to increase the supply of Forest products to your household	Yes	25	45.0%	22	40.0%	27	47.5%	31	55.0%
	No	15	37.5%	27	47.5%	35	45.0%	17	30.0%
	Not sure	10	17.5%	7	12.5%	4	7.5%	8	15.0%
Forest reserve close to your community is well Protected	Yes	26	65.0%	20	35.0%	24	60.0%	16	40.0%
	No	15	27.5%	27	47.5%	17	30.0%	17	42.5%
	Not sure	3	7.5%	10	17.5%	4	10.0%	10	17.5%
Forest reserve close to your community is helping to conserve forest resources	Yes	20	50.0%	18	45.0%	15	37.5%	17	42.5%
	No	17	42.5%	13	32.5%	21	52.5%	17	42.5%
	Not sure	3	7.5%	9	22.5%	4	10.0%	6	15.0%

*FR: Forest reserve

Socio-demographic characteristics influence on the perception of forest community dwellers in the study area

The multiple linear regression result was carried out to examine forest communities' dweller's socio-demographic characteristics that influence their perception of constituted forest reserves close to them (Table 5). The first column on Table 5 shows that age and educational level significantly influence respondents' perception of forest reserve

protection, this implies that the respondents' age and education level positively influenced their perception of forest reserve protection with Beta coefficient = 0.62, t= 8.79, P< .001; Beta coefficient = 0.26, t= 3.69, P<.001 respectively. As a result, alternative hypothesis 1 is accepted. As further evidenced in Table 5, the second column shows that respondents' educational level had a favorable influence on how they perceived the role of forest reserves in protecting forest resources (Beta coefficient = 0.36, t= 5.61, P<.001),



accordingly, hypothesis 2 is accepted. Finally, the third column on Table 5 shows that the respondents' occupation and household size both had a favorable influence on how they perceived forest reserves to help increase the supply of forest products to their households, with the results (Beta coefficient= 0.24, t= 4.14, P<.001) and (Beta coefficient= 0.63, t=

10.94, P<.001) respectively. As a result, hypothesis 3 is rejected. In addition to the analysis, the variance inflation factor (VIF) shows no evidence of multicollinearity based on Johnston *et al.*, (2018). Table 5 below summarized the result of the multiple linear regression analysis carried out.

Table 5: Socio-demographic characteristics influence on the perception of forest community dwellers in the study area using multiple linear regression analysis.

SC	Unstd. Coefficients		Std. Coefficients	T value	(Sig.)	95.0% C. I for B		Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
(1)Constant	.161	.065		2.483	.014	.033	.288		
Age	.361	.041	.624	8.790	.000	.280	.442	.210	2.773
Educational level	.129	.035	.262	3.693	.000	.060	.198	.210	2.773
2) Constant	.792	.112		7.071	.000	.571	1.013		
Educational level	.168	.030	.362	5.612	.000	.109	.226	1.000	1.000
3) Constant	.290	.070		4.114	.000	.151	.429		
Occupation	.111	.027	.237	4.142	.000	.058	.165	.472	2.117
Household size	.241	.022	.627	10.937	.000	.197	.284	.472	2.117

Note: P<.001 is significant

SC: Socio demographic characteristics, CI: Confidence interval

Discussion

General perception of the benefits derived and the problem faced by forest community dwellers from constituted forest reserve

Bringing into perspective the benefits derived from the forest reserves and the problem encountered by the forest community dwellers as revealed by the respondents, the following observations were made in the light of their responses (which are already analyzed in

Figures 4, Table 3 and Table 4). Firstly, majority of the forest community dwellers living close to the forest reserve derived at least one or more benefits from the reserves and these benefits enjoyed depend on household or individual preferences.

However, common benefits derived by almost all the households include foods (crops and fruits), traditional medicines (also known as herbs), building materials and in some case water, which in totality improve the socio-economic and ecological aspects (including



increase of income, economic growth, and development of infrastructures) of the community dwellers. Some of these benefits are also stated as part of the remuneration the forest community dwellers in Nambinga Forest in Ulanga District, Tanzania derived (Ngwembe *et al.*, 2022). In addition, Adedayo and Akindele (2003) in their study concluded that rural dwellers of no doubt derive innumerable NTFPs benefits from the forests and this has been reported in several studies (Farnsworth and Soejarto, 1991; Teklehaymanot and Giday, 2007; Uprety *et al.*, 2010; Uprety *et al.*, 2012; Agrawal *et al.*, 2013; Ahammad *et al.*, 2019; Mintah *et al.*, 2019; Rahman *et al.*, 2022). Besides the social-economic and ecological benefits derived from the forest reserves, there are also some problems threatening the life and safety of these dwellers. One of those major problems is the forest reserves becoming a harbour and safe haven for kidnappers. For some years now in Nigeria and Ondo State in particular, there has been news and reports of kidnappers and Fulani herdsmen taking their captives into the deepest part of the forest to demand for ransom from their family members.

They also perpetrate their evil on the farmers and local community dwellers by killing some and carting away with the properties of others. A recent report from Sahara Reporter confirms an incident of this nature at Power line and Ago-Oyinbo both located at Ala Forest Reserve in Ondo State (Sahara Reporters, 2023). Another problem faced by the forest community dwellers is their exposure to harsh weather condition. It is true that forest or forest reserves can serve as wind breakers during stormy rainfall (Schäfer and Dirk, 2011), however, they can also serve as catalysts that increase the degree of coldness during winter or harmattan seasons

(Contosta *et al.*, 2019). The forests tend to have higher humidity levels which can reduce the amount of sunlight that reaches the ground, which can in turn lead to cooler temperatures. Also, they can act as a barrier to wind, which can also result in cooler temperatures in the surrounding areas (James and Sherman, 2022; Knight *et al.*, 2021; Mcpherson *et al.*, 2005; United State Environmental Protection Agency, 2023).

The implication of this is that during this season, the health of the dwellers is at risk to underlying health conditions and diseases such as hypothermia or frostbite when their bodies become too cold. In some cases, respiratory and cardiovascular conditions are triggered (National Center for Environment Health, 2022). Therefore, they constantly need to keep themselves warm by preparing fire. Also, their effectiveness to work during this period is greatly reduced and this holds well for farmers and fishermen among them. Another challenge encountered by the forest community dwellers which is not rampant is their exposure to wildlife. Sometimes, dangerous cold-blooded animals such as snakes could hide inside the houses of these dwellers in search for warm places. When disturbed, they could bite the person and this can lead to the death of the victim if proper care is not taken. This was in line with the findings of Eniang and Ijeomah (2012).

Socio-demographic characteristics influence on the perception of forest community dwellers in the study area.

The result in Table 5 shows how respondents' socio-demographic characteristics affect how they perceived forest reserves that were close to them. It revealed that age and education level were statistically significant at $P < .001$ and therefore influenced their choices positively. This implies that, as the age of the



respondents increases, the more likely they will have the perception of the forest reserve being well protected. In addition, older individuals who have lived long in these communities are likely to have more experience and knowledge about the importance of protecting forest reserves than younger individuals, hence leading them to perceive it positively. This assertion was supported by a study done by Sousa *et al.*, (2021), which claimed that older people would have more experience with forest reserves and might know more about the advantages of conservation, whereas younger people might not be deeply aware of the advantages of conservation and hence, might have different opinions toward it.

Table 5 also showed that the education level of the respondents was statistically significant at $p < .001$. It means the education level of respondents positively influenced their perception of forest protection and conservation of forest resources. This suggests that individuals with higher level of education are more likely to view forest reserves as being well protected and conservative in nature for forest resources. Their level of education will enable them gained more insightful opinions and assessments on matters that go beyond what a lay person might think of. According to Tadesse and Teketay's (2017) research, socio demographic factors like education had a significant influence on respondents' perceptions. The research of Garekae *et al.*, (2017) also supports our conclusions.

Table 5 finally showed that the occupation and household size of the respondents were statistically significant at $P < 0.001$, The implication of this statement is that respondents who are farmers or livestock owners and have larger households (such as families of three or more) are more likely to

view the forest reserve as advantageous in terms of increasing the supply of forest products to their households because they have higher subsistence needs. It could also be because these respondents have a greater understanding of the benefits of forest reserves. This however suggests that occupation and household size play a role in shaping people's perceptions of the forest reserve's contribution to their livelihoods. Inoni (2009) found that rural households primarily collect non-timber forest products (NTFPs) from forest reserves for subsistence or income generation purposes. This highlights how respondents' perceptions of forest reserves as a significant source of forest products for their families may be influenced. Likewise, some past studies have also shown that, larger household sizes are associated with higher volume of forest resources being exploited as they largely rely more on forest resources for their livelihoods (Liu *et al.*, 2003; Inoni, 2009; Mwera *et al.*, 2016).

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study has evaluated the perceptions of forest community dwellers about constituted forest reserves in Ondo state, Nigeria. The perception of forest community dwellers in the study area were found to have been influenced by their socio-demographic characteristics and were statistically significant. It was found that there were several derivable benefits from the forest reserves close to them, benefits such as food, firewood, medicinal plants, and so on, which are of great advantage to the people living close to the forest reserve. Major threats facing the communities living close to the forest reserves includes exposure to wildlife, exposure to harsh weather condition and forest reserves becoming a harbour and safe haven for kidnappers. Therefore, it is recommended that Government should take



proactive actions to attend to some of the problems surrounding insecurity such as recruiting additional local patrol personnel.

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