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VEGETATION LOSS AND PROBABLE CONSEQUENCES FROM TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF OBUDU RANCH RESORT, OBANLIKU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The Obudu Ranch Resort has witnessed change in Weather/Climate and there has been species endangerment and eco-system alteration. All point to the fact that the current development of the Resort. Many of these impacts are link with the construction of general infrastructure such as roads, and of tourism facilities, including resorts, hotels, cable car, restaurants, shops, golf courses and many others. The negative impacts of tourism development can gradually destroy environmental resources on which it depends. However, tourism and identification of forest loss has encouraged conservation activities. It is against this background that the study recommends that for sustainable tourism on the ranch, operators should de-emphasize economic gains but rather guarantee environmental sustainability. The need for local participation in tourism

operation was recommended and policy for regulation of tourist activities and the reinvestment of proceeds for local structural/ amenities provision considered necessary.

KEY WORDS: **MAPPING, VEGETATION LOSS, CONSEQUENCES, TOURISM DEVELOPMENT, OBUDU RANCH RESORT, OBANLIKU LOCAL GOVERNMENT.**

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, ecotourism has attracted increasing attention not only as an alternative to mass tourism, but as a means of economic development and environmental conservation. Ezealor, (1995). Opined that ecotourism ventures have sustained the economy of most nations for example East African countries like Kenya, Tanzania and part of West Africa like Senegal. Ecotourism is mainly the interaction between the physical environmental features for leisure purposes. It is in this light that several thousand of people live their usual to areas with friendly climate, coastal regions for linking and trekking, surfing and swimming and the enjoyment of friendly ambience.

The construction of tourism facilities and infrastructure has caused severe disturbance and erosion of eco-system, residence already complained of changes in the weather. For instance, they complain that the weather is hotter (i.e the temperature is high) than before, while there is no frequent rain like before and there is less fall of snow. This prompted the present study to seek to find out how the ranch has impacted on the biophysical environment. Ezealor, (1995).

Tourism has created great pressure on local resources like energy, food and other raw materials that may already be in short supply. Greater extraction and transport of these resources exacerbates physical impact associated with their exploitation. Because of the seasonal character of the industry, the destination has times more inhabitation in the high season than in the low season, with high demand been placed upon natural resources to meet the high expectations

tourist often have for instance, a typical pressure on the vegetation to extract fuel wood to provide room heating.

The study based on the impact of Obudu cattle rach resort on the biophysical environment.

Obudu cattle ranch is close to the Cameroon border in the North-Eastern part of Cross River State of Nigeria, approximately 110km east of Ogoja Town and 65km from Obudu Town. It falls within the Obanliku Local Government Area, situated on a relatively flat plateau on the Oshie Ridge of the Sankwala hills, Obudu cattle ranch is approximately 134 square kilometers in extent.

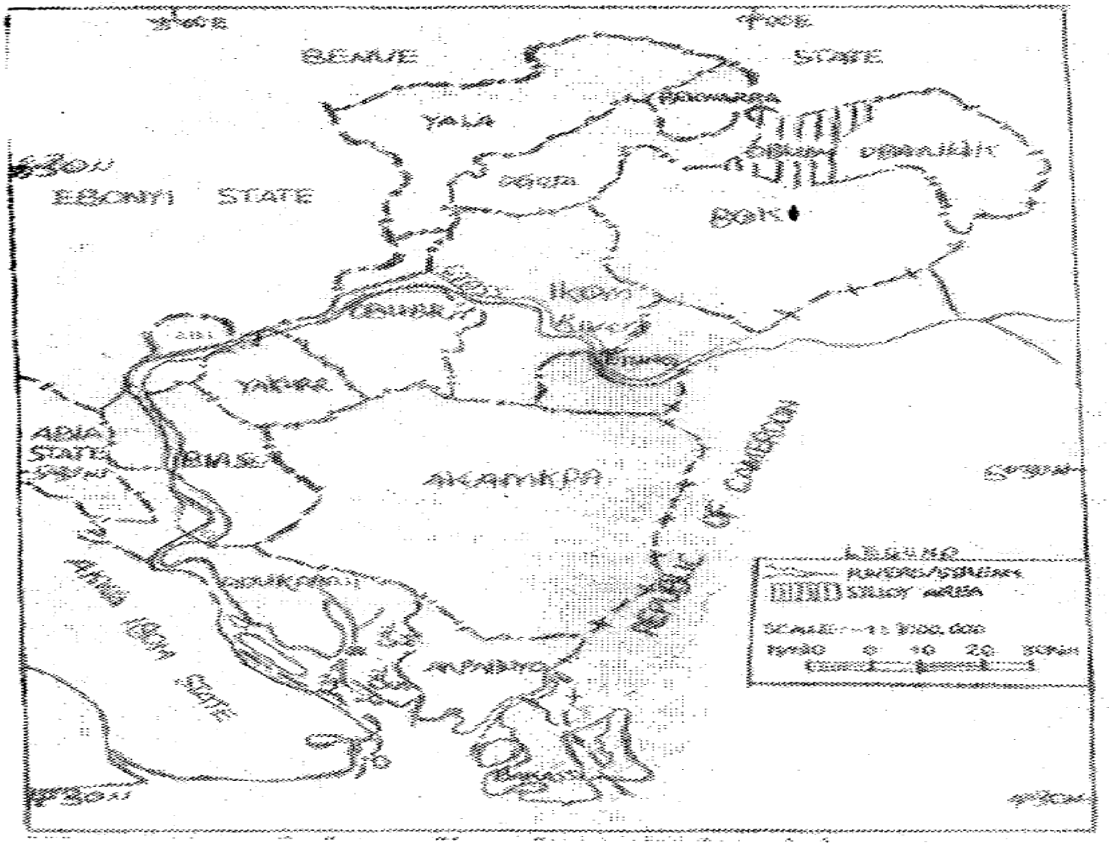


Figure 1. Map of Cross River State showing study area

Source: Authors works

RELIEF

The relief of Cross River State falls into two broad categories, the high land and the low land. The Obudu cattle ranch is located in the high lands with a general elevation of 1,576m, but with odd peaks rising to almost 2,000m. It is the highest peak in Cross River State.

CLIMATE

The climate here is comparable to that of the temperate high latitude region, with low temperatures for most of the year. It enjoys a temperate climate, an area of idyllic tranquility, beauty and breath taking views. Temperature is usually lowest between June and September (as low as 4.4ºc to 10º). Generally sunshine hours are low with average of 5 hours but could reduce to as 2 hours in some days. It is this weather conditions that was the initial attraction for the exploitation of the plateau for cattle ranching.

Annual rainfall is generally high, more than 4000mm with the intensity most of the times characterized by drizzles. Rainfall is double maxima with the highest peak in August. Humidity is equally high mostly during the raining season where it could be high as 80-90%. This could drop as low 50-55% during the dry season.

One fascinating thing about the ranch is the near absence of some disease insect vectors such as mosquitoes and Tsetse flies. The discovery of the ranch in 1949 by McCaughley, a British veterinary doctor and its choice for ranching was on the basis of this suitable environmental condition. From a purely livestock ranch however there have been tremendous shift towards tourism and this is what the ranch is known for today.

In this chapter the methods that were used to gather data for this study is discussed. The following are also discussed, types of data, population and sample, method of data collection and method of data analysis technique as well as presentation.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The objective is to collect data that will be sufficient to enable us make inference in respect of the overall philosophy of this study. The data required for this study were both primary and secondary data. The primary data include data on stream loss and degradation, land and forest loss to urbanization, weather pattern in temporal context, exotic species introduced and species specific to the area, the extent of pollution and how species have been endangered. The secondary from various published reports and documents.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Six major communities (settlements) make up the ranch resort. Three of them were selected using a simple random sampling technique. Before this, the area was divided into two zones or strata on the basis of closeness to the resort. Out of these, one community was sampled from the zone further zones and two from the closer area. Within the ranch are indigenous Becheve people whose population estimate is put at about 1,000 (1991 census estimate/projection). A total of 100 indigenous people were administered with the questionnaire while 20 were interviewed. Also 30 workers and visitors were administered with the survey instrument. A total of 140 instruments were duly completed and returned, representing 93.3% return rate.

The six (6) communities are; Keji-Okwu/ ranch urban, Apejili, Okpazange ,Kegol, Anape, Okwanu

While the sampled areas were Ranch Urban, Okpazange, Kegol

SAMPLING TECHQUES

The data were generated from structure questionnaire and semi- structure interviews.

The questionnaires were administered to literate respondents and the same were used as the basis of interview with some of the older and illiterate respondents.

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Statistical tools were employed. These descriptive tools were purely percentages systematic maps of different lines resolutions were also analyze while the change defection was expressed in percentages.

Photographs of important land marks depicting the facilities of the resort and the damages or destruction done to physical/natural features were presented and described to showcase the level of development and probable environmental change.

DISCUSSION

TOURISM AND DEFORESTATION IN THE STUDY AREA

The issue of deforestation in the study area is presented in figure 2 to 5

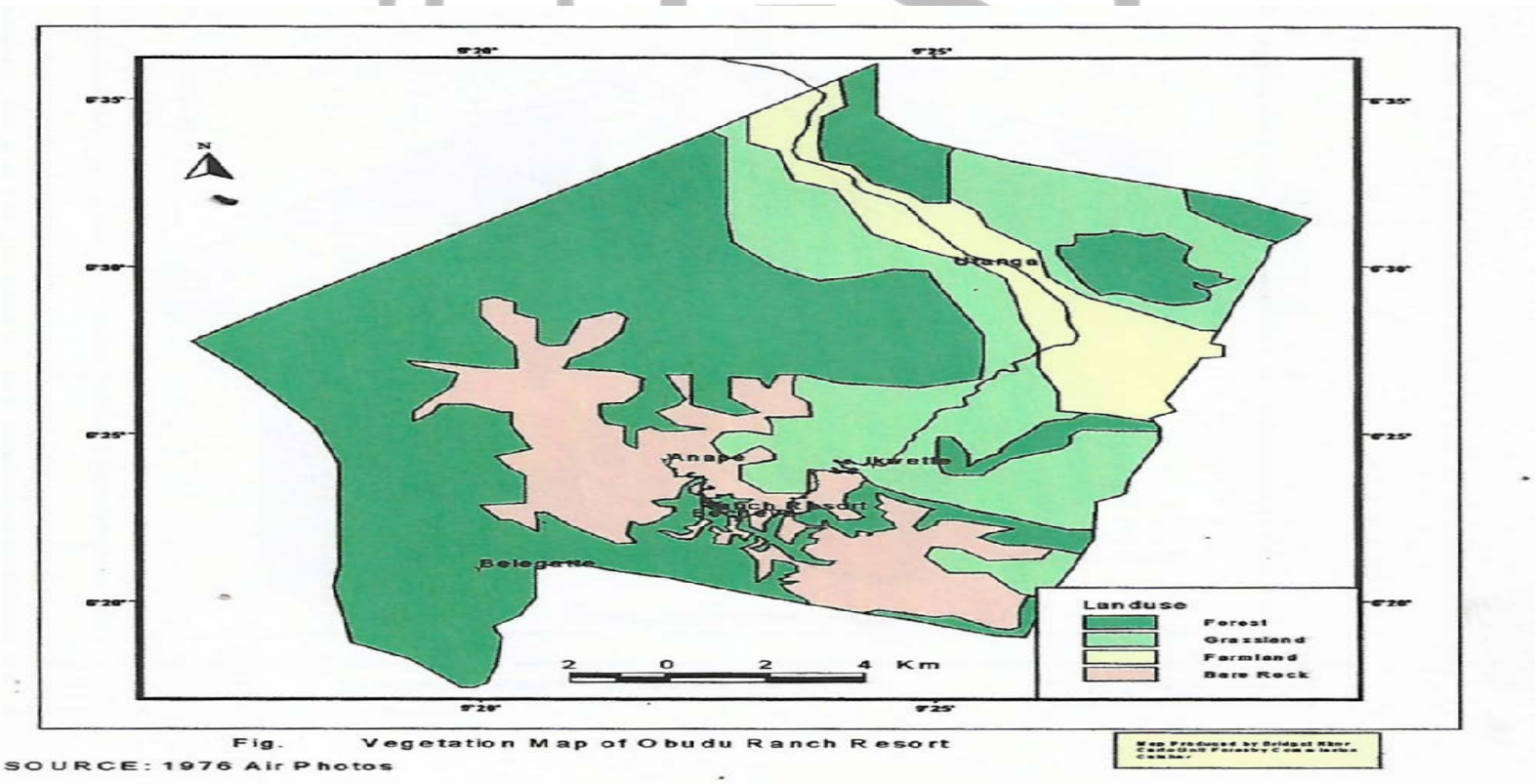


Fig. 2: Vegetation of the Ranch and Environs as at 1976

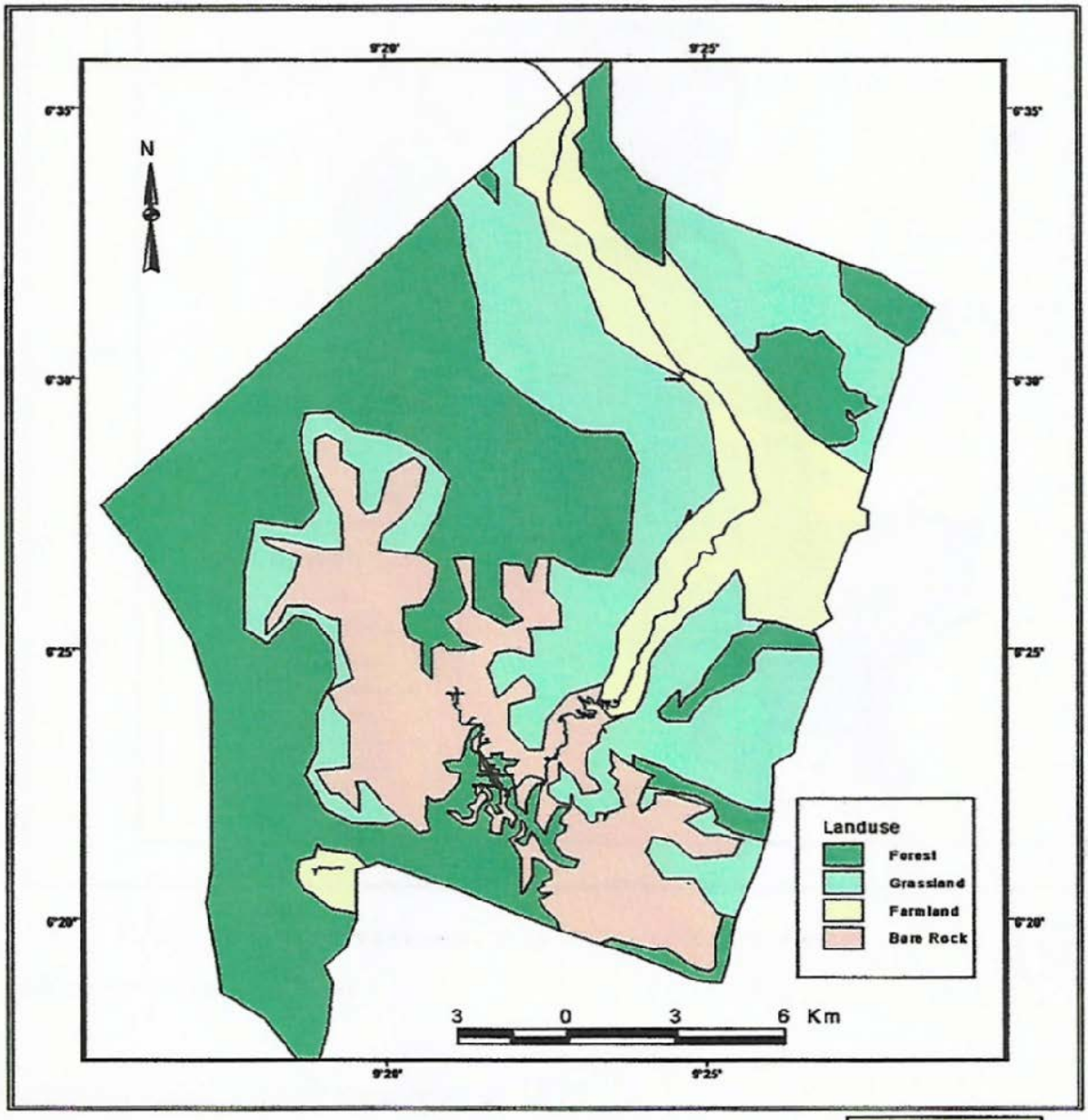


Fig. Vegetation Map of Obudu Ranch Resort

SOURCE: 2002 Landsat Imagery

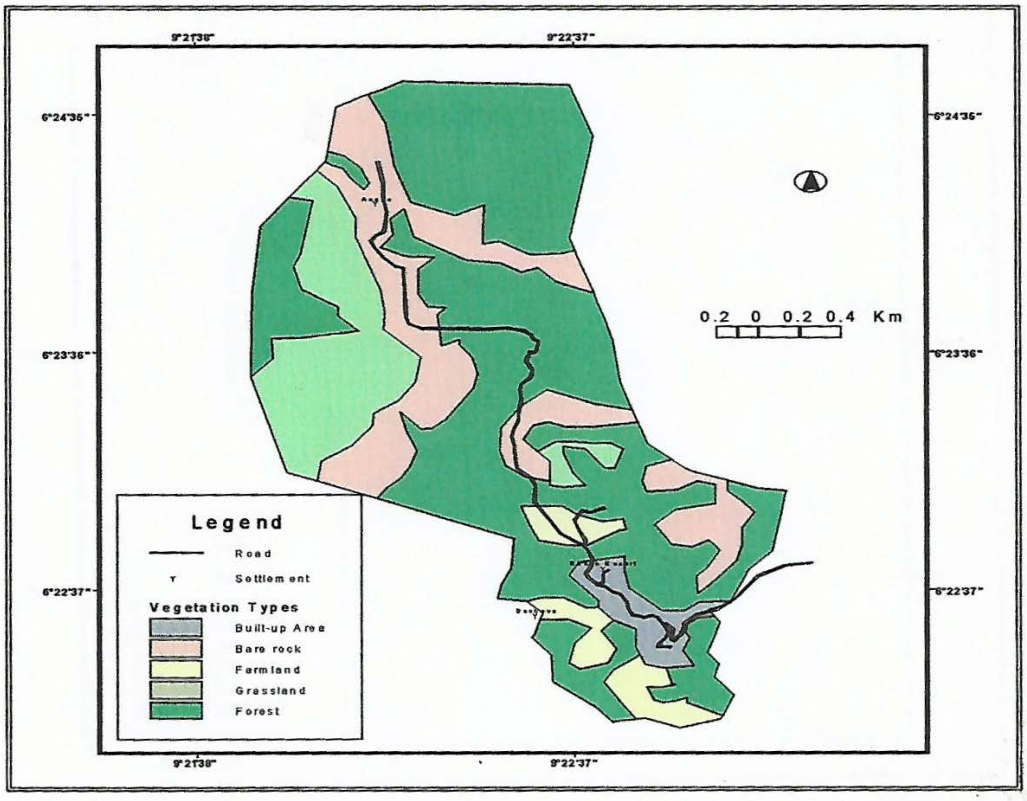
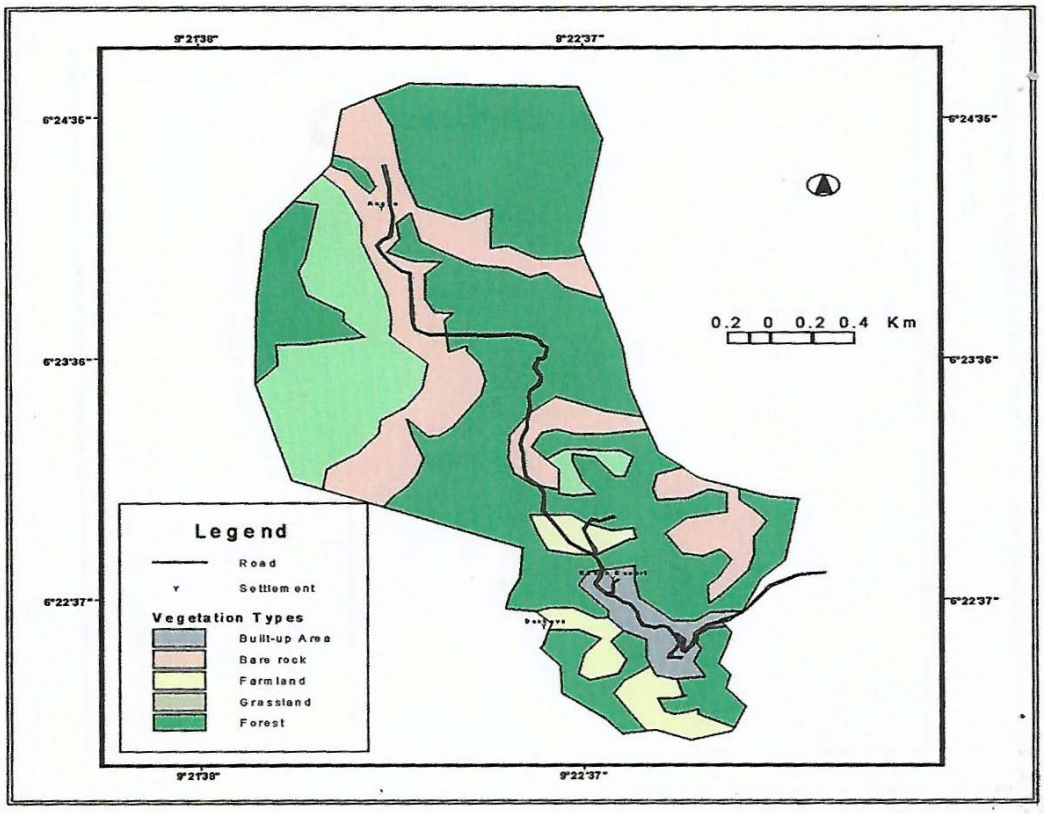


Fig. Vegetation Map of Obudu Ranch Resort

SOURCE: 1976 Air Photos

Fig. 4:



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SOURCE: 1976 Air Photos

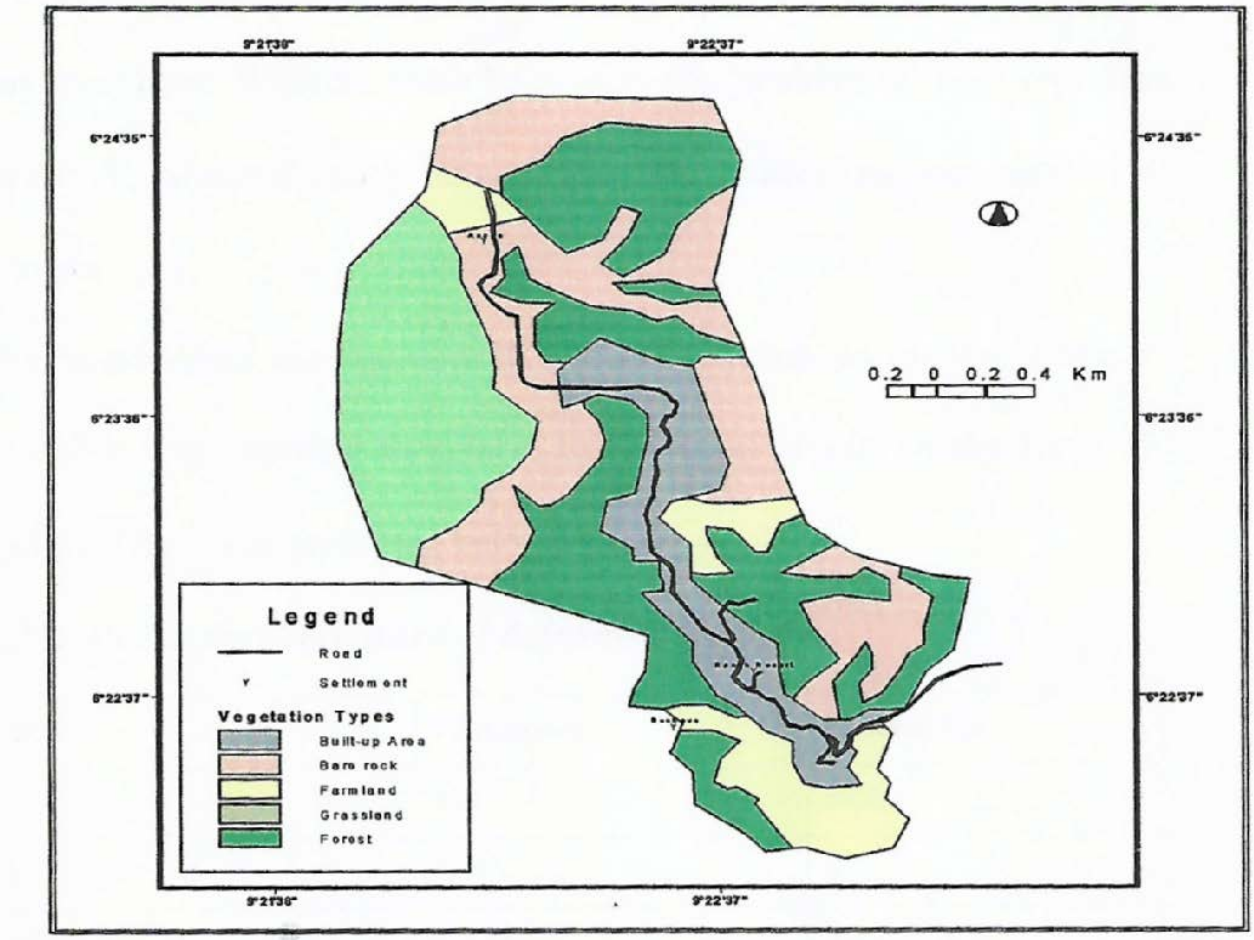

Fig. Vegetation Map of Obudu Ranch Resort

SOURCE: 2002 Landsat Imagery

Vegetation/land cover		**total area over time**		**Change index**
		1976	2002	
Built – up area	-	0.23km^3	0.92km^2	0.69
Bare rock	-	1.3km^2	1.89km^2	0.57
Farmland	-	0.33km^2	0.72km^2	0.39
Grassland	-	0.95km^2	1.23km^2	0.28
Forest	-	3.87km^2	1.99km^2	-1.88

It is clear from the table that a significant change has occurred in the vegetation over time. Whereas there been increase (positive change) built up cover bare rock, farmland and grassland, the forested area has been shrinking over the years.

The respondents also perceived the deforestation as on the increase based in either way whether they have experienced or not on the issue of deforestation. This presented below in table 2

Table 2: Perception of nature of deforestation

Experience	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Increase	131	93.6
Decrease	5	3.6
Undecided	4	2.8
Total	**140**	**100**

Source: Field work 2010

From table 2, the issue of deforestation was agreed by 93.6% (131) of the respondents. While 3.6% (5) of the respondents says no, to have experienced deforestation while 2.8% (4) were undecided on the issue. The forest land is converted to the various uses as presented below.

Table 3: Causes of deforestation

Reason	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Agricultural activities	47	33.6
Housing	39	27.8
Tourism/recreation	9	6.5
Sources of fuel wood	30	21.4
Others	15	10.7
Total	**140**	**100**

Source: Field work 2010

From the above 47 (33.6%) of the respondents agreed that the forest lands are converted purely for agricultural activities. This is followed by housing which constituted 39 (27.8%) of the

respondents. 30 (21.4%) of the respondents attributed the causes to sources of fuel woo by the people of the ranch area. In the area of tourism/recreation 9 (6.5%) the forest land is explained while 0.7% (15) of the total respondents attributed to others.

The issue of deforestation is generally to be because of the high rate of urbanization to increase tourism attraction. In addition 33.6% of the respondents agreed that the forest lands were converted purely for agricultural activities, this is followed by housing which constituted 27.8% of the respondents, 21.4% of the respondents attributed the causes to source of fuel wood by the people of the ranch area and above all the area of tourism/recreation.

CONCLUSION

Moreover, the tourism activities also cause resource depletion, change in ecosystem structure, degradation of important cultural and natural sites, local climate alternation, loss of agricultural productivity land due to change in life style for example, the construction of the cable car station and water park at the bottom hill for instance saw the displacement and relocation of the people of old Ikwette. According to the rural Dwellers.

On the contrary tourism development, which involves spatial reorganization and restructuring, has its environmental cost. As noted by Matheson and Wall (1993) and Pearce (1992), the first major source of environmental stress, resulting from tourism development, is permanent restructuring of the environment, brought about by a variety of major construction activities such as urban development, construction of roads, airports and building or recreational facilities which Obudu is not an exception.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the ranch to maintain it status and semi temperate climate, the management body should intensified environmental conservation and tree planting programmes also they should be fire protection groups to avoid the issue of natural fire that sometimes result to habitual loss and endemic species extinction government should provide something to the indigenes of the host communities like credit facilities to engage them in business and should also award them scholarship to divert their attention from destroying the natural features.

In order to enhance the Obudu cattle Ranch Resort and the Biophysical Environment (natural features) the following recommendations should be taken into consideration.

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