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PROSPECTS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SHASHA FOREST RESERVE, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Forests are located mostly in the rural communities and they contribute substantially to poverty alleviation in such communities. Thus sustainability of Forest Resources is of utmost importance in rural economy. It is therefore being realized globally that for any forestry programme to succeed, it must involve the local communities. In Nigeria, efforts at involving the people in forest management have not been very successful because they did not really address the needs and interests of the people. It is important to know what exactly the people want and the best role they can play in forest management in order to achieve success. This paper therefore investigated the perception of the communities living around Shasha Forest Reserve concerning community forestry and their potential roles in such arrangement. Stratified random sampling was used to select eight of the forty communities within and around the forest reserve. A total of eighty-two questionnaires were administered on three categories of the stakeholders viz: hunters (32); Harvesters/fishermen (40) and forestry official (10). Results indicated that 71% of the respondents are favorably disposed to the idea of community participation in the management of the Forest reserve. Also, community members showed interest in forest protection, commercial seedlings production, maintenance and harvesting operations. There was no evidence of bitter relationship among the stakeholders. A method of benefit sharing was also proposed.

Introduction

The central role of state in natural resources management is challengeable because of its inability to provide the financial resources, personnel and other facilities to ensure sustainable resource management. Evidence from around the world shows that neither state ownership and regulation nor the market have had much success in enabling individuals to sustain long term productive use of natural resources system (Juma and Ojwang 1996). Summarily, communities of individuals have relied on institutions resembling neither the state nor the market to govern some resource systems with reasonable degree of success over long period of time. Many of the planning disasters of the past are now attributed to a failure to understand the prevailing economic and political context in developing countries. Feeney (1998) observed that ignorance of local conditions leads to a lack of commitment on the part of intended beneficiaries. The organization of forest management systems in

Nigeria at the early years was such that the community members were granted some rights to harvest some produce for their domestic needs and community members were involved in forest management activities. According to Osemeobo (2001), all these were soon jettisoned for centralized forest management, which gave little or no recognition to the right and opinion of the indigenous forestland owners. The resultant effect of this is a mutual distrust between the government and the community people. Cases of forestland encroachment, illegal felling, poaching and complete de-reservation of gazetted forest reserves have become very rampant. The country's total forestland, which stood at 9.8% in 1976, had therefore reduced to 5.1% of the country's total land area by 1995 (FIORMECU, 1999). Efforts at involving the rural communities in reforestation activities have failed because the programmes did not fully meet the aspirations and the needs of the local communities (Kio, 2002 and Agbor, 2002).

Thus community participation in resources management has long been realized as a veritable way of achieving sustainable forest management in the country. Although, the mechanisms for its implementation have not been based on proper understanding of the peculiar socio-cultural and economic circumstances of the rural land owners to whom the forests originally belonged.

Different authors have variously conceptualized community participation. Feeney (1998) defined it as an opportunity for citizens as well as public and private organizations to express their opinions on general policy goals or to have their properties and needs integrated into decisions made about specific projects and programmes. This allows members of civil society, particularly the poorest a chance to discuss development plans with the government officials. Tosanwumi (1995), observed that community members will understand and accept best, those actions which they assist to originate. A portion of chapter 26 of Agenda 21, the policy document of the 1992 Earth's Summit states thus: Indigenous people and their communities have historical relationships with their land and "... have developed over many generations a holistic traditional scientific knowledge of their lands, natural resources and environment. National and international effort at implementing environmentally sound and sustainable development should therefore recognize, accommodate, promote and strengthen, the role of indigenous people and their communities". As a matter of fact, the traditional and cultural set up of African countries is such that various communities jointly manage resources. In Nigeria forestlands were communally held and land were only acquired through inheritance or by conquest during wars. Every member of the community sees the land as a legacy passed down by the ancestors and which must be held sacred for the benefit of the coming generation. Hence, the resources were sustainably managed. The traditional rulers/community heads and committee of elders were firmly in control of the land and its resources. Now that it is apparent that the policy of "science and policing" has failed to sustain the forest and its resources, there may be a lot of wisdom in

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to identify the various stakeholders of Shasha forest reserve and their vision for the forest reserve, in order to suggest a mutually acceptable participatory arrangement for the forest reserve.

The Study Area

Shasha forest reserve is situated between latitudes 7° and 7° 30'N and Longitudes 4° and 5° E. The reserve was first gazetted in 1925 under an agreement with Ijebu native authority before it was later reconstituted as Ife native Authority forest reserve following the readjustment of boundaries between Oyo and Ijebu provinces in 1941 (Kio, 1978). The reserve shares boundaries with Omo forest reserve in the west while the Northern and Eastern boundaries are with Ife Native authority forest Reserve (No.2) and Oliwa forest Reserve / Ondo State respectively.

The forest reserve falls within the lowland rainforest region with double maxima rainfall coming in July and September respectively. The total annual rainfall ranges from 887mm to 2,180 mm. The mean annual temperature is 26.5°C. The terrain of the reserve is generally undulating with occasional flat terrains. The geology of the reserve has been described as composing of undifferentiated crystalline rocks of basement complex origin (Bada, 1977). There are at least forty communities living within or outside the reserve boundaries. Immigrant cocoa farmers, hunters and other forest users (who come only occasionally) inhabit the enclaves within the reserve. The major tribes inhabiting the reserve communities are the Yorubas from Ile-Ife, Ikire/Apomu, Ibadan, Ondo, Igbomina and Ila. There are few Hausas and Igbos who are engaged in various non-farm works ranging from harvesting of forest products, hunting, fishing to produce buying.

Method of Data Collection

The study adopted stratified random sampling. The forest reserve communities were stratified into four based on their relative location within or outside the reserve boundaries. Eight of the estimated forty communities were studied comprising of four communities within the reserve and four settlements within six kilometers of the reserve boundaries. On the basis of this the following exercises were carried out:

- (i) Oral interview and village square meetings using the participatory rural appraisal technical (PRAT) to identify the various forest stakeholders; and to familiarize with their socio-cultural characteristics.
- (ii) Three sets of questionnaires totaling 82 were administered on the three categories of stakeholders identified within and around the forest reserve viz: Hunter (32); Harvesters/fishermen (40) and forestry officials (10). The ques-

tionnaires sought information on the preparedness or otherwise of the various groups to participate in the management of the forest reserve; the function they feel they could perform to assist the government in the management of the reserve; the existing relationship between the various stakeholders; and the benefit desired by each stakeholder group.

Results

- (i) *Stakeholders Identification*: Many traditional associations and groups with interest in the management and utilization of the forest reserve were identified in the study area. They include: Hunters' Association, Timber Contractors/Saw millers' Association, Farmers' Association, Traditional Medical Practitioners, Youths' Association, and Cooperative Groups. Other local institutions identified include Traditional chiefs, village heads (Bales) and the elders' society (Ogboni). The state forestry service is a major stakeholder.
- (ii) *Willingness to Participate in Forest Management*: The responses of the community members on their preparedness to participate in the management of the forest reserve were overwhelmingly positive. Twenty-six of the thirty-two hunters (81.3%) interviewed were willing to be involved in forest management. Only six objected to this idea as they doubted the sincerity of the government. In the case of the harvester/fishermen, thirty-two of the forty (80%) of the respondents were ready to participate in the management of the forest reserve. Five of the ten forestry staff was also in support of community participatory (Table 1).

Table 1: Responses of the Various Stakeholders to Community Participation in the Management of Shasha Forest Reserve

| Stakeholders | Responses | | No. of Questionnaires |
|----------------|-----------|----|-----------------------|
| | Yes | No | |
| Hunters | 26 | 6 | 32 |
| Harvesters | 32 | 8 | 40 |
| Forestry Staff | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| Total | 63 | 19 | 82 |

Source: Field Survey, 2001.

- (iii) *Present Level of Community Involvement*: Eight of forestry staff interviewed confirmed that community members were involved in the management of the forest reserve. The area in which community members are involved is Taungya

farming and they also serve as forest labour during harvesting and maintenance operation.

- (iv) *Roles to be Played by Community Members in the Management of Shasha Forest Reserve:* The responses of the various groups on the role(s) they would wish to play in the management of Shasha Forest Reserve is presented in table II. Out of the ten forestry staff interviewed, two (20%) suggested that the community members should be involved in forest protection, six (60%) were of the opinion that they should be involved in forest harvesting while one (10%) each believed that they should be involved in maintenance operations and as joint stakeholders respectively. Eighteen of the thirty-two (56.30%) hunters suggested that they intend to participate in forest protection. Four (12.5%) want to serve as forest labourer while three (9.4%) of them showed interest in game rearing and seven are interested in commercial seedlings production. In the case of the harvesters, twelve of them are interested in seedlings production, while four (10%) of the forty respondents wanted to be involved in forest protection. Eleven (27.5%) wished to be involved in forest labour works. Six (15%) are interested in decision making as joint owners. four (10%) were willing to participate in harvesting of timber and non-timber forest products. Three of them were interested in game rearing.

Table 2: Expected Roles to be played by community Members in the Management of Shasha Forest Reserve

| Stakeholders | Responses | | | | | | No. of Responses |
|----------------------|-----------|----|----|----|---|---|------------------|
| | A | B | C | D | E | F | |
| Forestry Staff | — | 2 | 6 | 1 | 1 | — | 10 |
| Hunters | 7 | 18 | — | 4 | — | 3 | 32 |
| Harvesting/Fishermen | 12 | 4 | 4 | 11 | 6 | 3 | 40 |
| Total | 19 | 24 | 10 | 16 | 7 | 6 | 82 |

Source: Field Survey, 2001.

- NB* A Commercial seedling production
 B Forest protection
 C Forest Harvesting
 D Maintenance operation
 E Joint ownership
 F Game rearing

- (v) Relationships between the various Stakeholders of Shasha Forest Reserve
The various stockholders commented on the existing relationship between them. Table 3 shows a summary of their comments.

Table 3: Relationship between the Various Stakeholder of Shasha Forest Reserve

| Stakeholders | Responses | | | | No. of respondents |
|----------------------|-----------|----------|--------|-------------|--------------------|
| | Cordial | Friendly | Casual | Indifferent | |
| Forestry Staff | 16 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 32 |
| Hunters | 12 | 8 | 12 | 4 | 40 |
| Harvesting/Fishermen | 2 | 4 | 2 | 11 | 10 |
| Total | 30 | 20 | 14 | 16 | 82 |

Source: Field Survey, 2001.

The table above shows the level of cordiality between the forestry officials and the primary stakeholders of the forest reserve. Sixteen (50%) of the thirty-two hunters interviewed affirmed that they enjoyed cordial relationship with the forestry staff and other stakeholders; eight (25%) believed that their relationship with the forestry staff is friendly while four (12.5%) each maintained that their relationship with other stakeholders is casual and indifferent respectively.

Out of the forty harvesters, twelve (30%) say they enjoy cordial relationship with other forest stakeholders. Eight (20%) said their relationship is friendly. Another twelve (30%) believed that they only have a casual relationship with other stakeholders while eight (20%) felt that their relationship is indifferent. In the case of the forestry staff, two (20%) of them said they relate cordially with other stakeholders, four (40%) said that their relationship is friendly. Two of the respondents also believed that their relationship is only casual while another two, (20%) said that he maintained an indifferent attitude with the forest reserve communities.

- (v) *Benefits to be Derived from the Forest Reserve by the Rural Communities:* Results of various meetings and the focus group discussions (FGDs) indicated that Taungya farming is the most important benefit which the communities aspire to obtain from the forest reserve. Although timber production is also very important, it is to them a venture, which benefits the outsiders more than the forest reserve communities. They are also involved in bush meat hunting, fishing and collection of non-timber forest products. The clamour for the provision of social infrastructures is also very loud. They demanded for repair of their roads and bridges and provision of portable waters. The prevailing

social political situation around the forest reserve has also led to some level of distrust between forestry staff and timber contractors. Forestry staff's morale was really very low. They find it more difficult than ever before to enforce forest laws. Timber exploitation is virtually uncontrolled while parts of the forest reserve have been encroached by farmers.

Discussions of Results

The fact that majority of the community members were willing to participate in the management of the forest reserve corroborated the submission of Ajayi (1996) that Nigeria Forestry authorities have neglected the local people who are the original owners of forest land for too long. Giving them an opportunity to participate will provide for them an avenue to air their views on what and how the resources are to be managed for their benefits. Community's enthusiasm to participate in management of forest resources have also been reported by several authors including: Morakinyo (1994) in Ekuri Forest Reserve; Egbuche *et. al* (1995) in Okomu Forest Reserve and Agbor (2002) in Cross River State.

Until recently, taungya farming had been the major way by which community members were involved in forestry in Nigeria (Adebisi, 1996 and Kio, 2002). This however was not very successful because according to Kio (2002), the programme did not really address the needs of the people. The present study indicates that the old practice is still very much in place in Shasha Forest Reserve. However, the impact of taungya on regeneration is still very little. Large areas of exploited natural forest are yet to be regenerated. People expressed desire for farming land through taungya arrangement, but the supervision arrangement on ground is not adequate to properly address this need. The practice of taungya in the forest reserve will contribute to improving the output from the forest in terms of wood, non-wood and arable crops.

From Table 2 it is obvious that community members are willing to provide advisory services and assist in forest protection. This has vital implication for the sustainable management of the forest reserve. If community members are allowed to air their view and these are incorporated into the management plan, it would make such plans mutually acceptable to all concerned. The fact that community members are willing to assist in forest protection is also very strategic. This is because the indigenous people are capable of reducing incidents of theft and other forest offences. They are familiar with the terrain and know virtually all members of their communities, so it is easier for them to detect and check criminals. The involvement of these landowners would also promote a sense of responsibility on the part of the people and lighten the burden of forest protection on the forestry officials.

The benefit the local people wish to derive from the forest reserve include taungya as earlier been discussed. Other benefits are bush meat hunting, fishing and harvest-

ing of non-timber forest products. These aspirations are quite legitimate. It is only pertinent that an appropriate management model that would harmonize these objectives with that of the government be worked out such that the satisfaction of one group would not jeopardize the satisfaction of others. Hence, the principle of multiple use forest management which allows the production of other forest products in addition to timber needs to be carefully incorporated into the management of the forest reserve.

Conclusions

There is very good prospect for involving the forest reserve communities in the management of Shasha Forest Reserve. The major stakeholders could work together provided they are properly organized and adequately monitored by the forestry authority. The yearnings of the people for taungya farming and harvesting of non-timber forest products could be accommodated in the forest reserve if proper multiple use planning is put in place. The forestry Department stands to gain from this gesture in terms of gaining the confidence of the stakeholders and reducing the burden and probably the cost of forest protection.

Recommendations

The forest reserve needs to be properly assessed to know exactly its extent and the resources therein. This has not been done for a very long time. Effective multiple use planning to accommodate the various stakeholders interests will definitely necessitate a detailed inventory. The reserve boundaries should be clearly re-established, as many of them have been encroached.

In order to encourage the local communities and obtain their goodwill, it is proposed that revenues from the forest reserve be shared in the ratio 1:1:2 in favour of Communities, Forests Regeneration Fund and Government respectively. Each community should have a committee to judiciously utilize such funds for community development projects. In addition, seedlings for regeneration should be purchased from community nurseries in order to empower the community members economically, thereby alleviating rural poverty. Hunting and fishing activities within the forest reserve should be regulated in order to ensure sustainability.

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