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## **Inclusive Management for Sustainable Development: the Case of Government-Community Partnership in Forest Management in Nigeria since Independence**

By Remijus Friday Obinta

### **Abstract**

This paper argued that the sustainability of forest resources management in Nigeria is dependent upon the government partnering with the rural communities as stakeholders in its administration and benefit sharing. It considered the extant debates by development and policy implementation scholars on the appropriate development and policy models capable of assuring efficiency and sustainability in the administration of societies. The paper found existing debates to include, among others, top-down model; bottom-up model and the hybrid model respectively as they affected forest resources management. It found that none of the above policy development models had, in itself, led to sustainable management of the forest resources. The paper found that the local communities participated actively in the Nigeria's colonial forest management. It discovered that both individual scholars and even the United Nations' Agencies had recommended the inclusion of the local communities in the forest management schemes for sustainability. It further uncovered that community participation in forest management was discarded shortly after independence in the country and the governor of each state assumed authority to solely manage the forests in a top-down fashion. It found that the local communities, as the closest neighbours of the forest reserves, caused the greatest amount of damage to the forests, their resources and their ecosystems as they partly depended on the forests for livelihood. It also found that government-community joint forest management was tried in only one of the thirty-six states making up Nigeria in the early 1990s with remarkable success. It found that the other thirty-five states did not emulate that fruitful collaborative gesture in their respective states. The paper found joint control and benefit-sharing as effective incentives capable of attracting the local communities into sustainable forest management. It uncovered that the benefit of this partnership in favour of sustainable forest management were numerous. It finally found that the failure to include the local communities in Nigeria's forest management was partly responsible for the country's high ranking among the most deforested countries around the world. The paper concluded that the sustainability of the forest resources and their management in Nigeria is directly contingent upon government-community collaborations in mutually beneficial ways.

Key words: inclusive management, sustainable development, forest management, government-community partnership.

**Key words:** Inclusive Management; Sustainable Development; Government-Community Partnership; Forest Management; Nigeria

### **Citation Format**

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### **Introduction**

This study was approached from the perspective that sustainable forest management is contingent upon functional and robust collaborations between the government and the respective local communities within whose neighbourhoods the forest reserves were located. The paper did not pretend to claim originality over the above position. Rather, it was applied to analyse the forest management situation in Nigeria with a view to highlighting the benefits inherent in its application and the possible dangers for not doing so. This collaborative forest management perspective had gained currency way back in the 1980s. The United Nations' Commission on Environment (also known as the Brundtland Commission) was set up in 1983 to investigate the challenges facing sustainable environmental resources management and to make appropriate recommendations to address these challenges (Brundtland Report, 1987).

At least, three of the findings of that Commission, as contained in its report, were relevant to the theme of this paper. The first was that, as at 1987, the population growth rate around the world could no longer be sustained by the available natural resources (Brundtland Report, 1987). The second was that extreme poverty had predisposed the rural poor, and other forest users, to overexploit the forests. The third was that from that point onward, individual member countries could no longer be left to themselves in matters of forest and environmental resources management. The United Nations, through the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), was to oversee and ensure that member nations monitored and ensured the uses of their natural resources sustainably. Another study by the World Bank also reemphasised the same view above. It even went further to declare that the bulk of the rural poor that put that much pressure on the forests and natural resources were located in the Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank publication, 1996). The findings of the two reports above did agree that sustainability of forest management must factor in the rural poor that were in the majority in the Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Related Literature to Public (Forestry) Policy Implementation**

Extant literature on public policy implementation generally and forestry policy implementation especially do unanimously point to the fact that a great deal of dichotomy existed between public policy formulation (forestry inclusive) on the one hand, and their correct implementation on the other. Different scholars have adduced an array of reasons why this had had to be so. One of such studies engaged earlier studies on public policy implementation with a view to synthesising them and coming up with a more consensual position (Pulz and Treib, 2007). They first examined the works of scholars whose views were described as top-down theories. This implied that scholars whose works were so described placed overriding emphasis on the positions and views of the government officials as the public policy makers over and above the inferior civil servants that have the duty of implementing the policies as well as the bureaucratic intricacies involved in the implementation of such policies. The top-down theory proponents cared much less about the potential influence the implementers of these policies might exercise on them which could actually get the policies modified or altered before eventually getting to the end users (the people).

Also, the paper discussed studies by some other group of scholars known generically as bottom-up theorists. This category of works placed preponderance of emphasis on the often

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overlooked roles and powers of the policy implementers on the field. They held that though these usually involved low-cadre civil servants often despised or looked down upon, they actually wielded enormous powers among the recipients of the policy actions. First, they were the representatives of the government to the people and they bridged the gap between the two. Similarly, it is their own interpretation of the policy, which they actually implemented on the field, that ultimately constituted the policy to the people and not necessarily what was exactly written in the books.

Finally, the third category in the groups of policy implementation researchers were those scholars identified as ‘hybrid theorists’ (Pulz and Treib, 2007). This group enunciated the necessity of marrying the top-down and bottom-up theories in a complementary manner. This was to allow for the overcoming of the ideological and theoretical weaknesses that each of them might contain when considered independently. They held the view that a positive synthesis of the two would better serve the purpose of arriving at a more effective and efficient public policy implementation. Pulz and Treib concluded their ‘implementing public policy’ discourse by affirming that in an effort to move our knowledge of public policy implementation forward, implementation researchers should endeavour to explore new research options and directions. This new direction should especially aspire towards more mutual awareness of other scholars’ findings on policy implementation research. This, they were convinced, would positively move the field of policy implementation research forward in a collaborative way.

In the same vein, another study did illustrate the possible impact of the people at the grassroots on the forest policy outcomes on the fields (Vasan, 2002). It showed that the forest guards who were charged with the responsibility of policing government forest reserves and ensuring sustainable management in India often, in collusion with the local peoples, undermined that objective. It further showed that since the forest reserves were located in the rural areas and the forest guards, the most junior in the forestry departments, were the most visible to the local forest users, their actions were central to effective forest management. The study also found that these forest guards sometimes colluded with the local peoples to undermine forest management by failing to report some forest crimes they witnessed on the fields.

The Indian scenario discussed above was similar to the situation in forest management in Nigeria where the understaffing condition and poor remuneration in the forestry departments had predisposed disaffected forestry staff members to collude with the local peoples and forest users to plunder the forest reserves (Popoola, 2014.). The useful take away from Vasan’s and Popoola’s studies of forest management in India and Nigeria was that sitting in the forestry departments and formulating forestry policies and laws was not a sufficient guarantee of effective forest management without carrying the local peoples along. The local peoples were more prone to undermine forest policy implementation once they could secure the cooperation of some corruptible forest guards. This was because they were used to the forests since the pre-colonial times and would need closer monitoring to stay away from the forests. It was, therefore, not likely that a forest management programme that was not inclusive of the local communities around the forest reserves could ensure sustainable forest management.

### **Background to Forest Management at Independence in Nigeria**

Nigeria attained political independence from Britain on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1960. Since this paper commenced at independence, a brief background to forest management before that period would facilitate a clearer understanding of the factors that collectively influenced the forest administration up until that time. Modern forest management system was introduced into Nigeria by the British colonial administrators. This was necessitated by their desire to regulate

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and curb the rate of deforestation in the 1880s (Omosini, 1978). The slash and burn farming practice coupled with large scale opening up of virgin forests for the cultivation of newly introduced cash crops like cocoa and rubber (among others), was considered unsustainable by the governments (Berry, 1975). They proposed to introduce forest reservation to protect the forests and preserve their resources. The Nigerian land owners opposed the forest reservation proposal for years for fear that it might occasion permanent forfeiture of their ancestral lands. They had been so used to their ancestral lands and had depended on these forests for their welfare (Adeyoju, 1977). They could not comprehend giving up those lands to the European rulers only to require permits to enter them.

After much correspondences between Lagos Colony and the Secretary of States for the Colonies in London over the issue, the Governor of Lagos Colony and Protectorate obtained the permission to reserve forests for the government and the first forest reserve in Nigeria (Mamu Forest Reserve, Ibadan) was constituted on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1899 (Forestry Ordinance of Nigeria, 1916). Subsequently, other forest reserves later began to follow in various parts of Nigeria, spreading out from the Lagos Colony and Protectorate. Pertinent to be noted here was the fact that inclusive forest management was practised by the British Colonial administrators throughout the period of colonial rule in Nigeria. The very spirit of indirect rule system was visibly demonstrated in their mode of forest administration.

To begin with, the colonial authorities did not tamper with the indigenous peoples' land tenure rights, at least in principle. They held that all reserved forested lands and other lands put to public use were only held in trust by the governments on the peoples' behalf. It was for this reason that the land titles of the original land owners were retained and they were paid royalties annually from the proceeds realised from those forest reserves. The forest reserves were administered at two levels. There were the Native Authority Forest Reserves as well as the Provincial Forest Reserves. It should be stated, however, that the whole process of forest reservation weakened the economic base of the local land owners in Nigeria (Shokpeka and Nwaokocha, 2009). The Native Administration Forest Reserves were administered by the respective traditional rulers, known under the Indirect Rule system as Native Authorities. On the other hand, the Provincial Forest Reserves were managed by the British colonial officers in Nigeria. This dual colonial forest management scheme gave the local peoples a sense of belonging in the management of their forest estate. The royalties they also collected annually equally mitigated their sense of loss in respect of the lands they had forfeited for the purposes of forest reservation in Nigeria (Bridges, 1934).

Right from the beginning of forest reservation in the colonial times in Nigeria, the objective targeted was to bring, at least, twenty percent of the country's total landmass under reservation (Annual Report, 1921). As at independence, less than ten percent of Nigeria's total land was under reservation (Agricultural Development Plan, 1974). Even though the colonial forest reservation target was not exactly met at independence, the colonial governments managed their forest reserves comparatively more sustainably than their post-independence counterparts. The colonial forest managers strictly ensured that forest timbers were only harvested with the use of the forest action plans.

The Forest Action Plan was an official document annually issued from the Forestry Departments setting out, in great details, the conditions under which timbers might be harvested from a given forest reserve. The chief goal of the forest action plan was to ensure that deforestation was less than or equal to reforestation. This was to make sure that the harvest of mature timbers in any given year did not exceed the rate of replanting of tree seedlings. More importantly, the forest action plan was to ensure that replanting of harvested

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timbers was done tree for tree. For instance, it was not acceptable, under this practice, for a timber contractor to fell an Iroko tree (*Milicia exelsa*) and then replant Bush Mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*). This forest harvesting policy was aimed at preventing species extinction possibly attendant upon the overexploitation of a particular tree species without commensurate replanting of same.

### **The Place of Local Communities in Sustainable Forest Management**

Any plan aimed at managing forest resources in a sustainable way cannot exclude the local communities and hope to succeed. A number of reasons could explain this position. To begin with, most of the lands constituted as government forest reserve originally belonged to these indigenous local people. These people had depended on those forests to meet an array of their survival needs. Apart from timber for household furniture, the forests also provided a lot of other non-timber forest products useful for their livelihood. Wood fuel was among the most recurring need from the forests since the rural poor depended on this predominantly for their cooking. They also gathered edible fruits and other food items like mushrooms, vegetables, bush meats, canes and brushes for weaving mats and other useful handicraft materials. Leaves, barks and roots of forest trees were also collected as medicinal herbs among others. In creating the forest reserves, the governments were quite mindful of these other useful purposes the forest reserves served to the people. Consequently, the governments made allowance for the collection of these items from the reserve only upon paying prescribed fees and obtaining relevant permits as appropriate. However, due to poor forest policing on the part of the forestry departments, the rural dwellers, most of the times, harvested these non-timber forest products without necessary permits and in unsustainable ways.

### **Forest Management in the Post-independence Nigeria**

Several factors collectively impacted negatively upon the management of forest resources in Nigeria beginning from shortly after its attainment of political independence in 1960. One of such factors was the discovery of petroleum resources in the twilight of colonial rule in 1958 (Food and Agricultural Organisation Paper, 2001). Before that discovery, Nigeria's economy was predominantly agrarian. Cocoa, groundnuts, palm oil and raw timber were among its export products. With petroleum resources as the major source of foreign exchange earnings in Nigeria, especially from the early 1970s, agriculture and forestry were among the sectors of the economy that began to suffer sustained neglect from the successive governments. Less and less attention was paid to the forest management as was obtainable under the colonial administrations.

Another factor that hindered sound forest management in Nigeria was the abolition of the Native (and later Local) Authority Forest Reserves and Forest Services in the early 1970s (Obinta, 2016). One of the reasons given for the abolition was that the local authorities, as at that time, lacked the financial and human resources and the expertise needed to run the reserves efficiently. With the interference of the Nigerian military in the country's politics, beginning from 1966, the constitution was set aside and a lot of arbitrary reforms were made without reference to or sufficient regard for the existing relational patterns between the government and the local peoples. One of such reforms was the summary scrapping of the Local Authority Forest Reserves and Services referred to above. Such reserves were simply converted to the state government forest reserves. This particular reform technically excluded or disconnected the local people from the management of the forest estate of which they had been recognised stakeholders since the colonial times.

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Furthermore, the Nigerian government enacted the land Use Act of 1978 to modify the mode of land ownership and land titles in the country. Under the new law, ownership of all lands was taken away from the indigenous people who, up until then, had enjoyed ancestral and customary titles over same (Idowu, 2015). The governor of each state in Nigeria was now vested with the right of ownership over all lands to be held in trust for the citizens of the respective states. This new law had far reaching implications for the predominantly agrarian local peoples whose continuous livelihood were tied to land. In addition to forfeiting their land titles, the forest royalties they had been receiving annually from the proceeds of the forest reserves equally summarily ceased. With the cessation of the payment of royalties, the people were totally alienated from their lands as the royalties represented their annual compensation for the lands they had given up for forest reservation.

### **Government-Community Collaboration in Forest Management in Nigeria**

A community-forestry related article was written on Cross-River State of Nigeria to show the results of government-community partnership in forest management (Babalola, 2009). It discussed the importance of forest-dependent rural communities to sustainable forest resources management. It highlighted a new forest management perspective that placed ‘people and forest’ first and ‘investors in the forest’ second. The study identified Cross River State as the only place in Nigeria, beginning from 1991, where practical involvement of the rural dwellers in active forest management had been experimented. It found community based forest management to be a possible answer to the earlier failed attempts at managing forest resources sustainably. Selected communities in Cross River State were encouraged by the state Forestry Commission to constitute themselves into Forest Management Committees to manage forests in their neighbourhood at the local level.

These Committees worked in collaboration with the state Forestry Commission that inaugurated and performed oversight functions over them. These Local Committees were given free hands to enact bye laws that reflected local peculiarities regarding forest resources management. These communities were also given a measure of access to the forest products and the proceeds from these were used to fund developmental projects directly beneficial to the people in these communities in Cross River State. The study uncovered that the involvement of the local communities in Cross River State in forest management in a way materially beneficial to them did actually motivate them to actively manage, police and check unsustainable forestry practices among themselves on behalf of the State Forestry Commission. The study concluded that the joint forest management experiment succeeded commendably in Cross River State. It also canvassed for the continuation of this government-local community partnership in sustainable forest management as well as the replication of same in other states in Nigeria.

The findings of Babalola’s paper presented above did show the challenge of lack of continuity of government policies in Nigeria. Even though he had found that the partnership in forest management between the government and the people had ensured sustainability while it was practised, there was no evidence that it continued beyond the 1990s. There had also been no evidence that any other state in Nigeria had similarly partnered with the local people to manage their forest estate at the local level in a sustainable way. This situation was partly accounted for by the instability in Nigeria’s governance in the 1990s. Nigeria was, for the most of the 1990s, under the military rule with each state doing its own thing and with one government overthrowing another in military coups in quick succession. This non-inclusion of the local people in forest administration was partly responsible for the apathy showed by these people towards forest protection and their inclination to even plunder the forests as much as possible.

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### **Potential Benefits of Joint Forest Management**

Quite a lot of benefits are inherent in the collaborative forest management arrangements between the governments and the local communities. The mere sense of belonging at being included in the forest management scheme would secure the goodwill of these local people towards managing the forests sustainably. Once these peoples were motivated towards collaborating to manage the forest resources, they will become very useful in forest policing and protection. This was because they lived close to these reserves and they almost knew one another and could easily identify strangers around the forests. They could report forest encroachment or theft to the appropriate quarters and help reduce deforestation.

Even more importantly for the local communities, benefit sharing, like in the case of the Cross River State related above, would go a long way in alleviating rural poverty which, in itself, was a push factor towards deforestation and plundering of the forest resources. In the same vein, the collaboration would afford the governments the opportunities to gradually but steadily orientate the people away from overreliance on fuel wood as energy source. This might entail empowering them to consider other eco-friendly energy alternatives like bio-fuel and other non-wood energy sources. It would also afford the government the opportunity to create necessary awareness among the people on the many benefits of green environment, especially the impacts on climate change and global warming.

Another vital area that joint forest management would enhance was the orientation and mobilisation of the local people towards tree planting. There had been tree planting campaigns in Nigeria but it had, in most cases, been half hearted and without sufficient empowerment and enabling environment. Allied to this was motivating the peoples towards investing in private forestry. Hitherto, private forest ownership in Nigeria had remained an elitist business venture accessible only to the very rich few who could afford the huge financial outlay that such investment required. This was because banks in Nigeria were not willing to provide credit facilities to fund forest investments because it took ten to fifteen years before the commencement of returns on investment. The only or the more viable way for potential investors in private forests to access funding was for the governments to arrange for credit facilities for potential investors. All the above and, perhaps, many more are the potential benefits obtainable from the government and the people collaborating to manage forest resources in sustainable ways.

### **Consequences of the Absence of Government-Community Partnership in Forest Management**

There were a number of negative consequences attendant upon the absence of collaborative management of the forest resources between the governments and the local communities. The first one had to do with the feeling of alienation by the local people who had been part of the management scheme under colonial rule through the Native Authority system (Obinta, 2016). This resulted in sheer disinterest, by the local people, in forest protection matters since they felt it was not going to serve their interests. These local people literally plundered the forests to extract all they could for their livelihood. These rural dwellers also caused much loss of needed revenues to the government. This they did through the evasion of all relevant taxes legally required before entering the reserves to harvest its resources. This evasion also made it very difficult for the forestry department to keep proper records of the resources extracted from the forest reserves.

Moreover, while tree planting campaigns and awareness were being occasionally carried out in Nigeria, the responses from the local people towards these efforts had not been encouraging. The same apathy was demonstrated towards private forest ventures. The people did

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not readily see the potential environmental and financial benefits obtainable from private forest investment. Only very few enlightened rural dwellers could appreciate the usefulness of the green environment. The overall implications of the failure, by the Nigerian government to incorporate the local communities into the forest management plans was the incremental rate of deforestation which had seriously threatened the sustainability of forest resources in the foreseeable future.

### **Conclusion**

This paper had discussed the importance of the need for the Nigerian government to incorporate the local communities into their forest management plans for it to be effective and sustainable. It observed that this view was widely shared by earlier studies on the possible methods of sustainable forest management. The paper found that modern forest management was introduced to Nigeria by the colonial governments and the local people were part and parcel of the colonial forest administration. It also uncovered that the colonial forest service, in Nigeria, did not tamper with the traditional land tenure system but, instead, paid annual royalties to land title holders throughout the colonial period in acknowledgement of their land ownership. The paper further found that, even though the colonial forest managers in Nigeria had targeted conserving, at least, twenty percent of the country's total land areas as forest reserves, less than ten percent was under reservation before they granted independence to Nigeria in 1960.

The paper reported an earlier study on Nigeria which showed that one state in Nigeria had experimented with government-community partnership in forest management with success. It also found that this inclusive forest administration did not endure beyond the 1990s due to lack of continuity in many Nigerian government policies as well as government instability and military interference with politics. The paper went further to identify the benefits inherent in the inclusive or collaborative forest management system if embraced. It equally pointed out the dangers of neglecting to incorporate the local peoples into the forest management schemes. It then concluded that the sustainability of forest resources and their management in Nigeria is directly contingent upon government-community collaborations in mutually beneficial ways.



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