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## **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES THROUGH PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Human activities and nature conservation can hardly be divorced from their complex socio-cultural history. In the quest for a sustainable community forest management to improve livelihoods and protect nature, conflicts and crises of varying degrees have occurred among indigenous peoples in such areas or communities. Some argue that such restrictions reduce their capacity of production systems and abuse their fundamental rights. Various national governments have not been too sensitive in this area relating to abuse of rights. It should be noted however that there are extensive literatures on how community-based conservation are increasingly merging into that of rural sustainable livelihoods. This paper takes a cursory look into the concept and meaning of community management and sustainable development, conflicts of interest in indigenous knowledge systems and in agro-livelihoods, indigenous knowledge systems and agro forestry development, participatory approaches in community forest management, environmental and social impacts of community forest management with specific examples in Southern Nigeria etc. The implications of community-based conservation of forests and the implications on youths development in Nigeria were also discussed. Suggestions and recommendations were also given in strengthening the model of community-based forest management to improve sustainable rural livelihoods without any infringement whatsoever on the peoples' rights particularly the youths on means to eke out a decent living.*

**Key words:** Techniques, Sustainable, Community Forest, Participatory Approaches, Livelihoods, Indigenous Peoples, Conflicts

## **INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT**

Since independence, most African countries have intensified efforts on nature conservation particularly in areas of aforestation and reforestation programmes. The urge to ameliorate harsh climatic changes on the environment coupled with decreasing farm productivity and harvests are making various national governments to gear up for action on how to make the environment generally friendly and sustainable. Aside from climatic variations, the economic, political and human pressures on the land are ever increasing at an alarming rate. The increasing pressure on environment caused by over population and cultivation resulting in soil degradation has lately stimulated greater interest in agro forestry practices. Agro forestry is an activity of major global importance for about an estimated one billion people which is 20 percent of the world population that depends to a large extent on agro forestry products and services for their livelihoods (Garrett *et al*, 2000)

There is a steady decline in productive capacity of most farm lands in the tropics mainly due to decrease in bush fallow period. With increasing population growth and urbanization; land is becoming increasingly unavailable to justify long period of bush fallow as an effective soil management strategy. The continuous degradation of the forest reserve base has major effects on other important segments of the economy. This is manifested with rapid disappearance of forest cover leading to

erosion, loss of biodiversity, soil degradation and unfavorable hydrological changes (Awero, 2001).

Agboola (2000) affirmed that shifting cultivation (bush fallow) system practiced in the humid tropics is an effective and stable method of soil management when land available is unlimited. The reduced fallow period has exposed farm lands to constant cultivation, deforestation and soil erosion, thereby aggravating the decline in soil fertility and stabilization. He observed further that with the reduced period of bush fallow, most farmlands in the tropics have remained poor and demand for inorganic fertilizers that are often scarce, unaffordable and unavailable is on the increase. Soil erosion, bush burning and deforestation have remained serious problems to agricultural lands management, as our farmer cultivate even on fragile ecosystems. Large herds of free-grazing livestock degrade the vegetation base. These practice lead to marginal rain-fed terraces being abandoned and the waste land around human settlements going on the increase.

Garrett *et al* (2000) defined Agro forestry as the combination of agricultural and forestry technologies to create integrated, diverse and productive land use system. As a land-use formula, it serves the diverse needs of individual farmers in harnessing the natural resources around them as this cannot be reconciled by the traditional crop system. It involves the combination of trees and crops that increase the



medicinal environmental and economic value of land with the much needed profit and food security.

Over the years, there is increase in human competition of activities between land for food and arable crops production, livestock grazing and for other human uses. In view of these competitions between human and animal needs, there is the need for community forest management initiatives that will involve all stakeholders in such a manner that will be sustainable without any pressure on their means of livelihoods.

Community forest management or social forestry goals most commonly include empowering 'the weaker sectors' of local communities through active participation in the management and use of forests; promoting a corporative structure to articulate the interests and voices of local people; meeting local forestry need; and promoting self-sufficiency and social equity among local communities (Rahman, 1992; Task Force, 1987). To achieve some of these goals, social forestry also (directly or implicitly) aim to empower local people to free themselves.

Forestry is the business of managing forest lands and the resources to produce economically useful goods and services. The trees and other vegetation as well as the soil which support them are important bases for forest management. The nature of the forest is diverse depending on the soil and climatic condition prevailing over a specific region of the world. Many forest types can be distinguished indicating the type of tree vegetation and ecosystem prevailing in a given area

In Bangladesh and the neighboring South Asian countries, social forestry (SF) is used rather flexibly as an umbrella term for public, private and communal initiatives for ensuring "active participation by the rural people in planning, implementation and benefit-sharing of tree growing schemes"(Task Force, 1987)". SF is viewed here within the broader framework of rural development. It include aforestation programmes in marginal and degraded state and communal forest lands; village woodlots; farm forestry; strip plantations alongside railways, highways and embankments; community plantations' on public or communal joint management and benefit-sharing arrangements between the government and local communities; homestead forestry (home-gardens); and varied other manifestations of agro-forestry.

According to William, Massoud and Othman (1998) there is a range of community participation' approaches that have been developed in association with nature conservation and sustainable resource use programmes. Although there are many variations, these approaches can be grouped as:

Community service and out-reach programmes: often established in association with protected area management with the aim of resolving conflicts between the protected areas and surrounding communities through relation building and community development projects funded from protected area revenues. An example of such a programme is the Tanzania



National Parks Community Service 'SCIP' programme.

Integrated Conservation with Development Projects: piloted in the 1980s, these projects sought to bridge conflicts between conservation and development but focusing on the linkages while emphasizing the maintenance of biodiversity. The projects aim to facilitate the participation of local people in planning and decision-making processes of the protected area while simultaneously trying to address the social and economic requirements of participating communities (Stocking and Perkin, 1992). There are numerous examples of ICDPs, such as those at the East Usambara forest, Tanzania and the Impenetrable Forest, Uganda.

Community-based conservation programmes: developed in Zambia (ADMADE) and Zimbabwe (CAMPFIRE) in the 1980s with variable success, these programmes sought, at least in part, to empower communities to manage their own wildlife resources as means for development and conservation. This was done by variably endowing participating communities with rights of resource custodianship, management and revenue retention. A large emphasis is placed on community institution strengthening, and development of micro-economic management skills and capabilities.

### **Agro-livelihoods and conflicts of interest in development initiatives**

Agro-livelihoods is defined as a situation whereby the indigenous people in a particular area are engaged in a

continuous cultivation of arable crops, trees of economic values and keeping of livestock without necessarily depleting forest resources to earn daily living. On the other hand, it can be defined as a sustainable management of land, with cultivation of forest trees with available crops or pastures or both simultaneously or sequentially with applied management compatible with the cultural pattern with local people. In Nigeria, for almost four decades now, the Taungya system of agriculture has successfully complemented the nomadic system to enhance crop yield thereby raising arable crops in agro forestry. This maximizes the use of available land on multi-purpose basis.

Conflicts emanating from appropriate use of land for arable crops cultivation, forest trees production and pastoral farming had been on the increase in several communities in Nigeria in the last decades. The increase in competition of human activities between land for food and arable crops production, livestock grazing and for other economic uses and attendant crises had been sources of worry for local and state governments in Nigeria. The Fulani herdsmen of Northern Nigeria are nomadic in nature and this makes them to move continuously in search of pastures from place to place. In doing this, they encounter disaffection from local communities as their herds destroy farmlands and growing crops. This invariably creates conflicts of high magnitude in such local environments leading to loss of lives and properties as regularly reported in the daily newspapers. In view of these competitions between human and

animal needs, there is the need for community forest management initiatives that will involve all stakeholders in such a manner that will be sustainable without any pressure on daily means of livelihoods of the farmers and other stakeholders.

According to Warner and Jones (1998) the word 'conflict' carries negative connotations. It is often thought of as the opposite of cooperation and peace, and is most commonly associated with violence or the threat of violence. This view of conflict is not always helpful. In many settings it should be seen as a potential force for positive social change; its presence is a visible demonstration of society adapting to a new political, economic or physical environment.

'Good governance', democratic involvement and strengthening of civil society are common conflict prevention strategies. Less common but of increasing interest is the use of targeted programmes of conventional community development (education, health, Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), etc; (Graig *et al*, 1998).

Conflicts can be categorized in terms of whether they occur at the micro-micro levels, among community groups or between community groups and outside organizations (Grimble and Willard, 1997). Micro-micro conflicts can be further categorized as taking place either within the group directly involved (e.g. between this group and those not directly involved (e.g. between the 'user' group and women entering the forest to collect fuel-wood) (Conroy *et al*, 1998). In extreme cases conflict over natural resource management can escalate into physical violence.

According to Warner and Jones (1998), in the context of conflict within CBNRM it is helpful to distinguish three broad types of ownership/ management:

Community owned, community managed (e.g. rotational grazing of communal land);

Community owned managed (e.g. harvesting or processing of communally owned forests by commercial logging companies); and

Outside owned, community managed (e.g. community group management of state owned forest reserves)

Each of these regimes can be either initiated by local people themselves or by some external government, non-governmental or private organizations.

According to Warner and Jones (1998) the options in conflict management include:

**Force** – adversarial negotiations, legal channels, some electoral systems, mass media to rally public support, public protest, threat of withdrawal, lobbying.

**Withdrawal** – avoidance, opting out, deployment of delaying tactics, postponement of decision, temporary boycott, strikes

**Accommodation** – maintain relationships, goodwill' nurtured

**Compromise** – arbitration, cost-benefit analysis, trade-offs

**Consensus** – direct consensual negotiation (no facilitator), third party facilitated/mediated negotiations.

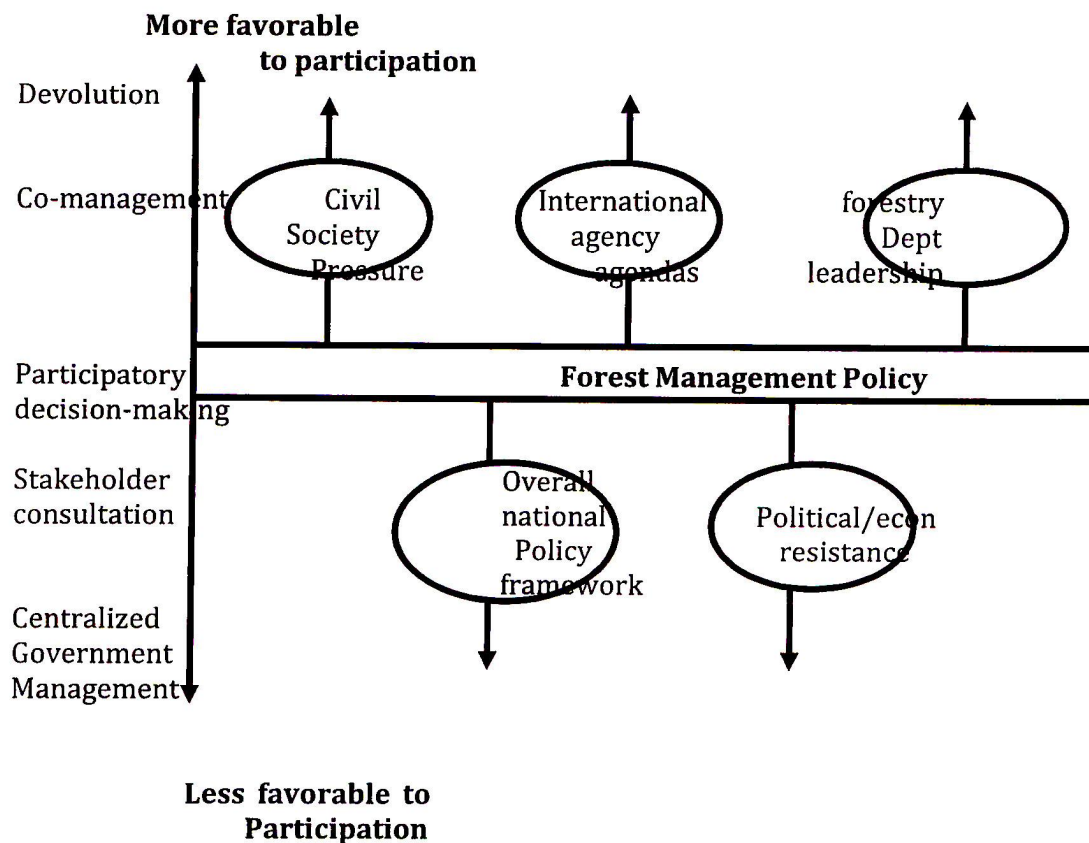
### **The Concept of Community Participation in Sustainable Forestry Development**

Participatory approaches depend on all partners having the ability to contribute meaningfully and equitably. Community involvement in forestry development



and management is fast gaining recognition in most parts of the world. In Jamaica, it has supported decentralization of decision making and devolution of management responsibilities to local entities. This situation reflects a continuing debate within government and society generally on the appropriate extent of stakeholder participation in management and decision-making. While the country's active NGO community and international donor

agencies have effectively pushed for policies more favorable to stakeholder participation, politicians and civil servants have largely resisted the structural changes required to implement them, and this resistance acts as a 'glass ceiling' to policy reform (figure 1). The forestry sector illustrates this well (Goeghegan and Bennett, 2003).



**Fig. 1- An adaptation of forest policy management model (Goeghegan and Bennett, 2003)**

According to Omolewa (1988) community participation otherwise known as popular participation or peoples' participation implies the massive involvement of all the people in development. It is an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than merely receive benefits.

There is wisdom in engaging farmers in teaching, learning and scientific experimentation processes. There is a good deal of debate about the wisdom of teaching farmers scientific methods of research. The critics charge that such formality suppresses local experimentation, contributing to the devaluation of local knowledge systems. In particular, they argue that power relations make it difficult for researchers to enter the very different worlds in which farmers' ideas and conceptions exist, effectively excluding them from the scientific realm (Salas, 1994; Van der Ploeg, 1993; Fairhead and Leach, 1994). Much of what is considered to be farmer research is embedded in daily practice as part of the craft of farming (Stolzenbach, 1994; 1997).

Accounts of promising innovations and adaptations of technologies produced by Honduran and other Central American farmers are

numerous. They include the spontaneous spread of *Mucuna* (a cover crop) as an alternative to burning amongst north coast maize farmers improved fallows using *Gliricidia sepium* and other legumes; cultivation of 'good weeds' for improving mulches; adapting in-row tillage and contour hedgerows to local conditions; and the widespread use of intercrops of beans and maize (Humphries, *et al.* 2000).

On the other hand, innovative management practices by communities and governments often serve as impetus to the local farmers. Experiences of forest community management initiatives from Jamaica indicate that the 1996 Forest Act permits the Minister responsible for forest management in consultation with the Conservator of Forests, to "appoint a forest management committee for the whole or any part of a forest reserve, forest management area or protected area". The functions of these committees as defined by the Act include:

Monitoring the condition of natural resources in the relevant forest reserve, forest management area or protected area

Holding discussions, public meetings etc about these natural resources

Advising the conservator on the development of the forest



management plan and regulations  
Proposing incentives for conservation practices in the area  
Helping to design and execute conservation projects in that area. (Goeghegan and Bennett N, 2003).

**Sustainable livelihoods, forestry development and implications for youth development in Nigeria**

The concept of Sustainable Livelihood (SL) is an attempt to go beyond the conventional definitions and approaches to poverty eradication. In a nutshell, it refers to a balance between **conservation** and the **utilization or depletion** of natural resources (Alademerin, 2013). George (2010) in a study of aforestation practices in selected secondary schools in Abeokuta North Local Government Area of Ogun state found out that 90% of the students participated in tree planting activities within the year, 80% were aware of tree planting society but only 60% were members. This calls for a more aggressive campaign in all secondary schools in the state in order to integrate young people into tree planting initiatives and sustainable community forest management in the future. The respondents in this study indicated that 25% each of the

trees were grown for shade, erosion control and school beautification/aesthetic values while 15% were grown for fuel and firewood for cooking while only 10% were essentially grown for planks in the school. In 1992 Robert Chambers and Gordon Conway proposed the following composite definition of a sustainable rural livelihood, which is applied most commonly at the household level:

*A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term.*

Leading proponent Scoones (1998) proposed a modified definition of SL: A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks; maintain or enhance its capabilities and

assets, while not undermining the natural resource base.

Four types of capital are identified in the IDS framework (which does not pretend to be an exhaustive list):

**Natural capital** – the natural resource stocks (soil, water, air, genetic resources, etc.) and environmental services (hydrological cycle, pollution sinks, etc.) from which resource flows and services useful for livelihoods are derived.

**Economic or financial capital** – the capital base (cash, credit/debt, savings, and other economic assets, including basic infrastructure and production equipment and technologies) which are essential for the pursuit of any livelihood strategy.

**Human capital** – the skills, knowledge, ability to labour and good health and physical capability important for the successful pursuit of different livelihood strategies.

**Social capital** – the social resources (networks, social

claims, social relations, affiliations, associations) upon which people draw when pursuing different livelihood strategies requiring co-ordinate actions.

The sustainability of livelihoods becomes a function of how men and women use asset portfolios on both a short and long-term basis. Sustainable livelihoods are those that are:

able to cope with and recover from shocks and stresses through adaptive and coping strategies;

economically effective;

ecologically sound, ensuring that livelihood activities do not irreversibly degrade natural resources within a given ecosystem; and

Socially equitable, which suggests that promotion of livelihood opportunities for one group should not foreclose options for other groups, either now or in the future. This relates to various cadres of workers in the forest reserves.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that Nigeria has the potential to readily integrate the youth and all other stakeholders into community participatory natural resources and

environmental management for sustainable products and services given more pro-active measures towards education, incentives and enforcement of appropriate laws.



### **Recommendations**

The following are recommended as techniques for improving sustainable community forest management through a participatory environmental development approach in Southern Nigeria:

Communities and educational institutions should be encouraged to develop interests and educational initiatives in forestry development and tree seedlings multiplication projects. This was practiced during the civilian regime of late Chief Olabisi Onabanjo in Ogun state, Nigeria.

The National tree programme initiative in which inhabitants are encouraged to plant trees in and around their vicinities should be pursued with much zeal and vigor by all tiers of governments. Communities should be encouraged to form local vanguards to effectively monitor the development.

The indigenous people in the local communities should negotiate with government to ensure that their sources of livelihoods are well protected by the by-law relating to forest conservation. Forestry policy should be reformed to admit donor communities into forest reserve for participatory exploitation of the forest reserve or sustainable yield.

Cooperation and support should be sought from the villages as the local authorities implement

their new by-laws. In addition, support by government should be continuous by helping the local people to resolve legal and administrative problems as they arise. A critical area here is the enforcement of by-laws. It is necessary to commit individuals and the community in both the planning and executive stages of forestry projects.

Build the management and local training capacity of various stakeholders in the forestry sector so as to further promote and strengthen their cultural ties to the resource base. Governments at all tiers should continue conservation education work with rural and urban communities on regular basis so that it becomes part of their culture. To achieve self – sufficiency in the supply of fuel wood, pole timber, food etc it is recommended that government should motivate or give incentives to farmers to encourage them to plant forest trees.

Forestry departments need to work in partnership with communities and rural resource users to derive appropriate systems for ten co-management of owned land in line with Shackleton, *et al*; (2010a).

Indigenous or traditional knowledge of customary laws, norms, beliefs and practices relating to the use and management of specific dry

forest and woodlands species needs to be included in any efforts to improve forest and species management (Sambou, *et al*; 2002).

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