

Forest Exploration And Utilization As A Veritable Market For Rural Development: An Assessment Of Oke-Ako, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT: Rural communities are blessed with resources which need to be exploited to achieve rural development. This study focuses on the assessment of forest resources as a developmental strategy in Oke-Ako, Ekiti State, Nigeria. The rate at which the rural areas are being neglected for the development of urban settlements is on the increase. This phenomenon had lead to the increase of urban populace on a daily basis which equally results to other problems. The abundance of forest resource in the study area has brought about an approximate 3994 population; this makes the community to stand out among other settlements in the area. The sampling techniques adopted for this study is a total survey. Structured questionnaires were administered to all the 208 buildings in the study area and relevant government agencies. Data collected from the study area were analyzed and presented with the aid of tables and other graphical illustration. Other findings include; exploitation methods of the forest resources, security measures put in place, efforts towards forest resources preservation, and effects of forest resources development among others. Based on the findings, it is therefore recommended that government at all levels should enlighten the farmers and the entire public on the important of forest resource. Also, forest should be preserved and conserved by government and the community at large so that the available forest resources in Oke-Ako can enhance aesthetic and sustainability of the community.

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1.0 Introduction

The global glamour for a livable and salubrious environment led to the creation of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) in 1978 whose goals among others are improving governance, reducing poverty, improving the living environment, managing disaster, etc. (UNCHS, 2000). The sad reality of the rural areas is the painful paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty (George, 2006). Based on the population perspective, rural area is a settlement having less than twenty thousand (20,000) people. Using economic activities as basis, a rural area is predominantly inhabited by those that live on the production of food and cash crops, rearing of animals and gathering of forest products (Shoremi, 1987).

Oke Ako is a rural settlement near Ipao in Ikole Local Government Area of Ekiti State, Nigeria with a Population of 3,994 (NPC, 2006) having some potential resources which can be used for its development and those resources are materials and natural components of the environment, which can be tapped by man to meet his developmental purposes. Typically, forest resources are available materials or assets that can be transformed to produce benefits and in the process may be consumed (FAO, 2009). According to Williams (1978), tapping of rural

resources is a major way of developing rural area. The goal of rural development is not only to improve the quality of life and standards of living of the rural dwellers through adequate attention to food, housing, recreation and rural economic activities of the citizen which are mostly exploit from forest, but also the employment of the vast resources of the area to lay a solid foundation for coordinated and meaningful development (Ademiluyi, 1987). The development of rural area have not been given the deserved priority, as regards this, there has been a drift from rural area of the country to urban areas (Oye, 2003). The rural-urban migration has reduced the manpower in the rural areas. It has now been realized by the government to improve the condition of living in the rural area since development of rural areas contributes tremendously to the growth of nation's economy, physically, socially and economically (Adeyemo, 1995).

This study, centre on how best the forest resources in the rural environment of Oke-Ako could be exploited and utilized in a way to improve the quality of life of rural inhabitants, because the economic base of most African Countries (Nigeria especially) lies in the rural sector which represent a substantial proportion of the African population (Salau, 2004). Apanpa (1978) describes potential resources for rural development as an economic factor

having no specific index of defining it, but it entails all the area of providing goods and services to satisfy the want of the people living in a particular area. In addition, planning for rural development is intended to bridge the gap between the rural area and urban centres through the development of those resources (Adeyanju, 2007). These resources will improve agricultural productivity and social standard of rural people if efficiently utilized and will pull / attract people to the community which will increase the population and eventually the development of the area, (Egunjobi, 1996). According to Spectroplan (2005), “rural development is a complex of activities and processes leading to the fulfillment of the basic needs of the rural poor”. These views are amplified and expanded by Obadan (1997), who sees rural development as improving the living standards of the masses of the low income population residing in the rural areas and making the process of their development self-sustaining. In other words, rural development is seen as the process whereby concerted efforts are made in order to facilitate significant increases in rural resource productivity with the overall objectives of enhancing rural income, increasing employment opportunities and upgrading rural communities.

That is why this project focuses on the exploitation and utilization of the forest resource for rural development in Oke-Ako Ekiti and if these resources are properly managed, utilized and conserved not by the Ekiti State government alone, but by rural dweller in the study area, it will lead to the transformation and expansion of the economy of Oke-Ako Ekiti and mass movement of youths from the study area in search of job in the urban areas will be minimized because of the establishment of industries which will provide employment opportunities for the rural dwellers and even increase their standard of living and promote economic growth in term of given assistances to the farmers, establishment of industries and other necessary facilities to attract people to the study area and its final result will be of great benefit in achieving sustainability in rural development through forest resource.

2.0 The Study Area

Oke Ako Ekiti is in the Northern part of Ikole Local Government Area in Ekiti State, Nigeria. It has five (5) quarters namely: Aofin, Afaako, Odo Irele, Ile Owa and Oke Diosan. It is located within longitude $5^{\circ} 12'$ and $6^{\circ} 35'$ E and latitude $7^{\circ} 38'$ and $7^{\circ} 45'$ N. It is eighteen {18km} from Oke Ayedun Ekiti, Ipao {8km} and Irele Ekiti {8km}. It is about 18km to Ekiti State and Kogi boundary, while to Itapaji Ekiti is 15km. The study area has a land mass of about four kilometer radius. It is bounded in the North by Irele Ekiti, in the South by Oke Ayedun, also in the East by Kwara State

and in the West by Itapaji Ekiti which is 15km. The 2006 population census had a total population of 3,897 while the projected population for the study area to 2012 put the community at 4,481 using the geometric method of population projection. This is an increase of 584 for a period of six years interval. The low population here is not unconnected with the rural nature of the study area. The existence of forest resources in this area has of course brought the area to focus as a major distribution centre for planks and logs of different sizes.

Today, Oke Ako is constituted by two ruling houses which are Aofin and Oke Idiosan with their Obaship title as Baale which had now been elevated to Owa of Oke Ako Land since 1997 by the Ekiti State Government during the regime of Colonel Mohammed Bawa.

3.0 Literature Review

According to Akinbode (2001), potential resources for rural development involves a broad spectrum of issues among which are problems of agricultural modernization, rural industrialization, job creation, transportation development and provision of adequate housing and shelter for rural inhabitants. Others include education, health, recreational services, regional economic development and the composite problem of overall transformation of the rural development in order to enhance the quality of rural life.

Community development is base on the people's proper understanding of the fact that governments' resources are limited, hence the need to help themselves by coming together as a group to better their chances of success (Oyesiku, 2002).

The use of forestry as a marketable resource has received considerable attention around the world where all nations of the world are looking for sustainable ways of using the resource for rural, regional and national development. Thus the subject of this study has gained the attention of notable scientists in the past who had devised various methods and techniques of putting this resource to maximum use (Ogunleye, 1994)

3.1 Need for Integrated Forest Resource Development

Environmental pollution, degradation and the loss of natural habitat are caused by people who should also be vested with the responsibility to find solution to associated problems (Singh & Karltho, 1987). For this to be efficient, integrated forest resource development must enjoy grassroots response. Our environment being a totality of space, time and socio-cultural settings must be well managed to sustain biosphere components including land, water, air plants forests and animals on one hand, and human settlements together with their indigenous technological knowledge and evolutions on the other.

When all of these operate in harmonious equilibrium, continuity of human heritage and its life supporting system can be guaranteed (Lawal, 2003).

3.2 Economic and Social Benefits of Forest Resource

Forest resources provide a wide range of economic and social benefits. The economic benefits can be in monetary values. Instances are through employment, value generated from the proceeds and trades of forest products, investment in the forest sector, the value of production of goods and services from forest and through the sale of surplus goods and services in rural area (Ajakaiye, 2001). This is through to the study area because majority of people in the rural areas of Ekiti State rely on forest resources for their livelihoods. Most of them use resources generated from trees on their farms to generate food and cash {money}. Also wood production continues to be one of the economic benefits of many forests. Majority of the forest in Ekiti State are used primarily for production of wood and other forest productions.

3.2 Conservation of Forest Resources

At the beginning of human civilization, mankind's consumption of the forest resources was limited to clearing forest lands for agriculture and using wood for fuel or for lumber. Mankind also hunts animal in the forests and gathers nuts and fruits. Firewood has been an important resource even since the beginning of human civilizations. It also has played a major role in the large-scale development of rural communities. Firewood is required for cooking and heating. (William, 1978).

In addition, a forest is capable of self recovery, in the sense that, after a tree is chopped down; more trees will re-grow from the remaining trunk or root. Cutting down trees results in environmental damage. It is when the rate of consumption of trees exceeds the rate of growth that would not allow recovering. This result in severe ecological problems, such as massive loss of vegetation, soil erosion, animals and land desertification, vegetation, especially trees has a huge ecological effect on humans and on the natural environment (Ogunjemite, et al, 2003)

3.4 The Concept of Community Partnership in Rural Development

Concerted efforts towards saving Nigerians environment started in 1988 with the establishment of Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FAO, 2009). The agency is to develop plans of actions and advise government on natural environmental policies and priorities. Reducing or reversing environmental damage and promoting sustainable rural development will require above all, changes in the way people live, farm, fish, etc (Wikipedia, 2003). In the past many developmental projects have failed because they were imposed from the top, without sufficient cultural

sensitivity or involvement of the local people (Adeyanju, 2007). A good rural development policy framework may be developed but without empowering local communities through a strategically evolved participatory approach all such laudable initiatives will end as beautiful exercise in futility (UNDP, 2003). Community participation implies involvement of local people in the development, management and maintenance of their natural resources (Okunlola, 2003)

The concept insidiously hides the old mentality in which the state is seen as having primary responsibility for development. The concept has not removed the principle of state as developer; rather, it is based on the true mastery of natural resources by co-developer. Sustainable rural development relies above all, on the management of natural resources, it is important to create a shared perspective of the problem and jointly decide on specifications to be taken (Labeodan, 1999).

This aspect has reviewed the need for integrated forest development, social benefits, conservation of forest resources and community partnership in forest exploration and utilization so as to achieve a sustainable veritable market for Oke-Ako, Nigeria.

4.0 Methodology

Two basic sources of data were involved in this study. These include primary and secondary sources of data. Considerable intellectual ability, creativity and strategies of asking questions from people so as to extract useful information were put in place on this project. In addition, observations by the authors and perception study from the respondents were another useful means of investigation of this study.

The sample frame includes all the quarters in Oke Ako Ekiti. The quarters are; Aofin, Afaako, Odo Irele, Ile Owa, and Oke diosan as shown in table 1. In order to have a reliable result, total survey technique was adopted, meaning that 100% survey was taken, which indicates the total number of buildings (208) in Oke Ako, Ekiti State. In this wise, well structured questionnaires were administered to the family head in the study area. Simple statistical analytical techniques were adopted for analysis, these include frequency distribution, percentages and charts among others.

5.0 Discussion of Findings

According to the questionnaires administered and personal interview with the respondents, majority of Oke-Ako occupants are farmer while others are Students, Self Employed, Civil Servants, Private Establishment and Unemployed. See table 2.

From the above illustrations, 37.5% of the respondents were farmers. 9.6% were students and

15.4% were self employed. Also 10.6% of the respondents were civil servant. 20.2% work as private workers, while 6.7% were unemployed. It shows that majority of the occupants are farmers which allow sufficiency in the production of food such as yam, banana, orange, rice, cassava, wild animal, palm fruits and forest product like provision of materials essential for building such as poles, doors, roofs etc. which increase the economy of the study area.

Findings also revealed that farmers in the study area do plant different types of economic trees such as Iroko, Mesonia, Obeche, Afra, Mahogany, etc which they usually fall as logs and processed into planks in the sawmills. The availability of these trees and other raw materials led to the establishment of Hope sawmill, Ipinloju sawmill and Ekamefa sawmill which are the available sawmills in Oke Ako Ekiti. See Plate 1

Furthermore, findings also revealed that the availability of palm trees in the forest has contributed to high supply of palm oil to other communities both within and outside the state. This also led to the establishment of Twins palm oil processing industry which produced averagely 220 kegs of 25 liters of palm oil monthly. Buyers buy palm oil in large quantity which they transport to urban settlements to be re-sold at much higher prices.

According to the information from the Forestry Department in Ikole Local Government, economic tree plantation claim 251 hectare of land in Oke Ako Ekiti, and people within and outside the study area fell an average number of 140 economic trees monthly with little replacement and permit for one tree is ₦ 10,000. According to the information from the Ministry, only few people do collect felling permit before felling economic trees. The expected revenue per month is ₦1, 400,000, but the average monthly revenue generated from economic trees i.e. timber is ₦ 800,000.

Table 3 revealed that 28.8% of the respondents have no formal education. 36.6% of the respondents have primary school education. Also secondary school/technical school leavers were 20.2%. Those who have ACE/ND/NCE certificates were 8.7%. The percentage of HND/B.Sc/B.Tech Holders was 3.8% while 1.9% of the respondents have Post Graduate Certificates. This shows that primary school leavers and people with no formal education dominated the study area, this perhaps affect their level of understanding as well as their methods of exploration and utilization of the forest resources.

It was also confirmed that Ministry of Agriculture and Forest Resource in Ikole Local Government Area were in short of staff and unable to move round the study area and detect illegal felling of

trees been felled in the forest and transport to the sawmills, see table 4.

It could be deduced from table 4 that 110 respondents admitted that there is no effective security measure put in place while 66 of the total respondents were of the opinion that Community Base Organisation Security was in operation. However, Governmental Securities which should have been more effective than other securities operations were lacking in the study area. From the above point of view, it is observed that strict enforcement by the government and the community on its forest reserve has not been enforced due to the ways and manners in which the forest resources were been exploited and utilized. This allow for illegal operation.

Table 5 revealed that the exploitation methods of forest resources in the study area were most often done manually. This is attributed to the poverty level and their educational exposure (see table 3). Also, the government inability to organize workshops on the methods and uses of modern farm equipments, the use of improved seedlings among others were other challenges. Farmers are not benefiting from modern farm implements, like the use of tractor, plough harvester. They only have access to primitive tools like cutlass, hoes, axe, which did not make their farm activities faster and also reduced man power capability and the production. The farm output were been taken to other towns for further processing due to lack of modern processing industries. If this were done in their area, it would have enhanced more development, income and improve their standard of living. The palm canal taken from the palm oil processing industry were been taken to another town for cream and oil making. Planks were taken to Ikole, Ako, even outside the state for modern door, window, round chair making. The implication of this is that it retired the development in this area for another area.

All efforts towards the preservation of the forest resources as shown in table 6 proofed abortive. Majority of the respondents (71.63%) agreed that the preservative measures in practice is poor, 24.52% respondents subscribed to it as being fair, while only 3.85% signified that the preservation of the forest resources was good. This could be linked to our previous discussion in table 4 that "No Security" (which accounted for 56.9%) could be responsible for the poor preservation and utilization of the forest resources which is a bane to sustainable development of the study area. Furthermore, table 6 also stressed that the effect of forest resources on development in the Oke-Ako is not that significant as this account for 73.56% of the total respondents. This is as a result of the poor preservative measures coupled with lack of security in the study area.

6.0 Recommendations And Policy Guidelines

The following recommendations are put forward toward the enhancement of a sustainable exploration and utilization of forest resources in the study area.

6.1 Preservation and Conservation of Forest Resources:

There should be proper preservation of the forest resources. The forest should be preserved and conserved so that the available forest resources in Oke Ako will enhance the sustainability of the study area. The available forest resources in the study area should be protected by the Community Base Organisations (CBO's), Governments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) they should preserve immature trees in the forest.

6.2 Employment Opportunity:

Government should employ more forest guard to monitor, control and safe guard the forest reserves so as to discourage encroachers. If this can be done, people will follow normal process before felling of the economic trees in the forest. This will increase government's internally generated revenue, and high level of deforestation will be reduced.

6.3 Assurances to the Farmers:

As a matter of urgency, both Federal, State and Local governments should give farmers in the study area assistance which should include; enlightenment, workshops, loans, seedling, modern farm equipments etc. this will encourage them to take active part in farming and make farm operation faster.

6.4 Establishment of Industries:

It is also the recommendation of this paper that government at all levels should place greater attention to the establishment of industries to process farm output taken to other town. This will provide employment for the people and will also reduce rural-urban migration, improve their standard of living and also increase the population of the area by attracting both local and foreign investors to the study area.

Mankind cannot stop the consumption of forest resources. As long as mankind maintains a reasonable consumption rate and treats the forests with care, we should be able to keep the replenishment rate of forest resources higher than the consumption rate of mankind. Prevent permanent loss of the forest resources and improve our living environment.

Table 1: Shows the Number of Buildings in Each Quarter in Oke Ako

S/N	Quarters	Number of Buildings
1	Aofin	57
2	Afaako	49
3	Odo Irele	30
4	Ile Owa	32
5	Oke diosan	40
	TOTAL	208

Source: Field Survey, July, 2012.

Table 2: Occupational Distribution

Variables	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Farming	78	37.5
Student	20	9.6
Self employed	32	15.4
Civil Servant	22	10.6
Private establishment	42	20.2
Unemployed	14	6.7
TOTAL	208	100

Source; Field Survey, July, 2012.

Table 3: Educational Status

Variables	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No Formal Education	60	28.8
Pry. Sch. Leaving Cert.	76	36.6
Sec. Sch. Cert/Tech	42	20.2
ACE/ND/NCE Cert	18	8.7
HND/B.Sc/B. Tech	8	3.8
Post Graduate	4	1.9
TOTAL	208	100

Source; Field Survey, July, 2012.

Table 4: Security measures for Forest Resource

Variables on Security	Number of Respondents	Percentage
No Security	110	53.88
NGO's Security	17	8.17
CBO's Security	66	31.73
Govt. Security	15	7.22
Total	208	100

Source; Field Survey, July, 2012.

Table 5: Exploitation Methods of the Forest Resources

Variables on Exploitation Methods.	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Mechanised Method	68	32.69
Manual Method	112	53.85
Both Method	28	13.46
Other	-	-
Total	208	100

Source; Field Survey, July, 2012.

Table 6: Effort towards the preservation and Effect of Forest Resources on development

Variables on Effort	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Poor	149	71.63
Fair	51	24.52
Good	8	3.85
Total	208	100
Variables on Effect	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Not Significant	153	73.56
Significant	36	17.31
Quite Significant	15	7.21
Very Significant	4	1.92
Total	208	100

Source; Field Survey, July, 2012.

The most fundamental step is to restore conscience and morality. When people improve their morality and realize the danger of over-consumption of the forest resources, they will work together to conserve the forests and ecological benefits which will motivate people to be more dedicated to forest conservation. People will respect and appreciate forest resources instead of wasting its treasures. After cutting down trees for lumber, people will plant trees equal in

number to that of the trees that were taken down (Wikipedia, 2003)

In conclusion, it is certain that for viable achievements, our government at all levels should collaborate with private investors and the community participation must be involve to sensitized them to give room for an enabling environment on how to

preserved, conserved forest resources and establish industries to process unfinished product been taken to other towns outside the local government to finished product. This will lead to the expansion of Oke Ako both physically, socially and economically and also reduce rural-urban migration.



Plate 1 Showing loading of planks in one of the sawmills in the study area



Plate 2: Showing a Palm Oil Processing Industry in the study area



Plate 3: Showing illegal operation in one of the forest reserves

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