



Community development committees' participation in forest protection in Delta Central Zone, Delta State, Nigeria

A. U. Ofuoku * and O. M. Agbogidi

*Faculty of Agriculture, Delta State University, Asaba campus, Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria. *e-mail: ofuoku@yahoo.com, omagbogidi@yahoo.com*

Received 17 May 2006, accepted 22 August 2006.

Abstract

The study was carried out to investigate the participation of community development committees (CDCs) in forest protection in Delta Central agro-ecological zone, Delta State, Nigeria. Their forest protection measures, perceived benefits and reasons for not participating in forestry extension meetings were also ascertained. Participants who were members of CDCs were purposively selected from the eight local government areas that constitute the study yielding a sample of 80 respondents. The findings show that the major occupations of the respondents are teaching, trading, farming and hunting. Forestry extension activities they were involved included conservation campaign; forest exploitation control; supply of hybrid planting materials etc. Perceived benefits for participants were improved economic status, increased income and employment by forestry department. The extension contact most often indicated was personal contact and meetings exhibitions. A majority of the respondents (75%) were of the opinion that the communities decided the extension programmes. The reason given for non-participation in meetings was mainly inadequate publicity for such meetings. The level of respondent's education, sex and occupation had significant correlation with the participation in extension and forestry department's meetings. For sustainable forest utilization, adequate publicity for meetings, more measures to check illegal exploitation and sustained participation of the communities in decision making and programme design were recommended.

Key words: Community development, committees, participation, forest, protection.

Introduction

Community development committee has been a formidable platform for galvanizing the efforts of people to undertake rural development projects in developing countries. It is a group of elected officials of a community charged with the responsibility of coordinating self-help development project of that community⁹. In the last two decades, focus has been on the protection of forest the world over. In support of the above Chambers⁵ opined that in the course of the last two decades, the attention of policy makers and development workers for the so called marginal (or complex, diverse and rained areas) has increased. This called for the participation of communities in forest development.

In addition to the above fact, because of indigenous cosmovision related to natural resources, various communities are interested in the protection of their forests. Cosmovision can be briefly defined as the way people perceive the world in which they live⁷. During compass workshop in Bolivia the partners showed that in spite of differences, there are also similarities amongst the indigenous perspectives of rural people in Latin America, Asia and Africa⁶. In all countries, major changes in demography, economics, technological innovations, exposure to mass media and degradation of ecological resources have taken place that are leading to an erosion of indigenous cultures, knowledge and cosmovisions.

In many cosmovisions, nature is considered sacred. This finds

its expression in concepts like Mother Earth, sacred mountains, rivers, trees and animals. Animals, plants and trees are often considered to be linked with the spiritual world and should be treated with respect.

Heavy deforestation in the past decade in all classes of forest facilitated by the construction of roads. Uncontrolled exploitation combined with heavy grazing pressure and the clearing of land for cultivation has resulted in the almost total depletion of forest resources in Pakistan^{2,8}. The increased demand for timber in Delta State has meant added pressure on natural forests and heavy felling has taken place where tracts of natural forest lie close enough to a road to make it profitable.

As the situation is with the economy of this country, a lot of rural households depend on the forest for fuel wood³. If this trend is left uncontrolled, our forest will be further depleted and the impact on the environment will be very devastating.

With the pressure of the Community Development Committees in the various rural forest communities in Delta State, it is expected that something are being done by them to promote sustainable forest development. Forests impact positively on the daily life of the rural dwellers.

In light of the above, this study is conceived to assess the participation of Community Development Committees in forest protection in the Delta Central Zone of Delta State specifically

the study aims to determine the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, ascertain regulatory activities carried out, determine respondents perceived benefits of forest protection, determine the relationship between socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and their participation in forest protection meetings.

Methodology

The population of the study was the community development committees (CDCs) of Delta Zone; Delta Central Zone is situated within Fresh Water Swamp Forest from the eight local government areas that constitute the study area. Eight rural communities' CDCs were randomly selected on the basis of one community from each local government area. Ten members were then purposively selected from each CDC for the study. The choice of CDCs was informed by the information from the forest rangers in the Forestry Department, Ministry of Environment.

Both structural questionnaire and interview schedule that have been pre-tested for reliability ($r = 0.84$) and ($r = 0.88$) respectively were employed for data collection. The instrument solicited information on socio-economic characteristics forest regulatory activities and cases of violation of rule on forest protection.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions and percentages. Correlation coefficient was used to examine the degree of relationship between socio-economic activities and participation in forest meetings.

Results and Discussion

Demographic characteristics of respondents: The results in Table 1 show majority (63.7%) of the respondents are males and 76.2% are married. Most of the respondents (66.2%) are above the age of 35 years. This implies that majority of the respondents are matured. The results indicate a low level of educational qualification with 81.3% having primary and secondary education, while 7.5% had tertiary educational qualification. The major occupations of the respondents are palm fruit and rubber tapping (18.7%), hunting (17.5%) and farming (23.8%), while 22.5% are unemployed. The level of income of the respondents indicate that a majority (73.7%) has ₦150,000.00 per annum (US \$ 1000.00).

Forest protection extension activities in the communities: The information in Table 2 indicates that the major extension education activities are conservation education in schools and communities (35%). Others are supply of tree seedlings, advocacy of taungya farming, supply of locally fabricated charcoal stoves, supply of hybrid planting materials and assistance in getting fertilizers. These are supplied by a non-governmental organization sustained forest for livelihood. The major extension contact methods with respondents are personal contact (65%) and meeting and exhibitions (32.5%). The frequency of contacts was mostly fortnightly (67.5%). A majority of the respondents (75%) indicated that extension activities are decided by the communities through their respective community development committees (CDCs). This is in consonance with the suggestion that the process of community extension should be participatory and community oriented⁴.

Perceived benefits from community extension and forestry department: Majority of the respondents (73.7%) mentioned that

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to demographic characteristics (n = 80).

Variables	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Age		
< 35 years	27	33.8
≥ 35 years	53	66.2
Sex		
Male	51	63.7
Female	29	36.3
Marital Status		
Married	61	76.3
Single	19	23.8
Educational Qualification		
No formal education	9	11.2
Primary education	26	32.5
Secondary education	39	48.8
Tertiary education	6	7.5
Occupation		
Palm fruit & rubber tapping	15	18.7
Hunting	14	17.5
Farming	19	23.8
Trading	10	12.5
Teaching	18	22.5
Unemployed	4	5.0
Income		
N10.000 – 49.000	16	20.0
N50.000 – 99.000	20	25.0
N100.000 – 149.000	23	28.7
N150.000 – 199.000	16	20.0
N200.000 and above	5	6.3

Source: field survey. US \$ 1 = approximately N(Naira)150.00

their economic status has improved and their income increased (66.3%) (Table 3). About a quarter of them (27.5%) were employed by the Forestry Department. These were recommended by the communities to the Forestry Department for employment.

Experience of conflicts and reason for conflicts: Table 4 shows that a majority of the respondents (77.5%) indicated that they experience conflict between the forestry department/communities taking sides and some natives of the communities on the opposing side. These conflicts were mainly unauthorized extraction of forest trees (80%) and bush burning (40%) which destroyed parts of the forest vegetation.

Participation and reasons for non-participation in forestry extension and forestry department meetings: Table 5 shows that 41.3% of the respondents attend and participate in extension and forestry department meetings, while 58.7% of them indicated that they do not attend and participate in such meetings. The major reason given for not participating was inadequate publicity

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to forest protection extension activities and methods of contact with extension.

Extension activities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Conservation campaign in schools communities	28	35.0
Control of forest exploitation	14	17.5
Supply of tree seedlings	7	8.8
Advocacy of taungya farming	9	11.3
Supply of locally fabricated smokeless stoves	6	7.5
Supply of hybrid planting materials	11	13.5
Assistance in getting fertilizers	5	6.2
Method of extension contact:		
Mass media (radio and TV .. newspapers	2	2.5
Personal contact	52	65.0
Meetings and exhibitions	26	32.5
Frequency of contact: weekly	5	1.3
Fortnightly	54	67.5
Monthly	14	17.5
Quarterly	6	7.5
Not at all	1	26.3
Who decides extension programmes		
Forestry department	20	25.0
Community	60	75.0
Contact with delta state agric development project:		
Yes	40	50.0
No	40	50.0

Source: Field survey.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to benefits from community extension and the forestry department.

Benefits	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Improved farming methods and increased output	15	8.7
Apiculture equipment/improved output	6	7.5
Access to farm equipment	9	11.3
Easy access to fertilizer	5	6.2
Improved Poultry Management/increased output	5	6.2
Enhanced marketing	15	8.7
Increased income	53	66.3
Improved economic status	59	73.7
Employment by Forestry Department	22	27.5
Improved aquaculture methods/output	14	17.5

Source: Field survey. *N = 80 for each variables as a result of multiple responses.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents with respect to conflict experience and reason for conflicts.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Conflict between Forestry Department/Community		
And natives		
Yes	62	77.5
No	18	22.5
Reasons for conflicts*		
Unauthorized extraction of forest tree	64	80.0
Bush burning	32	40.0
Willful damage to tree seedlings	10	12.5
Unauthorized tapping of palm trees	10	12.5

Source: Field Survey. *N = 80 for each variables owing to multiple responses.

Table 5: Participation and reasons for not participating in forestry extension and forest department meetings.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Participate in forestry extension and forestry department meetings:		
Yes	33	41.3
No	47	58.7
Reasons for not participating: N = 47		
Inadequate publicity of meetings	39	83.0
Busy schedule	1	2.1
Non contribution in decision making at meetings	4	8.5
Time of meetings not conducive	3	6.4

Source: Field Survey.

Table 6: Relationship between respondents socio-economic characteristics and participation in extension / forestry department meetings.

Socio-economic Characteristics	Correlation coefficient
Age	0.017
Education	0.417*
Contact with Extension Agents	0.013
Marital status	0.129
Sex	0.337*
Occupation	0.354*
Income	0.028

* Significant at 0.05 level.

of such meetings as indicated by 83% of the respondents who do not participate in the meetings.

Relationship between respondents' demographic characteristics and participation in forest community extension and forestry department meetings: The level of respondents' education ($r = 0.417$) was positively and significantly correlated with participation in the meetings (Table 6). Respondents' gender and occupation were significantly related to participation in meetings. However, the degree of association between participation and demographic characteristics were low (education 17%, occupation 13% and gender 11%). Sex ($r = 0.337$) and occupation ($r = 0.354$) were significantly correlated with participation in such meetings. These results agree with the findings in a similar study¹.

Conclusions

The study has revealed that the main methods of extension contact in Delta Central Agro-ecological Zone are personal contacts and meetings and exhibitions. The communities decide the extension programmes. It also revealed that extension activities carried out were conservation campaigns, control of forest exploitation, supply of locally fabricated smokeless stoves, supply of hybrid planting materials, assistance in fertilizer procurement, advocacy of taungya farming and supply of tree seedlings. The demographic factors such as education, occupation and gender were indicators (though, weak association) of participation in forestry extension and eco-tourism meetings. Majority of the respondents did not participate in extension meetings and perceived unauthorized extraction of forest trees, bush burning, willful damages of tree seedlings and unauthorized tapping of palm trees as sources of conflicts between Forestry Department/ Communities and natives of communities.

In view of the results of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Participation in forest extension meetings should be enhanced by giving adequate publicity to such meetings.
- More measures should be put in place to check the menace of illegal exploiters of forests.
- Participation of community indecision making and programme design should be sustained.

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