

PRACTICAL ISSUES IN FOREST AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT



Edited by
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PRACTICAL ISSUES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNITY FORESTS: THE CROSS RIVER STATE EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

There is global concern about the extent of deforestation and the consequences resulting from it. The current issue of climate change is one of the consequences resulting from the unsustainable management of forests. However, the struggle to manage the forest in a sustainable manner is being encouraged. One of the approaches in the sustainable forest management is the community-based forest management approach.

Different authors have described the concept of community forestry. Some stressed the importance of participation and benefits sharing amongst the stakeholders (Ekeke, 2003). Another author sees the concept as a learning process that increases the involvement of the local people (Udo, 2003). Still another school of thought sees the concept as seeking a balance between the outside groups and the local community interest and increasing local responsibility for the management of Forest Resources (Redford *et al.* 1995, Ben, 2004).

Rejal and Petheran (2001) put together a synopsis of definitions by different authors as stated below:

A village - level forestry activities, decided on collectively, and implemented on communal land where local populations participate in the planning, establishing, management and

harvesting of forest crops, and so receive a major proportion of socio-economic and ecological benefits from the forest. Community forestry requires genuine popular participation in decision-making. Working with the people rather than policing them is an absolute necessity for forest resources utilization and conservation (Eckholm, 1982). Ravington (1992) described the concept as a situation where the local community controls a clearly and legally defined area of forest, and is free from government and outside pressure concerning the use of the forest and free from economic exploitation of markets or other pressure from outside forces.

Pokharel (2003) defined the concept as activities that involve or take into consideration the intimate relationship among women, men and the trees that surround them, capitalizing on the local knowledge of women and men about management and use of forest resources, recognizing the forest and tree resources needs of the various community members with a focus on increasing the benefits from forest for rural women and men, especially the poor and also integrating these players in the project identification, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Also Alao and Oguche, (2003) defined it as people-driven and its objective is to bring about improvement in their living standard. Community forestry in Nepal as defined by the Forest Act of 1993 is part of National Forests handed over to the community Forest User Group (GFUGs) by the District Forest Officer (DFO) for protection, utilization and management (Pokharel, 2003).

Ekeke (2003) defined community forestry as any situation which intimately involves the local people in a forestry activity. It embraces situations ranging from woodlot artisan or small scale industry level to generate income to activities of forest dependent communities, but excludes large-scale industrial forestry.

Therefore, a community forest is that which possesses the features described in the various definitions. It is a forest owned solely by a community or a village or tribal village or authority with

members sharing in the products or proceeds according to the laws and regulations of the land (Constitution of Cross River State Forest Management Committee (FMC, 2001). The paper examines the concepts of community forestry, the importance; the practical issues in community-based forest management in Cross River State, Nigeria and suggests ways of promoting sustainable forest management through the participation of all forest stakeholders in decision-making and sharing of benefits accruing from it.

HISTORY OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY

The concept of community forestry has been known over the decades in various parts of developed and developing world (Chijioke, 2003). Different societies have different names for it. In the Commonwealth of Nations, it is known as Communal Forestry. The Indians call it 'Panchayat' forestry while in most others it is called social forestry.

In Nigeria it should be called communal Forestry given that Nigeria is a commonwealth country. Community Forestry sprung up in different ecological zones for several reasons.

In Nepal, it came as a pronouncement of forest Legislation in 1993 after the Master Plan for Forestry Sector (MPFS, 1988) was provided. The document specified how the government will hand over the management responsibilities to the local communities. In 1995, a community forestry directives byelaw was put in place to ensure sustainable management. This document further strengthened the Master Plan For Forestry Sector, which was a vehicle for rural development and poverty reduction (Pokharel, 2003, Rejal and Petheram, 2001). National Forests (NFs) were handed over to forest user groups (FUGs) under the custodianship of the community forest users group (CFUGs) (Pokharel, 2003) a variant of the Forest Management committees (FMCs) in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, Ogar *et al.* (2003) reported that Community Forestry is not a new idea because the local population had managed their

forest before the colonial masters' arrival. It is modernized to officially delegate responsibilities to the locals to manage and utilize the forest (Egboh, 1985). Forest conservation by the locals is evident in the presence of 'evil forest', sacred hills and water which served cultural, social and economic values and totems that inundate the belief systems of the people (Ojating, 1997a; Anukwa, 2003; Ogar *et al.*, 2003).

Communal forest management was given impetus in Cross River State by the strategy document for the management of Cross River State Forestry Sector (FDD 1994) as the only viable option for sustainable management of the remaining rainforest in the state (Bisong, 2003 and Amika, 2003). This became necessary to stem the increasing rate of depletion of the Natural Forest in the state.

In 1999, Community Forest Management (CFM) became operational. The Cross River State Forestry Project (CRSFP) in partnership with the Forestry Commission aided the formation and functioning of Forest Management Committees (FMCs). This gave birth to the FMCs constitution in 2001. The constitution spells out the roles each FMC official is to play as well as the benefits each stakeholder stands to derive. It also specifies the administrative powers. Financial management and other issues are defined in the constitution clearly.

The following constitute FMC membership and administration:

Membership: Membership is open to all stakeholders and interest groups in the community, namely: The chiefs, youths, farmers, women, Timber dealers, traders, hunters, fishermen, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community-based Organizations, Local Government Councils, officials and representatives of the forestry commission.

FMC Administration: Each FMC has an executive committee with the following: officials, Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Assistance Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, Public Relations Officer (PRO), Auditor

I, Auditor II. Ex-officio members (Forestry Commission Staff) (The CRS FMC constitution 2001). There are well over eighty (80) recognized FMCs spread across the state now (Anoka, 2003).

Functions of the Forest Management Committees (FMCs) in CBFM in Cross River State

- * *Monitoring the extraction of all forest products closely*
- * *Collective granting and supervision of forest concession in a more participatory manner*
- * *Allocating royalties to fund community development projects*
- * *Protect forest resources*
- * *Assist in clearing forest boundaries annually with forestry commission staff*

Common property

Many community forestry activities occur within the context of common property regimes, where ownership is communal and access is determined by the larger community. A common property regime can include indigenous reserves, properties owned and managed by a rural community or any resource for which management authority is invested in a group rather than in separate individuals. The rules and regulations governing the use of common property have both spatial and temporal components. Differential access to resources pertains to different community members at different times, depending on what part of the communal managed lands they occupy, what crops or animals they raise, the amount of water to which they have access and numerous other considerations. In a common property regime, local populations clearly define the individuals or households that have the right to use the resource units from the community forest. Such access may be limited by sex, age or other socially defined factors, including restricted use except by special individuals such as shamans or curers. In addition, local user groups may negotiate the rules that regulate the time, place, technology used and quantity of resource units in a particular setting.

Among the small-scale tradition-oriented communities common in the tropics, access to wildlife is very rarely private property, falling instead under common property regimes, at least in part because most wild animals are fairly mobile. Even when a group claims access to game in specific forest areas and denies hunting rights to others, access to the wildlife for their members is very often communal and not considered private property. Different norms and regimes for using forest resources are followed under different situations.

In most parts of Papua New Guinea, for example, the people are the traditional legal owners of land and wildlife. Among the Maring hunters of the highlands, clan clusters are the units that have rights to the wildlife resources in an area; members of other local groups have no rights over these resources except under special circumstances. Travellers may shoot game of little value if they do so along defined travel paths. Anyone from another clan found straying from paths is considered a poacher (Redford *et al.*, 1995).

While the boundaries and complex rules of a common property system might be clearly defined for the local community, the surrounding society may often fail to recognize the legitimacy of such regimes. For this reason, common property regimes are often vulnerable to alterations in the rules of access and ownership by outside interests, most often the state. Common property regimes often break down due to ecological change, land shortages, emergence of market economics or other outside forces, and resource sustainability is often put at risk, resulting in resource use conflict. In these situations, it is important that new, locally compatible management strategies evolve, based on the principle that local benefits are necessary to encourage local cooperation and participation.

State property

In a great many countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia, wild animals are protected in national parks, national forests or wildlife reserves, which are all lands, designated as state property. This often equates to a complete legal prohibition of wildlife use, except in some cases where regulated use of wildlife is permitted. These may include hunting in buffer zones around core protected areas, subsistence hunting rights for indigenous groups and special hunting days or seasons in which normally closed lands are opened.

Whatever the accommodation is made, the relationship between the state and local people over the use of wildlife is often one of conflict. In many cases, traditional hunters have been reclassified as poachers, especially in parks and reserves. Such conflict occurs especially where state properties and the common property regimes of tribal and rural peoples are in close proximity to one another.

Conflicts also arise when rights and responsibilities are not well defined. Hunting prohibitions are commonly imposed by governments for larger game animals or for protection of endangered species. When damage occurs to crops or dwellings, which can be considerable with species such as elephants or buffalo, it is often illegal to kill the offending animals. Compensation mechanisms for crop damage are frequently non-existent, turning community sentiment against the government and conservation policies. This is especially true if the community derives no direct benefit from those policies, such as a proportion of the fees paid by tourists and professional hunters or of fines levied on poachers.

Property regimes and wildlife use

Historically, forest-based communities have generally followed communal property rules, with regard to the land they lived on and to the wild animal resources they used. The customs and institutions that developed around common property regimes usually proved to be viable over the long term from ecological, economic and social standpoints, and they reflected the needs of the local people. Under the effect of rapidly spreading "modernization" over the past few decades, these traditional rules regarding tenure and natural resource use have undergone considerable change in most regions of the world, often losing much of their responsiveness to address overuse and social rules of distribution. In spite of these significant changes, however, contemporary community forestry still needs to consider the relevance of the various traditional forms of property management, particularly to productive and sustainable wildlife use. This is necessary in order to preserve the diversity of the natural environment while improving the welfare of local communities.

Negative Consequences of Integrating Wild Animals into Community Forestry Activities

As many of the agricultural crops planted by farmers are also appreciated by wild animals, there are occasions when wild animal species compete with humans for food. When an animal species causes major damage to crops, it is called a pest. Pests may be nematodes, grasshoppers, leafcutter ants, mice, various types of birds, pigs, elephants, monkeys, etc.

For example, in parts of Venezuela whistling ducks are major predators of rice. Crop depredation by elephants occurs to a varying extent throughout their present range in Africa and Asia, wherever cultivation neighbours an elephant habitat. In many parts of the Asian and African tropics, fruit bats can cause major damage to commercially grown fruit, particularly when the supply of wild fruits has been reduced through forest loss.

In short, in virtually all settings that human's plant crops close to

wild animal habitats, there will be at least one species that is a pest. When communities are interested in integrating wild species into community forestry activities, this competition must be recognized. Some species of animals that would otherwise make excellent candidates for soft management practices or confinement may have to be excluded because of the potential damage that might result from increasing their populations. This is particularly true of small animals with the ability to rapidly increase their populations or for large animals such as elephants, which are capable of extensive destruction.

Some professionals have also expressed concern about the relationship between captive-bred and wild stocks of the same species. If captive breeding becomes economically viable and international regulations are modified to allow legal trade in animal products from these breeding operations, then a negative effect can be expected on wild populations of the same species. First, it will be difficult to distinguish between wild and captive animals, resulting in the harvest of wild specimens to be sold as captive-reared. Second, without a direct economic link between harvest rates and the sustainable replacement of the wild population, as is required in a hunting or ranching situation, the importance of conserving wild populations and their habitats would become less urgent.

Another common practice that leads to problems is the introduction of exotic wild animal species into new environments. It is important to assess whether incorporation of exotic species into community forestry activities will have negative biological side-effects. Virtually without exception, the introduction of exotic wild animal species into new areas has had major negative repercussions on local ecosystems as well as on humans. There have been countless failures, which are hardly counterbalanced by the very few successes. For this and other factors (such as disease transmission from wild to domestic species), it is better to work with wildlife that originates from and around the local area.

There may also be gender-specific considerations in assigning

"pest" status to a wild animal species. In areas where women are in charge of gardens, for example, a species of animal that men would like to manage for hunting could reproduce to levels where its depredation of gardens would significantly decrease production, thus negatively affecting women's productive activities.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY

The goals of communal forest establishment are to involve the locals in the decision-making, management and utilization of its resources, to better their living conditions. Anukwa (2003) put forward the following objectives:

- It brings about resource management and control by the local people.
- It encourages and develops human capacity and manpower.
- It encourages local governance.
- It strengthens the traditional institutions and beliefs of the people.
- It initiates community development through permits and royalties derived from the process.
- It helps in ecological management.
- It complements government efforts in tree planting and management.
- It generates income and improved livelihood.
- It helps in biodiversity conservation.

The attainment of these objectives will therefore define the importance of community forestry.

PROBLEMS OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN NIGERIA

The following factors have slowed down the development of communal forestry in Nigeria:

- Institutional problems in forest matter and management
- Inadequate and inappropriate legislation.
- Inadequate manpower in the area of community forestry.
- Fear of loss of jobs by forestry staff
- Inadequate support for community leadership
- Insufficient funding of forestry projects
- Gender problems in resource utilization

- People's negative attitude and land tenure system
- Conflicts in forest resources utilization
- Population pressure on forestland and border crises
- Inadequate consultation and compensation for the local people whose lands are often used for forest development.
- Illegal and unsustainable extraction of forest resources.

Community Forestry in Cross River State

Community forestry started in Cross River State in about 1999 with the establishment of Forestry Commission after a preliminary survey of the activities of the forestry departments and other forest stakeholders in the state. The aim of the commission was to promote rural development through sustainable forest management applying participatory approaches, monitoring and evaluation of forestry activities. It was also to bring alternative ways of managing forests in the state by encouraging equity, sustainability, self management, good governance and democratization of forest management policy in the state; the development that will encourage the peasant communities and local people to participate in decision -making as it concerns forest management.

Practical approach to community Forestry in Cross River State

- Initial survey to determine the forest resources (timber and non-timber forest products) of the state.
- Strengthening capacity through workshops, seminars and consultations with all the forest stakeholders
- Training of forestry personnel employed in the commission.
- Discussing with local communities.
- Production of legislation for community forestry in the state.
- Establishment of forestry commission with the assistance of Department for International Development (DFID).
- Setting up of community Forest Management Committees (FMCs).

- Funding and training of FMCs in some communities across the state
- Survey and planting beacons at forestry boundaries in the state.
- Forest inventory to determine the potentials of forests (timber and non-timber) resources in the state.
- Regeneration of tree species especially rare species based on the inventory.
- Establishment of series of rare species for enrichment planting.
- Training in timber protection and process.
- Providing alternative livelihood options e.g. honey production, snailery, *afang* cultivation etc.
- Training of local people on how to survey and identify the fauna and flora species in the state.
- General forest conservation training.
- Involvement of women in forest decisions-making and processing of non-timber forest products e.g. Mimusop oils.
- Supply of forest equipments and implements.
- Creation of awareness among communities on community forestry in the state.
- Determine revenues from forest.
- Training in appropriate marketing of timber and non-timber forest products in the state.
- Upward review of forest products' tariff in favour of local communities to benefit more from royalties accruing from forests in the state.
- More forest stakeholders were given the opportunity to participate in forest management.
- The establishment of constitution guiding the operations of the FMCs in the state. These documents guide the FMCs on the roles and responsibilities and that of the forestry commission.
- Re-organization of forestry institution promotes establishment of appropriate forest laws and regulations in the state to encourage CBFM.

Some issues encountered in the implementation of CBFM clusion of the real forest owners in FMCS

Some of the real forest owners in the communities were totally excluded from decision making. And majority of these people are the main people that depend solely on forest for livelihoods. The people collect various forest products such as 'afang', wrapping leaves, 'bush-meat', nuts etc. from the forests.

Lack of transparency between forest stakeholders

The decision concerning forest management, forest harvesting, product distribution and the use of funds from the Community forests were not transparent. The executive of the FMCS were not really involved in decision making which was not acceptable by other forest stakeholders.

Illegal felling and hunting

It was observed that many people in the area with community forest that formed the FMC were now exploiting the forest illegally as a result of the collaboration between the forestry department and communities in the state because some of them were not involved in the decision making process of establishing the FMC. Some challenges encountered in the implementation of CBFM include:

- Issue of revenue sharing – Even though FMCs were well constituted in some of the communities in the state, the process of sharing the revenues and royalties accruing from the project appears not to be well shared among the forest stakeholders especially the local people.

- Illegal practice in forestry - Some of the FMCs members that were assigned to do some specific jobs like sale of timber were not transparent, leading to misunderstanding between the FMC members
- Poor control and enforcement of community forestry rules
- Lack of adequate fund for implementation of the project
- Inadequate communication between forest stakeholder

- Clumsy nature of the rules and regulations governing community forestry practices e.g. the strong rules and regulations on the operation of FMCs – establishment, organization and the operations of FMCs were not quite practicable e.g. boundary problem with neighbouring communities or states
- Lack of adequate enforcement of forest rules and regulations and inadequate personnel and equipment
- Problem of bush burning and clearing of forest to claim ownership of forest land.
- General lack of legal backing for the FMCs to operate even though efforts were geared towards the training of the FMCs on the operations of community forestry.
- Land use ownership/community land custom Change in land use rule by new legislation as it affects forestry e.g. clear-cutting of forests for land ownership.
- Inadequate forestry professionals to practice community forestry in the State

Conflicts between forest communities

When the concept of community forestry was introduced in Cross River State, there were conflicts between, within and outside the communities. Conflicts arose between communities living in or close to the forests; in term of boundaries of the forestland. Conflicts within communities arose when the FMCS were formed. Some people were of the opinions that those in the FMCS committee were to benefit more than them and they were to be deprived of harvesting forest products. Also, conflicts arose outside the communities in sharing the benefits between forest communities and the forestry commission and environmental NGOs with interest on protecting the forest.

Other challenges of CBFM in Cross River State

1. Mistrust between the forest stakeholders - Forestry Department staff and local people. Forestry Department staff felt that the communities will take over their functions
2. Conflicts between individuals and forest communities

3. Non-sustainability of the assistance from donor organizations, like the Department for International development (DFID) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), to community forestry projects.
4. Lack of political will
5. Lack of assistance to the FMCS and mistrust between FMCS executive and community leaders.
6. Inadequate knowledge and awareness of CBFM.
7. Misguided choice of tree species for regeneration.
8. No strong agreement between forest stakeholders.
9. Problems of sharing of benefits from forests.

SUCCESS OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY IN CROSS RIVER STATE

Forest regeneration

it was observed that during this period of community forest practices in Cross River State, there were reduction in illegal timber felling, improvement in forest fire control, and increase in replanting of degraded forests.

Revenue generation

During the era of DFID assistance, there was greater revenue generation accruing to the state government and the forest communities because revenue loss as a result of illegal timber exploitation was drastically reduced. Recently, the moratorium on logging, reducing logging activities in the state revenue from forest has drastically reduced. The resources necessary to purchase equipment and maintain forestry staff is in short supply.

CONCLUSION

It has been realized that community based-forest management approach is one of the best ways of collective forest management and use worldwide. In realization, the government of Cross River State is promoting sustainable forest management through community based- forest management approach

Currently, the Cross River State government has constituted a Forestry Commission Board and a bill is before the State House of

Assembly to be passed into law appointing permanent Board members to be fully in charge of forest management in the state.

When the appropriate rules and regulations on community forest management are put in place, and fully implemented, forest will be sustainably managed in the state. Secondly, building of capacity on how to manage the forests in the state in a participatory approach will promote the full support by all forest stakeholders. Adequate fund, equipment, manpower, must be provided by government. Also, since many people are yet to understand the concept of community forestry, adequate awareness, education and enlightenment must be created in the state.

Socio-economic, political and cultural environment of the community determines the interest of the local people to participate in community forestry.

The cross-sectional nature of forest land use should be taken into consideration as forestlands are competed for by the various sectors of the economy especially the agricultural sector.

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