

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF ONIGAMBARI FOREST RESERVES ON THE HOST COMMUNITIES

Abstract

Onigambari Forest Reserve is one of the forest reserves in Oyo State. It covers a land area of Nine Thousand hectares (9000 ha) and many rural communities are around the reserve.

A multistage sampling was adopted in which purposive sampling was used to identify communities where government and non-governmental organization have their presence and the benefits they attract to these communities.

A stratified random sampling was used to administer 25 questionnaires in chosen four (4) communities in each of the two axes of the forest reserve making a total of 8 communities and a grand total of 200 questionnaires.

The benefits derived from the forest reserve are many, which include land for farming within the open spaces of the forest, logging, fuelwood extraction, medicinal herbs and shrub extractions, hunting and bush meat sales.

It was recommended that young people should take advantage of the enormous opportunities around this forest reserve to get for themselves gainful business and employment opportunities. Government should also provide infrastructural facilities and amenities to the rural communities to make living there convenient for the people.

Keywords

Economic benefits, gainful employment, Rural communities, forest reserve.

Introduction

Forest serves as habitat for plants and animals and also helps filter the atmosphere by absorbing Carbon (iv) Oxide from the atmosphere and releasing oxygen needed for man.

Organized forestry started in Nigeria in 1899 when Mr. H. N. Thompson a British forest officer was transferred from India to Nigeria and began plans for the forest reservation in 1901, with an act No. 28 which was passed into law in 1908. The law is referred to as forest ordinances and became a legal instrument for the constitution of forest reserves in Nigeria (Ige *et al.* 2009).

A forest reserve is an area of land demarcated for management and practices of forestry activities. Forest laws and policies are strictly adhered to in the forest reserves (Ayetan 2019).

The forest sector provides enormous economic benefits to the rural people. It is a source of raw materials to the wood base industries such as sawmills, veneer, particle boards mills, splint industry etc.

Forest also generate employment for both the formal and the informal sectors. In fact the forestry sector provides employment for more than 2 million workers in fuelwood production and associated trades (CBN 2005).

The forest is a source of wealth for the rural communities as most of their livelihood depend on the forest. Olawumiet *al.* (2013) stated that the non timber forest products such as chewing sticks is a major source of livelihood in Ogbomosho metropolis providing income for the sustenance of person's engaged in it and their dependants.

Ayetanet *al* (2010) submitted that Nigeria is naturally blessed with large forest areas which can be harnessed to boost national economy in both the rural and urban settlements of the country.

Ellis 1990, stated that rural households often combine numbers of livelihood activities, such as agricultural crop production, wage labour and forest products collection to meet their needs.

FAO 1990 claimed that fuelwood collected from the forest is a major product commonly used for domestic and industrial generation of energy. Hence, the rural communities around forest reserves are benefiting enormously from the forest reserve situated around them.

The communities around Onigambari Forest Reserve also enjoy free fertile land in the open spaces within the reserve for the cultivation of arable crops. Some members of these communities also engage in fuelwood collection as means of livelihood.

Methodology

Purposive sampling was used to identify the communities where social amenities are available and the agency that provided the amenities to these communities. After which stratified random

sampling was used to administer structured questionnaires in four selected communities in each of the two axes of the forest reserve.

The total of 200 questionnaires were administered which 25 questionnaires were administered in each of the 8 selected communities (4 communities in Ibadan – Ijebu Ode axis and 4 communities in Ibadan old Lagos road axis).

In depth interviews were also conducted to obtain vital information from the village rulers and farmers association leaders, fuelwood association leaders and government officers in charge of the forest reserve.

Data collected were analysed using simple descriptive statistical tools such as tables, percentage etc.

Results And Discussion

Table1. Socio economic characteristics of the respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Distribution of respondents based on gender		
Male	98	49
Female	102	51
Total	200	100
Distribution of respondents based on marital status		
Single	42	21
Married	136	68
Divorced	7	3.5
Widowed	15	7.5
Total	200	100
Distribution of respondents based on educational level		
Tertiary	15	7.5
Secondary School Certificate	32	16
Primary School Certificate	101	50.5
Adult education	21	10.5

No Formal Education	31	15.5
Total	200	100

Distribution of respondents based on house hold size

≤ 2	42	21
2 - 3	41	20.5
4 - 5	53	26.5
6 - 7	43	21.5
Above 7	21	10.5
Total	60	100

Table2. Economic activities carried out by the host communities in the forest reserve

Activities	Frequency	Percentage
Logging	30	15
Farming	59	29.5
Fuelwood	55	27.5
Hunting	11	5.5
Bush meat sales	15	7.5
Chewing sticks	10	5
Mushroom	5	2.5
Herbal medicine extraction	15	7.5
	200	100

Source : Field Survey 2021

Table 3. Government and Private establishment that render services within the forest reserve

	Name of Organization	Ownership type	Services
1	Onigambari Research Station, Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria	Federal Government	Research into forestry, Training of rural and urban visitors on forestry Employment of some rural dwellers into skilled and unskilled labour work
2	Oyo State Department of Forestry	Oyo State Government	Protection of the forest reserve Establishment of young plantation Monitoring of logs and fuel wood extraction
3	Triton Farms	Private	Agricultural business Raising of seedlings for planting (PPP)

The benefits derived from forest reserves are enormous ranging from farming to herbal medicinal plants, from table 2 above, it was discovered that respondents benefit more in farming activities, this could be because there are many open spaces within the forest reserve which were allocated for many rural people for taungya farming which help the farmers to have access to fertile land for farming while the forestry department also benefit by enriching the forest with desirable tree species which they give to the farmers to plant into the allotted space within the forest reserve. The activity that is next to farming as revealed by this research work is fuelwood marketing which carries 27.5%, of the respondents activities done in the forest reserve, this could be so because of the abundance of trees whose branches easily breakdown and become liters in the forest. The forest managers allow people to extract these fuelwood to reduce liters from the forest floor which could aid intensive burning in case of fire hazard. Wood liters which are hazardous to the forest are harvested by fuelwood marketers under the strict monitoring of the forest officers to prevent the felling of unauthorized trees. Fuelwood marketing is a big business in communities along Ibadan - Ijebu ode road axis of Onigambari forest reserve, as they are displayed along the highway for passersby to see and buy. Infact, the marketers also have an association and a meeting place where they discuss government regulations regarding fuelwood and forest reserve. They also penalize members of the association who violate government policy on forest activity and handover difficult situation to forest officers.

Logging is also an economic activity done in Onigambari Forest Reserve. It carries 15% of the respondents activities (Table 2). Logging is very expensive and highly controlled and monitored by the forest officers, because it involves removal of trees. Logging activity in the study area is done when government gives approval for timber extraction, which is done majorly in dry season with strict supervision by forest officers. Only registered timber extractors are allowed to carry out logging operation and the logs are to be transported to sawmills for sawing. The registered contractors gets their work done with the help of chain saw operators and logging vehicles to fell the trees and haulage them to the sawmills. At the sawmill, there are so many people that are involved in the sawing operations.

Bush meat sales, chewing sticks extraction, herbal medicinal plants extraction, hunting and mushroom sales are other economic activities carried out by the rural dwellers in the study area.

Bush meat sales and herbal medicinal plant extraction carries 7.5% each of the activities by the respondents.

The major business of the female rural dwellers in Zeriki community is the herbal medicinal plant extraction, their male counterpart are majorly farmers, especially the Uhori tribe of Zeriki community.

Bush meat sales is also female business of Onigambari, Busogboro and Onipe people, besides fuelwood marketing which majority of the female are engaged in.

Hunting is also an economic activity in the study area (5.5%). Other activities such as chewing stick extraction and mushroom sales are done by few people as they carry 5% and 2.5% respectively.

Table 3 explains the different services rendered by both the government and private sectors.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Food price increase and high rate of unemployment is a big problem in Nigeria in the recent years and became worsened with the prevalent of Covid – 19 pandemic which has made so many Nigerians to loose job and the closure of land borders is also a contributory factor towards high price of food.

The situation became worsened by the high level of insecurity in the Northern part of Nigeria and pockets of violence in some Southern part of Nigeria. Fulani herdmen clash with farmers and the bandits invasion of some forest reserves are causing loss of job and increase in food price. It is worthy of appreciation by the urgent attention given to this situation by the Southern governors forum meeting, where they agreed on banning open grazing which has drastically reduced the farmers and herders clashes especially in the Southern Nigeria (Southern Governors Forum, 2021).

The introduction of Western Nigeria Security Network named Operation Amotekun by the six South Western State Government in August 2020 held in Ibadan, Nigeria (DAWN Commission,

August 2020) has brought down crime rate especially the repelling back of the bandits from the SouthWest Nigeria by the officers of Amotekun Corps. Hence, the rural areas where forest reserves are situated are relatively secured. Therefore, with the enormous benefits derived from Onigambari Forest Reserve by the host communities, more people should be encouraged to move from the urban settlement to the rural communities for gainful employment and business activities within the forest reserve. Many who have lost their jobs in the urban settlements can engage themselves in the rural areas.

Another benefit is that food prices are relatively low in the rural areas especially food crops that are produced locally in the rural areas. Research conducted by Usang 2019 show that taungya farmers in Onigambari Forest Reserve produces food crops such as maize, cassava, yam, cocoyam, plantain, banana, tomatoes, pepper etc. These food crops are relatively cheap in the rural communities.

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