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Forest conservation policy in Edo State: An assessment of roles of forestry taskforce in realising the set objectives

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ABSTRACT: The study examined the roles of task force forest in conservation in Edo state with the use of data collected from both primary and secondary sources. The data were obtained through the use of well structured questionnaires administered to 90 respondents in 15 communities and forests reserved, based on sampling intensities of 50% to elicit information on activities of task force in forest conservation. Secondary data were obtained from ministry of environment and task force head office. It was to elicit information on involvement of task force members in forest conservation, implementation of forest conservation policies and management of forest reserved respectively. Data were analyzed with the use of descriptive statistic, percentage and inferential statistic using ANOVA. Results showed that there was significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between the beats of forest within and outside reserve. Results also showed that bush fire dominated all the identified threats to forest conservation. The results showed that 37.49% of respondents affirmed that task force members were involved in forest conservation. The results showed that there was significant differences among the land areas of the forest ($p < 0.05$). The findings revealed that the task force officers involved in the implementation of forest conservation accounted for 47.59%, while 19.88% and 52.53% of the respondents affirmed by task force were reforestation of logged areas, the management of forest reserves respectively. In order to ensure the efficiency of task force in forest matters, Government should employ adequate number of field staff for effective monitoring of forest reserves as well as to bring their experience to bear.

Key words: Perception, Forest conservation, task force, forest policy objectives

Introduction

Rural communities Edo state Government are involved in the exploitation of forest resources for economic benefits (Kalu and Okojie, 2009 and FAO, 1995). These forests have been significantly altered from the original state largely due to activities like harvesting of the resources, Agricultural expansion and illegal exploitation of timber and non-timber and products. It is necessary for the forests to perform their functions so that permanent existence will be guaranteed. This is because the forests contribute significantly to the needs of the people and the economy at both the local and national level at large (Adeyoju, 1996; Kalu and Adeyoju, 2008).

These forest estates have suffered together with other sectors of the economy from mismanagement. In particular, the effectiveness of the implementation of forest policy has been seriously eroded as a result of low funding and low enforcement of law and regulations (Okali, 1990).

The concept of forest policy in Nigeria can be traced back to 1890, when George Denton in his acting capacity as Governor of the colony of Lagos, recognised the need to conserve a representative sample of the natural vegetation, thus establishing a forest administration and set aside some forest estates as Government protected areas (Egbo,

1985). It led to the creation of several game reserves which were later upgraded to national parks, such as the Okomu National Park (OKNP) in Edo state which was established in 1999. Edo state like most other states has since independence shifted from the long term pursuit of policy objectives to inconsistent forest management (Adeyoju, 1996). One of the examples is the introduction of the task force and committees to ensure the implementation of forest policy objectives. The creation of a body is effective in tackling of the endemic problems associated with protection and management of forest. The state set up a total of eighteen (18) task force and committees between 1992 - 2006. Eleven (11) of such were set up between 1992-2003, while the remaining Seven (7) were set up between 2004-2006. Majority of the task force members do not have in-depth understanding of the forest operation due to the fact that many of the members lack professional training in the field. Even though few staff of the task force and technical cadre acquires experience. Most of the task force and committees consist mainly of politicians who view forest management as a means of generating funds even for their personal uses without considering forest conservation and policy objectives. The forestry department was charged with the responsibility of;

1. Forest and wildlife management and regeneration
2. Forest protection, log movement, control and utilization
3. Advise and assist Government in formulating policies on management of the state forest and wildlife resources.
4. Ensure execution and implementation of Government policies on forest and wildlife resources
5. Ensure execution of Government policies in forestry (Edo state forestry Administration)

It is evident that these activities embarked upon by the Edo state Government is clearly aimed at achieving self – sufficiency in forest products and production, control of exploitation of its resources, ensuring proper management through the implementation of sound management principles together with the mobilisation of human resources. This study therefore focuses on how the task force have fared in the implementation of the set policy objectives with the activities of the task force members to realize the forest policy objectives.

FOREST CONSERVATION POLICY

In Nigeria constitution, Forestry is a state subject that means that, the various state governments in the country own and manage their forest estates. This makes it possible for some state governors to side track well spelt-out forest conservation policy objectives. Edo state is typical example of where timber exploitation has been taking place without adequate regeneration despite regular payment of regeneration fees. This is because the government in such a state that is rich in timber, exploit the elements of forestry “statism” through the use of veto powers (Adeyoju, 1996). Garrity and Lai, (2000) noted that government policies in some countries actively encourage sedentized agriculture in the plantation/Forest. In most of the plantations and reserves, permanent agriculture crops as well as arable crops have encroach the forest estates. For instance oil palm and cocoa plantation have taken over the considerable proportion of Forest estates. This is the case of some forest in Edo state. It accounts for allocating of forests for harvesting and abandonment of forest land for other users outside permanent vegetation cover. Companies and timber investment organisation are faced with many uncertainties. The forest estate in Nigeria is currently 10% of the land area, which is far, less than the original recommended 25%. In addition the country has witnessed rapid population increase as well as economic growth with resulted in further degradation of the forest estate. It is for the reason that Oseni and Umeh, (1988) have opined that the forest policy needs revision in order to arrest the ugly trend.

The forest policy in this country has centred on the frame work developed since pre-independence which focussed mainly on forest exploitation (Papka, 1999). The intention has been a generate revenue for the government. This accounts for reservation and/ or plantation establishment in Nigeria. Sokponba forest in Edo state was among early forest reserve in the country. The extent of plantation forest to be raised annually is one of the objectives of forest policy (Aladejana, 1971). It is most unfortunate that little attention is given to the needs of the immediate communities that depend on the forest prior to plantation establishment. Decision making institution Focused on utilization and management of forest resources should be based on the knowledge of the community (Field - juma, 1998). This should be done within the framework of their work views, in other words, in accordance with their ethics, norms and beliefs. Policies are formulated to provide a Frame word to address the management and development of forestlands, market and price policies as well as the one’s relating to private Forestry and researches in Forestry. According to 2006 national forest policy guide lines, Edo state government developed its own policy, which has the following objectives.

1. Consolidating and expending the forest estate in the state and their management for sustained yield.

2. Conserving forest and protecting of environment such as soil, water, air, biota for effective sustained use.
3. Regenerating the forest at a rate higher than that of exploitation.
4. Reducing waste in utilization of the forest and forest product to a tolerable level at all stages of exploitation, processing, marketing, and end uses
5. Protecting the forest estates from Forest fires, poachers trespassers and unauthorized grazers
6. Encouraging private forestry by establishing necessary incentives and guidelines.
7. Creating man-made forests in various location and ecological zone for specific end uses, including fuel wood, pulp-wood and amenities.
8. Increasing employment opportunities in sub-sector.
9. Developing of national parks and game reserves
10. Developing of non-wood forest resources which are of significance to local economic and for encouragement of agro-forestry.
11. Co-operation with other nations in forest development.
12. Encouraging alternative sources of energy other than wood and the development of more efficient methods of wood energy.

The directive principles of the state policy are enshrined in the constitution of Nigeria to achieve basic social goals. This is to realize the desired results when national forest law is put in place. The needs for national policy can never be overemphasized. In fact energies and resources of the nation are being devoted to achieve these social are being devoted to achieve these social goals (Sehgah, 1992). Therefore, it becomes imperative to adopt policy that secures the survival of the people as the national priority (De-montalembert, 1999).

In fact, there it is imperative to widen the forest policy away from the narrow concept of sustained yield as well as the needs of stakeholders. Blahna and younts-shephard (1990) have added that many foresters do not confront controversial issues during the first round of forest planning and thus ignore important information provided by citizens that could define area of conflicts. Such information could provide insight into public perception of the proposed management actions.

FOREST CONSERVATION LEGISLATION

Policy is the basis for which legislation is needed to regulate the use and development of forest resources. In most of the states of Nigeria, the forest legislation is made by legislators without taken due cognizance of the autonomy rights, needs and norms of the host communities (Papka, 1999). Consequently, this implementation of forestry edict for most of the southern state like Edo is unattainable. For instance, enactment of felling edict, legislation has to be put in place to ensure preservation of the forest from illegal logging. This is because natural resources legislation is basically enacted for the preservation, and control of forest and taxes resources (FORMECU 1994).

However, the view does not tally with what is obtained in Edo state. Here, legislation on forestry matter hinges on timber exploitation since government and individual have lost interest in regeneration. This makes forest legislation of most state in Nigeria to be counterproductive (Papka, 1999). Steelman (1995) noted that legislation mandating public involvement is often written without much appreciation of pre-existing bureaucratic structure. Thus, it becomes difficult for the appropriate authority to implement the law as intended for instance it is extremely difficult to enforce law against bush fire, illegal felling of trees etc.

Papka (1999) has identified problem of incompatibility of forestry laws, like customary, land tenure and environmental law that makes the matter worst. Therefore, it is imperative to harmonize the forest laws with other laws relating to land, agriculture, environment at all levels of the government or federating units, namely, host community, local council state and federal. In order to get this done appropriate machinery has to be set in motion for enactment of Forest legislation for the country. This is by promulgating laws that has been recommended by the 2006 national forest policy. Future revision the forest policy will follow guide lines principles identified by Papka, (1999):

1. Customary laws and socio-economic measures are ineffective unless it harmonizes with land use pattern, occupation etc
2. Legislation should be flexible to allow community to meet it changes needs
3. Provision and opportunity should be made for the most community to partake in the management protection and utilization of the resources
4. Tree tenure should be fully exercised so that individual who planted tree could harvest them without under restriction
5. The legislation should be simple and easily understood to ensure compliance and enforcement

The security of the forest quota in a national plan depends upon the effectiveness of forestry legislation and the administration. It is necessary to develop forest legislation based on the proper understanding of the environment in which the law would operate taking into cognizance the socio-economic perspective of the people. This will make the proposed legislation effective and meaningful so that the policy will be translated into expected reality.

The public and private agreement is particularly noteworthy because of (a) forest service restricts timber harvesting policies and (b) ensure consistent scheduled allowable harvest for sustainability (Schalla, 1989). He also added that logging company is given a harvesting right for about 100 years. Green and Siegel, (1994) recommended that state and local council should decrease timber harvest.

ROLE OF TASK FORCE IN FOREST CONSERVATION

Task force is a group of people who are temporarily assigned to work together to achieve a very specific and clearly defined objective. The mission of the Task Force is to develop a better understanding about forest conservation. Taskforce enjoy certain autonomy which makes the head of taskforce take decision without consulting superior officers. This makes a task force extremely mobile, flexible, and effective, allowing the members to use their abilities in very efficient ways. A task force also typically contains a broad cross-section of people, integrating an assortment of skills into a single unit (FAO, 2000). The goals of the task force are clearly spelled out, and the commander of the task force recommends the kind of members needed. When the desired goal is achieved, the task force is broken up again, with the members returning to their original positions (FAO, 2000).

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study area is Edo state in south western Nigeria which situates between latitude 6° and $7^{\circ}20'N$ and longitude $05^{\circ}44'E$ and $06^{\circ}45'E$. The state is bordered in the east by Anambra state, in the north by Kogi state, in the West by Ondo state and in the south by Delta state.

The relief in the state is generally flat to gently undulating with elevation increasing northwards from approximately 50m to 300m. The landscape is interrupted by an east stand stone scarp found in some portion of the state (FORMECU, 1999).

There are three (3) classes of soil in the state, which consists of rain forest, wetland and savannah soils. The rain forest soils are very deep and moderately deep, well drained and composed of stands, sandy loam, and loamy sand. The savannah soils are very deep, well drained and composed of sandy loam (soil survey division).

There are two (2) major seasons in a year, comprising the rainy and dry seasons, the former starts from March to November while the later starts from November to February. The annual rainfall distribution is between 1250mm and 1500mm. The state is mostly covered by the moist tropical forest with lowland rainforest accounting for 76.5% of the total land area of the state (FORMECU, 1999). The distribution of rainfall is markedly bimodal with a lower peak in July and August (Barbour et al, 1982). The mean temperature varies between $25^{\circ}C$ in the south and $34^{\circ}C$ in the north while the relative humidity range from 79 to 90%.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study was carried out for the assessments of roles task force in forest conservation and implementation of forest conservation policies by task forces in fifteen (15) communities namely; (Siloko, Ugbogiobo, Ehor, Ekiadolor, Ekenwan, Sabo-Ora, Ugbuwe, Auch, Ofosu, Okogan Abudu, Agbor Road, Upper Sokponba By Pass, Okha-Odade Junction, Egba Police Junction, Lampese/Ibilo. There were a total of 122 members of task force distributed across the above listed communities in Edo State.

Sampling Method

A reconnaissance visit was made to ministry of environment and task force office at Ikpokpan, GRA. Subsequently, a survey was conducted to elicit information concerning perception of forest conservation policy by task force on forestry. Out of 16 beats in the state there were task force members in 15 beats (communities. These beats consists Siloko, Ugbogiobo, Ehor, Ekiadolor, Ekenwan, Sabo-Ora, Ugbuwe, Auch, Ofosu, Okogan Abudu, Agbor Road,

Upper Sokponba By Pass, Okha-Odade Junction, Egba Police Junction, Lampese/Ibilo. A field survey was undertaken in these ministries to collect primary data. The respondents were composed of task force officers in Government reserved forest, based on 50% sampling intensities (Table 1). The respondents in these areas were randomly selected in each of the communities in the study under review.

Table 1: Sampling Intensities of Task Force Officer in Each Beat

Communities	Numbers of task force in each beat	50%	Sampled population
Siloko	8		4
Ugbogiobo	6		3
Ehor	6		3
Ekiadolor	8		4
Ekenwan	10		5
Ekpon	0		0
Sabo-Ora	6		3
Ugbuwe	8		4
Auchi	10		5
Ofosu	6		3
Okogan Abudu	8		4
Agbor Road	6		3
Upper Sokponba By Pass	6		3
Okha-Odade Junction	8		4
Egba Police Junction	10		5
Lampese/Ibilo	6		3
Total	122		56

A total of 96 questionnaires were distributed in all the beats considered in this study while 90 questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected by primary data from task force officers and secondary data from Edo state ministry of Environment and task force head office at Ikpokpan, GRA. The primary data were obtained with the use of well structured questionnaires used to elicit information. Personal interviews were carried out using field assistants, who made use of local languages, such as Bini, amongst others. Data were analysed using descriptive statistic, percentages as well as inferential using analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Results and Discussion

Some identified threats to forest conservation identified were fires, poaching, trespassing, illegal logging and uncontrolled grazing (table 2). The results showed that illegal logging dominated all other variables considered in the study. This corroborates the view expressed by Tivy, (1996) that fire is as the principal threats to forest because it destroys forest canopy and opens up way for other diverse forms of vegetation especially grasses.

Table 2: Threats to Forest Conservation Policy Implementation.

Communities	Illegal logging	Poaching	Trespassing
Siloko	6	1	3
Ugbogiobo	6	-	-
Ehor	5	-	-
Ekiadolor	5	-	1
Ekenwan	6	-	-
Ekpon	7	-	-
Sabo-Ora	6	-	-

Ugbuwe	6	-	-
Auchi	6	-	-
Ofosu	6	-	-
Okogan Abudu	6	-	-
Agbor Road	6	-	-
Upper Sokponba	1	-	6
Okha-Odade Junction	-	-	7
Egba Police Junction	-	-	5
Lampese/Ibilo	-	-	6
Total	66	1	28
Means	55 ^a	1 ^b	4.7 ^b

Table 3 shows the extent of the conserved areas in the communities under review which consist of 0-10, 11-20, 21-30 and less than 30 hectares. The results showed that there was significant differences ($p < 0.05$) among the land areas of the forest. It was further revealed that hectare of land above 30 hectares dominated every other hectares considered in the study.

Table 3: Conservation Area (ha)

Communities	0 – 10	11 – 20	21 – 30	>30
Siloko	4	2	-	1
Ugbogiobo	2	-	-	-
Ehor	2	1	-	-
Ekiadolor	1	-	-	-
Ekenwan	1	-	-	-
Sabo-Ora	1	-	-	-
Ugbuwe	2	-	-	-
Auchi	2	-	-	-
Upper Sokponba	-	-	1	5
Okha-Odade Junction	-	-	5	2
Egba Police Junction	1	-	-	5
Lampese/Ibilo	-	-	-	6
Total	16	3	6	19
Means	1.78 ^b	1.5 ^b	3 ^b	3.8 ^a

It could be deduced that the reason why the task force officers may not succeed in the study area is the absence of field staff as well as inadequate monitoring team. The incentives given by the government are not very encouraging. The findings agree with the view expressed by Hellermann, (2007) that one of the major problems of forest operations is the absence of field staff.

The results showed there was significant differences ($p < 0.05$) in number of task force members in forest conservation (table 4). It was revealed that 1-10 and 31-40 dominated other members of task force who are in charge of forest conservation.

Table 4: Number of Task Members Involved In Forest Conservation

Communities	1 – 10	11 – 20	21 – 30	31 – 40
Siloko	6	1	1	1
Ugbogiobo	6	-	-	-
Ehor	3	2	-	-

Ekiadolor	5	1	-	-
Ekenwan	2	3	-	-
Sabo-Ora	4	2	-	-
Ugbuwe	2	1	1	-
Auchi	2	3	1	-
Upper Sokponba Road	-	-	1	2
Okha-Odade Junction	-	-	-	5
Egba Police Junction	-	1	-	4
Lampese/Ibilo	-	-	-	6
Total	30	14	4	18
Means	3.75 ^a	1.75 ^b	1 ^b	3.6 ^a

The findings reveal that the staff strength of Task force members is somewhat low. That is the number is insufficient to carry out adequate forest operations concerning conservation.

Table 5 highlights type of forest conservation policy practiced. The results revealed that there were significant differences ($p < 0.05$) among the variables considered in the study. The variables identified were regeneration, forest protection, log control and forest management. It was highlighted that forest protection dominated all the variables considered in the study.

Table 5: Type of Forest Conservation Policy Practiced.

Communities	Regeneration	Forest protection	Log control	Forest management
Siloko	-	3	2	1
Ugbogiobo	-	6	-	-
Ehor	1	-	3	-
Ekiadolor	-	3	2	-
Ekenwan	-	3	2	1
Sabo-Ora	-	5	1	-
Ugbuwe	-	3	3	-
Auchi	-	3	2	-
Upper Sokponba Road	1	1	-	2
Okha-Odade Junction	1	-	-	-
Egba Police Junction	1	-	-	-
Ofosu	-	6	-	-
Okogan	-	6	-	-
Agbor	-	6	-	-
Total	4	45	14	4
Means	1 ^b	4.09 ^a	2 ^b	1.3 ^b

That was because the observation revealed that forest protection practiced differed significantly from the other variables. These agree with the fact that the original purposes of conservation well established in the policy which suffered great set back at implementation.

Table 6 shows that 53.78% of the task force officers affirmed that task force officers partook in forest conservation. However about 46.07% of them had a contrary view on task force performance in the forest conservation efforts

Table 6: Performance of Task Force in Forest Conservation.

Communities	Yes	No
Siloko	6.59	4.39
Ugbogiobo	1.09	5.49
Ehor	2.19	3.29
Ekiadolor	4.39	1.09
Ekenwan	3.29	2.19
Sabo-Ora	6.59	1.09
Ugbuwe	3.29	3.29
Auchi	3.29	3.29
Ofosu	-	6.59
Okogan-Abudu	-	6.59
Agbor Road	-	6.59
Upper Sokponba Road	6.59	1.09
Okha-Odade Junction	6.59	1.09
Egba Police Junction	6.59	-
Lampese/Ibilo	3.29	-
Total	53.78	46.07

In fact, since the inception of task force officers on forest matters in Edo state, they have not perform creditably well because of lack of government's incentives. It could also due to the fact that the establishment of task force is based on political purposes because most os the members are appointed bases based on political patronage.

Table 7 shows the effects of various Government programmes to improve forest conservation area such as change, adequate enforcement of forest law and stoppage of task force on forestry. There was significant difference ($p < 0.05$) among the means of Government programmes on forest conservation areas level. It was further revealed that adequate enforcement of forest laws dominated every other Government programmes to improve forest conservation areas as considered in the study.

Table 7: Government Programmes to Improve Forest Conservation Areas.

Communities	CAP	AEFL	STFAFM
Siloko	3	3	2
Ugbogiobo	1	-	5
Ehor	-	2	3
Ekiadolor	1	4	1
Ekenwan	2	4	-
Sabo-Ora	1	6	-
Ugbuwe	1	5	-
Auchi	1	4	1
Ofosu	-	6	-
Okogan-Abudu	1	5	-
Agbor Road	-	6	-
Upper Sokponba Road	-	4	1
Okha-Odade Junction	-	7	-
Egba Police Junction	-	6	-
Lampese/Ibilo	-	6	-
Total	11	68	13
Means	1.4 ^b	4.9 ^a	2.2 ^b

KEY:

CAP = Change of Adopted Policies, AEFL = Adequately Enforce Forest Laws, STFAFM = Stoppage Task Force

Agents on Forestry Matter

The findings agree with the view expressed by Kalu and Izekor (2006) that the usual problems associated with policy in Nigeria lie with implementation phase of policy process.

The results showed that 59.6% of the respondents affirmed that task force officers were involved in protection against illegal logging on daily basis, while 40.4% of the respondents believed that task force officers were protecting the forest reserves against illegal logging on weekly basis (table 8).

Table 8: Frequency of Protection against Illegal Logging.

Duration	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	53	59.6
Weekly	36	40.4
Total	89	100

The findings agree with FAO (2001) that observe that. Nigeria's forests are increasingly at risk, mostly as a result of illegal logging, which destroying some 500,000 hectares in Edo state forests every year. Government officials admit that illegal exploitation is occurring almost all over the country, both in forest reserves and in unreserved forest areas. Illegal trading in timber products. This also has adverse effect in the conservation efforts of forest estates.

Table 9 shows some of the identified punishment meted to forest offenders by the task force member were involved in as imprisonment, payment of fine, impoundment of operating tools and magnitude of offence. The results revealed that there were significant difference ($p < 0.05$) among the treatment considered in the study.

Table 9: Role of Task Force on combating Forest Offences.

Communities	I	POF	IOOT
Siloko	-	7	2
Ugbogiobo	-	-	6
Ehor	1	2	2
Ekiadolor	1	3	2
Ekenwan	2	2	1
Sabo-Ora	1	3	2
Ugbuwe	1	2	1
Auchi	3	3	1
Ofosu	1	3	-
Okogan-Abudu	1	2	-
Agbor	-	-	-
Upper sokponba	-	-	1
Okha	-	-	-
Egba	-	-	-
Lampese	1	-	-
Total	12	22	18
Means	7.4 ^a	3.1 ^b	2 ^b

KEY: I = Imprisonment, POF = Payment of fine, IOOT = Impoundment of operating tools.

It was further revealed that imprisonment dominated every other penalties identified in the study. Forest management in Nigeria has been in the hands of the Government for over a century. This has resulted in uncontrolled deforestation of the National forest, encroachment by farmers practicing shifting agriculture and desertification at an alarming rate FAO, (2001).

Conclusion

The importance of forestry policy on forest conservation cannot be over-emphasized. In fact, forest conservation is one of the objectives of forest policy. Thus it is expedient to assess how far task force members have fared in carrying out forest conservation efforts. It is unfortunate that forest conservation policy has not fared well which result to some obvious threats in the forest estates. These include forest fire, poaching, trespass, illegal logging and grazing which negatively affect sustainable.

However, the presence of task force is very common in a democratic setting. It is vestige of military regimes. It is somewhat important in forest conservation especially in checking the roles of some forest officers that connive with illegal timber loggers in sharp practices. It is evident that policies put in place to solve protection and conservation problems will be rendered useless without proper implementation. Thus, there is an urgent need for proper implementation of forest conservation policy as a strong safeguard for providing best option for halting forest decline as well as making the required contribution to the well being of the society as well as economic development (Kalu and Okojie, 2009).

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