Adoption of Participatory Forest Management System for Sustainability in Nigeria

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Received: October 14, 2010 / Accepted: April 08, 2011 / Published: August 30, 2013.

Abstract: Forest is a composite renewable natural resource of multiple values to mankind. Over the years in Nigeria, government has been the sole player in the management of forest resources at the exclusion of the neighbouring forest-dependent communities to forest estates. The consequences of the monopolistic management are widespread illegal and destructive lumbering, degradation, deforestation and varying ecological disasters. This paper, therefore, discusses strategies that could facilitate and foster participatory sustainable forest management which include formulation of people-orientated forest policies and laws, creation of public awareness, stakeholders' consultation, training and capacity building, provision of incentives and creation of market channels for forest products. The aim is to underscore the potency of people-based forest management system, which considers the peoples' interest and welfare while ensuring effective conservation of forest resources. The method adopted is a review and appraisal of the prevailing situations. It is recommended that mass mobilization for participation in sustainable forest resources management and creation of enabling environment for organized private-sector involvement in forest resources activities could engender rapid development in forestry sub-sector of Nigerian economy.

Key words: Forest resources, sustainable management, participatory, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

People based forest management system, which is responsive to various forest stakeholders needs, allows people (the stakeholders) to take responsibilities and share meaningfully in the benefits accruing from sustainable forest management. Forest stakeholders are all the people who are interested in or affected by forest management and operations [1]. They include government agencies; communities in and around forest areas; indigenous people; employees, research institutions; investors and insurers; customers and consumers; environmental interest groups and the general public [1]. Forest stakeholders possess an economic, cultural or political interest in, or influence over the resource. People have varied interest and are affected differently by the way and manner the forest is managed because they all depend, in various ways

on the multiple goods and services derivable from the forest for their economic, social and cultural well-beings. People-based or participatory forest management system integrates the socio-economic and cultural needs of the people with resource conservation. It advocates for environmental interest in all its ramifications.

Globally, it is becoming increasingly clear that government alone can not manage forest resources sustainably in view of its inability to provide the necessary financial resources, personnel and other facilities to ensure appropriate resources management [2]. It has also been realized that the shrinking government owned forest estate is not enough to meet the society's growing demands for forest products. Furthermore, the conventional forest management system, which is very bureaucratic, centralized, exclusionary and close-circuit in approach, has failed to improve and sustain out forest resources.

Consequently, there has been a broadening of the

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scope of forest management to accommodate the interest of the different groups of people who are affected directly or indirectly by forests. Hence, the shift from management for mono-forest products to management for multiple forest products, and from one-sectoral to cross-sectoral approach to forest management. Forestry practices are therefore, moving from the traditional forest management approach that deals with technical details and absolute concentration on trees to managing the forest in a way that ensures greater flow of benefits to all stakeholders especially the forest communities [3].

Glamour for paradigm shift in forest resources management is not only peculiar to Nigeria. Many other countries are increasingly integrating the private sector and the local communities into the management of their forests. For example, governments in Mexico, Peru, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand have created the enabling environment for the sector and local communities to participate meaningfully in the development and management of forest estates, and this has reasonably increased sizes of forest covers and the performances of their sectors [2, 4, 5]. It is therefore, essential for such collaborative efforts to form the foundation of forest management in Nigeria.

2. Strategies for Fostering Participatory Forest Management in Nigeria

The strategies for enhancing a people orientated forest management system in Nigeria are those actions that must be taken or the things that must be put in place to attract all the relevant forest stakeholders to willingly invest, fully support and voluntarily take responsibilities for sustainable forest management in Nigeria.

2.1 Review of Forest Policy and Legal Framework

The current forest policy and its administrative machinery focused on government as the only stakeholder. This policy framework and its implementation does not encourage people's

participation in forest management, even though it states the need for the private sector participation as part of the strategies to achieve the objective of government policy on forest product. For example, the compulsion of individuals, groups, organizations and communities to obtain permission from government forestry offices before harvesting any tree, including those raised by them on their own land, suggests that all forest resources belong to government alone. This policy could deter to investors, hence, must be carefully reviewed to evolve a strategy that strikes a balance between sustainable management goals and proprietary rights [5]. People should be allowed to plant, maintain and own trees and forests.

A review of the existing forest policy and legal framework should lead to a well-defined and protected properties right that is transferable so that investors would be sure of having clear benefits from their investment and can easily exchange their forest properties for money or mortgage them to procure loans from financial institutions at any time. Prospective forest investors need reliable tenure powers to develop, own and manage forest resources sustainable. The government would regulate advice and monitor to ensure orderliness and environmental control compliance [5]. Developing partnership for forest conservation to their full potential requires willingness on the part of government sharing authority with other actors willing to assume responsibility, retaining sufficient interest and influence to ensure that the public interest is protected and providing sufficient resources to support devolved responsibilities [6].

Furthermore, the devotion of the whole government forest estate to timber production alone is a relegation of the local community and indigenous people's need for non-timber forest products, which are their sources of livelihood. The achievement and substance of forest resources conservation in Nigeria requires the full integration of social and economic goals into conservation planning process to ensure that forest stakeholders' expectations from the forest are met.

This requires a policy framework that considers the socio-economic development of the wider group of forest stakeholders. Shared benefits and responsibilities could ensure sustained livelihoods and higher returns from the forest to meet the needs of the stakeholders [7]. Focusing of forest policy on the participation of all stakeholders in the planning and sharing of all benefits accruing from the forest is a necessity to promote people's participation in forest management in Nigeria [8]. Tree tenure and sharing of benefits were key issues that school teachers and students sought clarification for them to fully partake in tree planting in school premises for protection against windstorms [9]. The mode of disposal of trees has strong influence on the enthusiasm with which tree planting is accepted and practised [10].

The existing land use laws, rules and regulations in Nigeria need to be reviewed to conform to the current realities such that prospective forest investors can easily procure land, since land is the most important factor in forest resources development and conservation. The tenure term should be long enough to cover the long period the project will take to mature, judging from the fact that forestry investment requires long gestation regime.

2.2 Creation of Awareness

Effective awareness campaign to properly enlighten the different groups of stakeholders is a necessary strategy to enhance the participation of people in forest management in Nigeria. Many people, including some government policy makers in other sectors, private individuals, and local community members, who should support and even participate actively in forest resources management, are not aware of the importance of forest resources. They are not sensitive to the consequences of forest destruction, and reason for their participation in the development and conservation of forest resources. Therefore, there is need for the forest managers (government forest services and commissions) to mount an effective

grassroots awareness campaign programme to enlighten the Nigeria populace on the renewability of forest resources, the importance of forest resources conservation, the consequences of forest destruction, the need to invest in forest resources conservation, and how to get technical assistance to identify, invest and manage forest projects for solving their particular needs [11]. When the people are enlightened, they will certainly know, build confidence, develop interest to support and even, get actively involved by accepting responsibilities to develop and conserve forest resources in Nigeria.

2.3 Stakeholders Consultation

Consultation with all the relevant stakeholders is a powerful tool for enhancing people's participation in forest management in Nigeria. Consultation is a two-way flow of information between the forest manager and the other stakeholders [1]. People feel recognized and have a sense of belonging when they are consulted, especially when they are allowed to make their own inputs. Regular consultation affords the forest managers the opportunity to inform other stakeholders about the objectives of forest management. The other stakeholders in turn have the opportunity to make their own contributions based on their ideas and interests. Proper consultation leads to meaningful collaboration in which stakeholders share responsibilities and benefits of forest management. If the forest management plan is the product of the various stakeholders' ideas, the implementation of the document and the monitoring of activities would be a collective responsibility of all the stakeholders. The benefits derived therefrom, should be equitably among the various stakeholder so that the people will develop stronger interest and willingly commit themselves fully to sustainable forest management in Nigeria. Thus, regular consultation with all the relevant stakeholders is an effective strategy for enhancing people based forest management. But first the stakeholders must be well enlightened.

2.4 Training and Capacity Building

A very essential strategy for enhancing people based forest management system in Nigeria is the training and capacity building of all the stakeholders. The professional foresters employed in government forest services or forestry commissions were only trained on how to manage forest resources. They do not have the skill of understanding socio-ecological interrelationships. They are rigidly concerned about the resources, not minding what happens to the people living around these resources. Their negative attitude towards the other stakeholders has dampened people's interest and even pitched them against the forest managers (the government) and the forest resources. To effect and sustain the change in organization and operational strategies, forestry professionals should be trained in such a way to embrace the anticipated shift towards socio-ecological interrelationship [12]. This will help to improve community relations and facilitate the transfer of scientific knowledge and operational techniques to the community.

Other stakeholders, especially the local communities, who lack the scientific knowledge of the resources, but are rich in traditional knowledge, must also be trained to build up their capacity to contribute meaningfully to participatory forest management system. They should also be trained to acquire skills on alternative sources of livelihood that would reduce their dependence on forest resources. Such training may include basic silvicultural techniques, agroforestry practices, bee keeping, cane rat production, poultry production and record keeping.

2.5 Provision of Incentives

Provision of incentives is a necessary strategy to enhance people based forest management system in Nigeria. But Atampugre [13] advised that for sustainable motivation, incentives should be found in benefits that are tangible, genuine and long-lasting. Incentives will lure and encourage individuals, private organizations and local communities to support accept responsibilities and even invest in the development

and conservation of forest resources for two main reasons namely:

(1) Incentives will help cushion the effect of tying down ones resources for such a long period that forest projects take to yield. Not many people in Nigeria can afford to tie down their resources for more than 10 years without incentives or alternative sources of livelihood. This long gestation period of forestry projects scares away investors and thus, creates funding problems.

(2) Incentives augment the investors' limited resources and thus, liberalize investment in forest resources development and conservation. Forestry projects are capital intensive and not many individuals, groups, organizations and communities can afford such huge capital required for active participation in forest resources management without some forms of incentives from the government.

According to Ref. [5], community participation in forest development should be nursed by a set of generous economic and technical incentives such as the provision of seedlings, short term trainings on tree planting and management techniques, soft loans from the banks, exemption from import duties on certain tools and equipments, different real estate taxation, and recognition/awards for corporate involvement in tree planting and environmental friendly projects. Other incentives include increase in the ratio of royalty paid to local communities, infrastructural developments such as the provision of electricity, clean water, schools and access roads for forest dwelling communities [8]. These incentives will motivate them to participate actively in forest management. If individuals and wood-based companies could successfully use incentives to elicit support from communities to release their forests, government with all its might, can as well use it effectively to win full and continuous partnership with forest-dwelling communities.

2.6 Provision of an Enabling Market Environment

Government has been the sole producer and primary marketer of forest products in the country.

Forest product pricing and marketing in Nigeria has been so inefficient and distorted. The prices of forest products in Nigeria are ridiculously low. In fact one can rightly say that the government had all along been producing and selling forest products at above 50% subsidized prices. The prices of forest products in Nigeria do not reflect their cost of production. Low pricing of forest products is partly responsible for the unattractiveness of forestry projects in economic sense, which in turn discourages private sector investment. It is also responsible for the wasteful utilization of forest products, which also contributes to the increase pressure on forest resources. To induce private sector involvement in the development and conservation of forest resources in Nigeria the trend must be reversed, appropriate pricing of forest products is essential.

Users of forest products must pay the full economic cost of their actions so that investors would reap the full economic benefits of their investments [14]. In order to attract private sector participation, a good market environment must be provided. This can be done by decentralizing the forest products market through privatization (or deregulation) of the production and marketing of forest products, especially roundwood. Natural forest and plantations managed for wood production should be placed in the hands of the private sector with the provision of necessary incentives and proper regulation by the government.

3. Conclusions and Recommendation

Forest management system all over the world is becoming more and more people-orientated. Reorientation forest management system in Nigeria to a people-based paradigm is a big challenge that must be faced by all forest stakeholders now in order to ensure the sustainability of the forest resources and the sustainable livelihood of the people. Hence, all the stakeholders must work together to provide the enabling environment for a successful collaboration.

But first, the government must set the ball rolling

by consulting with and enlightening all other stakeholders; providing a favourable legal and policy framework; training its forestry staff to be able to work effectively with other stakeholders; building up other stakeholders capacity to participate meaningfully in forest resources management; and providing the necessary incentives and a good market environment. Professional foresters should acquire the persuasive skill necessary for reaching out to the populace. They should be ready to offer profitable technical assistance to individuals, groups, organizations and communities, who are willing to invest and participate in forest resources management.

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