



## HISTORICAL TRENDS AND CHALLENGES IN FOREST ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

The paper briefly examined the trend of forest administration in Nigeria from the pre-colonial era to date. It examined it vis-a-vis forest policy formulation and review in the country. Presently, there is no separate forest policy in Nigeria but the administration of forest resources in the country is executed by the three tiers of government: the Federal, State and Local. Most of the authorities over forest resources are vested in the hands of the State government. Regrettably, the governments at all tiers have not paid much attention to forestry activities in the country. Inadequate staffers, poor remunerations, inadequate funding and corruption are some of the challenges facing forest administration and management in Nigeria. Most recently, the activities of encroachers/squatters, armed herdsmen, terrorists groups, kidnappers etc have caused a lot of destruction and depletion of our forests resources. These have affected forest administration and sustainable forest management in Nigeria. The paper, therefore, recommended the need for an urgent passage and approval of a separate policy for forestry, as has been done successfully in some of our neighbouring countries. This will positively affect the planning and execution of forestry programmes and activities in the country; more funding of forestry activities; improve security in our forest reserves to flush out criminals and other illegal settlers; the recruitment of well-trained and experienced forest personnel into the various forests organizations and agencies and the involvement of relevant stakeholders in the development, planning and implementation of forestry activities.

**Keywords:** Forests, Forests administration, Forest management

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria covers a total area of 923,768 km square with a population of 140,431,790 in 2006 (NPC, 2009). The population was estimated to 206, 139,590 in 2020 (UN Data, 2021), 211,898,957 in 2021 (UN Data, 2021) and 236,235,570 in 2025 (Worldometer, 2025). As a result of its large land area, the country covers different climatic and ecological zones. The forest endowment of the country is also as diverse as the ecological zones. According to the Society of American Foresters (SAF)net Dictionary, Forestry is the science, art, and craft of creating, managing, using, conserving, and repairing forests and associated resources, in a sustainable manner, to meet desired goals, needs, and values for human benefit. Forestry is practiced in plantations and natural stands. The challenge of forestry is to create systems that are socially accepted while sustaining the resource and any other resources that might be affected. A forest can simply be defined as the vegetation or land area that is dominated by trees and other woody plants. According to the UN (2021), a forest area is a land under natural or planted stands of at least 5 meters in situ, whether productive or not, and excludes tree stands in agricultural production systems (such as fruit plantations and agro-forestry systems) and urban parks and gardens. They include close canopy forests and open woodlands, where some leaves and twigs of adjacent trees overlap. Nigeria is blessed with a large expanse of forest cover but this important resource is not sustainably used, managed and/or conserved (Ayeni, 2013). Nigeria's forests fall into three basic vegetation categories, namely the coastal mangrove and freshwater forest, the tropical rainforest in southern humid zone, and the drier forest of the middle and northern regions (Akinbami et al, 2003; Salami and Balogun, 2006; Ayeni, 2013a). Forests in Nigeria are recognized as a

formidable base for sustaining the economy of the country and the livelihood of the rural populace. The forest has served as a source of livelihood to people in Nigeria for many generations (Ezenwaka & Abere 2009). The forests provide the raw materials for both primary and secondary industries, while generating employment for a sizeable number of the people.

A careful study of the vegetation of Nigeria shows that true and protected forest is mainly found in the southern part of the country and it occupied 93,345 sq. km in 1993 i.e. 9.6 per cent of the total land area of the country. This area increased to 11.4 percent in 1994 but dropped to 10 percent in 1995 (CBN, 2001). Report by the World Bank (WB) (2025) indicated that the forest area in Nigeria was 213,004 km<sup>2</sup> in 2022. This increase was said to be as a result of an increase in plantation forests. Historically, accounts also indicate that the country's main forest which was over 600, 000 km<sup>2</sup> in 1887 (i.e. 60 % of land mass) had reduced by half in 1960 (Amusa, 2024). Amusa (2024) also reported that forest covered an estimated area of 175, 000 km<sup>2</sup> in 1990, 135, 000 km<sup>2</sup> in year 2000; but between year 2000 and 2005, the country lost about 75, 195 km<sup>2</sup> of its primary forests (i.e. 55.7 % of native and original forests that have never being logged before). The records in the Federal Department of Forestry as of 2006 shows that Nigeria has a total of 1,160 constituted forest reserves, covering a total land area of about 107,527 km<sup>2</sup>, that is about 10% of the Nigerian total land area (FAO, 1990). This is well below FAO's recommended national minimum of 25%. The report in 2010 put forest areas in Nigeria to cover about 90,410 km<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1) (FAO, 2010; Batta et al., 2013). The States most affected by forest cover losses are Edo, Taraba, Cross River, Ondo and Ogun States.



Figure 1: Historical Data Chart for Forest Area (in km<sup>2</sup>) in Nigeria

Source: World Bank Indicators by Country

In comparison, the FAO (2015) reported that forest land covers in neighbouring Niger Republic equals to 1.14 million ha, with primary forest occupying 0.17 % of the country. The forestry sector in that country contributes up to 17 % of the GDP of their and provides numerous ecosystem services that contribute in building a resilient socio-ecological system in the Sahel amongst which they serve as safety nets during times of drought. Notwithstanding all these and other important functions of these forests, Niger Republic is also facing acute degradation and deforestation problems. Similar to the situation in Nigeria, the Green Climate Fund (2019) reported that between 1990 and 2000, the country lost an average of 62,000 ha of forest per year, with an average annual deforestation rate of 3.74 %. The high forest loss within this period was attributed to the Sahel drought which peaked in the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. However, unlike Nigeria, between 2000 and 2005, the rate of forest loss in Niger Republic fell to 12,000 ha per year and between 2005 and 2010, the forest loss remained stable at 12,000 ha per year with an annual loss rate of 1%. The forest loss decreased with renewed farmer-managed forest restoration in Niger after the drought years. In total, between 1990 and 2010, Niger lost more than 50% of its main forest cover (740,000 ha). Measuring the total rate of habitat conversion (defined as change in forest area plus change in woodland area minus net plantation expansion) for the 1990-2005 intervals, Niger lost 25.7% of its forest and woodland habitat (Green Climate Fund, 2019).

The Republic of Cameroon counts about 22.5 million hectares of humid Forests and its deforestation rate was of 0.8% per year between 1990 and 2000, against 0.3% between 2000 and 2005 (de Wasseige et al. 2012). This is way lower than that experienced in Nigeria and Niger Republic. The population was about 20 million in 2005 (MINEPAT, 2010), out of which the forest sector (including formal and informal, timber and non-timber sub-sectors) provided about 617,000 jobs (about 3.1 % of total population) (Eba'a Atyi et al., 2013). An assessment of the economic importance of forests tells that its formal and informal approved components contributed 3.95% to Cameroon's GDP in 2013 or about € 696.54 million (Eba'a Atyi et al., 2013).

For over half a century now, Nigeria's forests including the conservation areas have continued to shrink. Various factors have been attributed to the shrinkage but the major ones are intensive exploitation of the resources during the forest exploitation era (between 1930 and 1960s), present day uncontrolled logging and poor forest conservation among other factors (Ogunwusi, 2012).

### History of Forest Administration in Nigeria

Historically, forest administration and development in Nigeria began with reservation of forest lands in order to manage, maintain forest reserves and provide a supply of timber. This was followed by exploitation of forest resources to meet both export and burgeoning local demand as well as to earn much needed foreign exchange. With the country's independence in 1960, development phase of the Nigerian forest resources management began with focus on the development of forest plantations. Oyebo (2006) and Okali and Eyog-Matig, (2004), as cited by Ayeni (2013), recognised three phases in the evolution of forest resources management in Nigeria. These phases are the reservation phase (1899 – 1930), the exploitation phase (1930 – 1960), and the development phase (1960 till date). These three phases had different effects on our forest reserves. For the purpose of this paper, we will discuss briefly the trend of forest administration in Nigeria from the pre-colonial era to the present.

#### Pre-colonial Era

The history of forest administration in the South Western Nigeria can be traced back to the pre-colonial era. Johnson (1957) recorded that the people of South Western Nigeria, comprising the Yorubas as the major ethnic group, administered their forests through indigenous traditional institutions. In each Yoruba town, for example, an Oba (King) with the assistance of his subordinate chiefs directed the affairs of the town. These rulers also served as caretakers of ancestral land and the key operative concept for decision making was consensus. It is interesting that these traditional rulers offered their subjects a kind of leadership rooted in the principle of public accountability. In addition, the rulers also operated within this political framework to design rules and regulations for managing forests and other resources. In the case of forest administration, forest laws, which defined how and when to use the forests were enforced by the town's guild of hunters. It was the guild's members who served as forest guards during the time. These forests served a number of purposes such as places of worship and sources of raw materials for building and construction. However, Johnson's (1957) account did not mention the existence of any place specially designated as forest reserves in the pre-colonial era.

#### Colonial Era

The imposition of the British rule on Nigeria brought in a structural twist in forest administration in South Western Nigeria. The responsibilities, which used to be carried out by the traditional institutions, were gradually usurped by the British colonial administration. It was as a result of these

circumstances that organized administration of forests came into being first in 1862 in South-Western Nigeria including the Protectorate of Lagos and later, in other parts of the country. The office of woods and forests was created in the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos. In the same year, Mamu Forest Reserve was created to form a buffer between Ibadan and Ijebu territories. In 1901, the first forest ordinance came into effect to regulate the sale of timber concessions, to impose forestry fees and minimum exploitation girths (usually up to 120 cm diameter at breast height (dbh) for mahoganies) and to mandate concessionaires to plant 20 tree seedlings at each stump site. This practice was, however, found ineffective and later abandoned. Two types of reserves sprang up in South-Western Nigeria between 1889 and 1900. These were: Government Reserves and Local Authority Forest Reserves. While exclusive control was exercised over the former by the colonial government, the latter were under the native administration. But the ultimate intention of the forest policy was to hand over most of the forest reserves to the local authority councils. Revenue was also generated from taxes accruing from exported logs.

Although forest reserves in the domain of native administrative councils were viable sources of their finances, the administration of forest reserves by native administration councils raised many questions. First, the period was one of connivance among the Obas, the heads of the native administrations, and the colonial government. These Obas collaborated with the colonial masters to extract resources to meet the needs of the colonial home country instead of those of the indigenes (Olowu, 1996). Many of these rulers conducted themselves as absolute monarchs. Consequently, customs and traditions of the people and respect for the principles of public accountability, responsiveness and transparency which, before colonialization, served as sources of checks and balances on the rulers gradually became moribund. Thus, abuse of power by many heads of the native administrative councils started. This eventually led to opportunistic exploitation of forest reserves by traditional rulers with little or no benefit to the people within each council's domain (Akinbode, 1996; Oriboiye, 1997).

In 1902, a Forestry Department was established in the colony of Lagos and Southern protectorate and later in the Northern Protectorate of Nigeria. H.N. Thompson was appointed the First Chief Executive of the Forestry Service in 1903 based on his past experience in Burma. This experience impacted largely on subsequent forest management practices adopted in Nigeria. It is on record that the Forestry Ordinance of 1916 was fashioned out of that of Burma. At the formative stage, the Forestry Department was assigned two main tasks i.e. regulating forest exploitation and establishing forest reserves. The Department determined the size of concessions, minimum exploitable girths and charge appropriate fees and royalties. The rule then was to remove only mature trees of 100 cm girth and above. Two Foresters, J. D. Kennedy and W. D. Macgregor, were appointed in 1926 to begin research on the silviculture of indigenous species. One of the most important systems investigated was the Tropical Shelterwood System (TSS). TSS involved the demarcation of coupes, climber cutting and extensive poisoning with Sodium Arsenate of all non-commercial shade casting trees within the lower and middle layers. The system was later abandoned due to persistent political pressure to divert forest reserves to other uses and the inherent disadvantages in the TSS. The abandonment of the system led the Forestry Department to invest on artificial regeneration, especially, Taungya, which was introduced in 1926. Before then small-scale plantations of Teak and other tree species were established at Olokemeji

and other places in Nigeria. *Gmelina arborea*, which has now become the most popular plantation species in the country, was introduced from Sri Lanka in 1932. The thrust of the policy of the colonial administration was to set aside 25 % of Nigeria's total land area as forest reserves. Forest reservation was usually done in consonance with the local communities, who were authorised to continue their former uses of the forests, so far as such practices did not contravene the management of the forest for timber production. The rights and limitations of the people, including a description of the boundaries of the reserve were normally published as a part of the official gazette notice constituting the reserve. Forest reservation was almost completed in the high forest areas by 1940 except for Rivers State, where additional areas were constituted between 1960 and 1980. Majority of the forest reserves in the Northern Savanna zone was constituted between 1950 and 1970.

With the introduction of the system of representative Local Government Councils (LGCs) in Western Region in 1954, the native authority councils lost forest administration to the representative LGCs. Although some members of the old native authority councils did not give up forest matters immediately, their placement made councilors the custodians of forest reserves. Also, the choice of exploiters began to be the decision of the LGCs. A major challenge of the period of representative local government system and native administration was the problem of dual administration of forest reserves. This involved the forest policy emanating from the Regional Government and the Local Governments that were expected to carry them out (Adeleye, 1989). The problem of dual control greatly encouraged unauthorized timber felling. The situation continued to grow worse as ill-trained, dishonest local government forest guards connived with councilors to flout the laws imposed by the Regional Government. Due to the degrading nature of the forest reserves in Western Region, the government was forced to raise some probe panels in the late 1960s (Olayemi, 1985). Among the panels set up were the Mabogunje Committee on Forest Policy and Management (1966-1967); Somolu Commission of Inquiry into the Assets of Public Officers in the Western State (1965-69); and the inquiry into the Assets of Certain Local Government Officials in the Western State (1969-1970). These panels separately raised accusation of conflict of interest against certain politicians and forestry officials who were accused of unduly enriching themselves either by plundering forest reserves or diverting vast sums of public revenues accruing from exploitation into private pockets and savings accounts.

An important problem identified in the afore-mentioned forestry laws was that the making of the laws were unilateral. This is because they were enacted at the central level of government without the involvement of the concerned local governments and forest users. Apart from this, a number of other problems militated against the administration during the colonial period. First, there was lack of regeneration exercise which might have led to shrinking of forest reserves in the region. Second, because of the overwhelming interest of foreign firms, a lot of indigenous timber contractors could not have access to the reserves. Third, forest officials were not adequately remunerated and equipped with the required facilities such as patrol vehicles. Fourth, bribery and connivance with illegal forest users were very rampant among forest officials. The findings of the probe panels mentioned earlier also corroborated the existence of these problems.

**Post-colonial Era**

After independence in 1960, emphasis was shifted to forest exploitation for industrial development and increased foreign exchange earnings. This requirement accentuated the unregulated exploitation of the forest resources. To avoid this, the old Western State took over all forest reserves within its geographical territory and began to have full responsibilities for their administration from the late 1960s. At the time of independence in 1960, many forest reserves were already in place in the country. Thus, a Forest Commission directly responsible to the State Government was established to administer all local forest reserves. This marked the beginning of the administration of forest reserves by the State Government in South-Western Nigeria. Even when the old Western State was divided into smaller units (States) in 1976, each State continued to exercise ownership and administration over all its forest reserves. Many of these forest reserves were to later become game reserves. For instance, the Yankari game reserve which was opened in 1962 was a forest reserve for some time (Onokerhoraye, 1985). From about 800 forest reserves and about 30 game reserves in the 1980s, the number of forest reserves in the country has now increased to 966. There are also 8 national parks, 12 strict nature reserves and 28 game reserves in the country today (Areola, 1982; Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), 2001).

Apart from the establishment of a Department of Forestry at the then University College Ibadan, a Savanna Forestry Research station was established in Zaria, Kaduna State in 1964. The Savanna Research Station was established to carry out research to provide the basis for selection and afforestation of suitable areas. It was a United Nations assisted programme. The station achieved a lot of success in the areas of silviculture, soil survey, forest pathology, forest economics and soil chemistry, among others (Kadeba, 1978). In various parts of the country, silviculture and plant breeding were actively engaged in by various States' Departments of Forestry, with the support of the Federal Department of Forestry. Wildlife protection however did not enjoy the early attention given to forest conservation. This may be attributed to the wrong notion that, wild animals were plentiful and were therefore not under any threat of extinction. Another obstacle to wildlife conservation in the country was that, several communities see their surrounding areas as traditional hunting grounds. There was, therefore, the need to limit conservation to areas where there would be little or no local interests (FGN, 2001). The creation of the first game reserve in Nigeria therefore, had to wait until 1962. However, many forest reserves in the country have now become game reserves. For instance, the Yankari game reserve was a forest reserve for a long time before, before it became a game reserve. A comprehensive survey of the country's wildlife in 1962 showed that the wildlife population was falling rapidly as a result of over-hunting (FGN 2001). This resulted in the creation of other game reserves including the Borgu game reserve, Zugurma game reserve, Upper Ogun game reserve, Kanaku game reserve, Lame game reserve, Okhoma game reserve and Ohosu game reserve, among others. Some of these game reserves were later declared as National parks. For instance, Borgu Game Reserve and Zugurma Game Reserve became the Kainji Lake National Park in 1975. Other national parks later created include Yankari National Park, Old Oyo National Park, Gashaka Gumti, Chad Basin, Cross River, Okomu and Kamuku National Parks. Yankari has now reverted to the control of Bauchi State Government as a game reserve. Apart from the major aim of protecting the animals from extinction, it was also hoped that these reserves would become important tourist centres. They are also expected to

become important for scientific research (Ayodele and Falade, 1990).

**Current Situation of Forest Administration in Nigeria**

Presently, forest resources in Nigeria are administered at the three tiers of Government: Federal, State and Local Government.

**Federal level**

The Federal Ministry of Environment (FME) has the responsibility to administer forestry at the National level, through the Federal Department of Forestry (FDF). FDF was transferred from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (FMANR) to FME, which was created in 1999. The Department has the mandate to formulate National Forest Policy and support execution of federally funded projects. It also plays an advisory role to the State Forestry Departments (SFDs) and is responsible for relations with international development agencies. It is important to note that the Federal Government has no forest reserve of her own. Generally, the Department has been constrained by lack of funds to perform its functions over the years.

The Federal Department of Forestry is organized into six divisions for effective implementation of its mandates. These include the Forest Management, Forest Resources Assessment, Forest Product Utilization, Agro - Forestry & Extension, Forest Conservation, and Wildlife Management.

**State level**

Forestry administration at the State level is the responsibility of the State Forestry Departments (SFDs). Most SFDs are still placed as a department under the State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MANR) as some States are yet to establish their Ministries of Environment/Forestry, which the Federal Government had advised them to do. The government of Cross River and Enugu States must, however, be commended for going further by establishing Forestry Service Commissions in their States for effective forest administration and management. The Ogun State government also deserves commendation for establishing a full-fledged Ministry for forestry activities. Apart from the main technical functions of managing timber and wildlife resources, SFDs equally superintend over revenue generation from the forestry sector in their States. The overall staff disposition and structure of a State Forestry Department depends on the requirements of that State and the ecological peculiarities. In the south where most forests exist, the emphasis is on log harvesting while the north reflects the importance of tree establishment for fuel wood, environmental protection and livestock production. Unfortunately, the SFDs are confronted with crippling financial resources to perform their functions as most of the State governors have not placed priority on the management of forest resources within their domain. This is compounded by shortage of manpower, most of whom lack adequate training and exposure to modern forestry techniques.

**Local Government Level**

Most Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the country have a local government department of forestry, with divisional forest officers (DFOs) in charge. The roles the LGAs play in forestry administration vary from the South to the North. LGAs in the South have virtually no responsibility for managing the forest resources, either inside or outside forest reserves, but they could receive part of the revenue generated from forest products in their area by the SFDs. On the other hand, the function of the LGAs in the North could include forest reserves or confined only to free areas. The roles

stipulated for LGAs in the current National Forest Policy include establishment of woodlots to protect watersheds and river courses, protection of forests and farm trees in arable land against fire and illegal felling of trees, and protection of wildlife against poaching.

Unfortunately also, the LGAs lack the necessary funds and personnel to carry out their roles. According to Akinola (2006), the administration of forest resources in Nigeria leaves much to be desired especially when one considers governments' decisions and policies on utilization of forest resources in meeting the needs and aspirations of citizens. For the past forty years, the administration of forestry had been monopolized by the State government within the Federal structure in Nigeria. The exclusion of stakeholders such as local community dwellers, hunters, farmers, timber contractors and other non-timber resources users in the administration of forests directly or indirectly has led to poor forest governance and the consequent crises in forest reserves in Nigeria.

### **Forest Administration in Relation to Forest Policy in Nigeria**

In 1917, the first definitive government policy on forestry came into existence. In that year, the then Governor General, Lord Lugard, stated that each province of the country must reserve a minimum of 25% of its forests. This policy statement later faced a lot of opposition in the eastern part of the country. This was because of the high population density and the resultant higher pressure on land (Egboh 1979). Resistance to reservation was least in the northern part of the country due to the lower population densities and absence of plantation agriculture. Dependence on economic trees was thus, less significant in the north. To combat the problem of bush burning a Forest Ordinance was enacted in 1937, which made it illegal to set fire to reserves. This was followed by the Bush Order of 1940, introduced to control bush burning outside the reserves (Egboh, 1979).

The present policy on Forestry, Wildlife and Protected areas is part of the broad National Policy on the Environment developed in 1989 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989) and later revised in 1999 (FGN, 2001). The main goal of the policy is to achieve Sustainable development. Until 2006 when some prominent foresters paid a courtesy call on then president Obasanjo to discuss the need for a separate forest policy, there was no substantive national forest policy in Nigeria. After the visit, the president swung into action and sent the draft of the National forest policy to the National Assembly and the bill was passed in 2009. It has since been forwarded to the Federal Ministry of Justice for fine-tuning before it becomes an act. When it becomes an act, it will give legal backing to the protection of our dwindling forest resources and also be a model tool for the State Forestry Services.

In neighbouring Ghana, the country enunciated a Forest and Wildlife Policy to replace the first formal Forest Policy of 1948, which was formulated for the conservation and protection of the forest reserve estates. The main policy thrusts of the 1994 Policy were environmental protection, sustainable production and use of forest and wildlife resources, involvement of local people in management and benefit sharing, institutional restructuring and promotion of research and human resource development. The implementation of the 1994 Forest and Wildlife Policy witnessed significant changes in the structure and form of the forestry sector of that country. The 1994 policy introduced equitable sharing of management responsibilities; increased benefit flows to local stakeholders, especially the rural poor; and increased participation, transparency and accountability

in the sector activities. However, the implementation of the 1994 policy with all the associated reforms in Ghana could not halt the degradation in the forest resource base as a result of Illegal logging, mining operations in forest areas, fuel wood gathering etc. This led to the revision of the policy in 2012. The Ghana Forest and Wildlife Policy 2012, therefore, is a paradigm shift from the past policies, placing emphasis on non-consumptive values of the forest and creating a balance between timber production and marketing to satisfy particularly domestic wood demands. The policy also seeks to: (i) consolidate good governance through accountability and transparency (ii) enhance active participation of communities and land owners in resource management and addressing issues on tree tenure and benefit sharing (iii) promote small and medium forest and wildlife enterprises as a means of job creation for the rural and urban poor (iv) increase biodiversity conservation (v) promote sustainable management of savannah woodland (vi) promote ecotourism development (vii) increase government commitment to degraded landscape restoration through massive forest plantation development schemes (viii) improve research and application of modern and scientific technology in resources management (ix) develop climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, and (x) secure sustainable financing for the forest and wildlife sector. This has enhanced forest governance and management in Ghana.

Similarly, in neighbouring Niger republic, there is a large arsenal of legislative and regulatory texts on the forest domain. Starting from the country's Constitution (2010), article 35 paragraph 1, states the right of every person to have a healthy environment and obliges the State to protect the environment in the interest of present and future generations (FAO (2012)). According to the FAO (2012), Law number 2004-040 of 2004 confirms the State's desire to transfer to decentralised local authorities and communities the management of forest resources in the prospect of their preservation and the fight against poverty. It also considers forest resources as a common heritage of the nation, and invites "everyone to respect it and to contribute to its conservation and its regeneration". Degradation of tropical forest is a major concern in environmental policies. To face this problem, Niger Republic has developed policies to redistribute forest management from the State to local stakeholders. This strategy postulates that local management and an appropriation of forest resource by local stakeholders ensure sustainable management. During 1980's, Niger Republic became aware of the failure of policies that aim to exclude rural stakeholders from forests. According to Montagne, et al. (2006) the acknowledgement of failure by forest policy makers in Niger favoured the emergence of community forestry, which resulted in the creation of forest cooperative since 1981, and then the creation of firewood Rural Markets (RM) since 1992. All these were aimed at sustainable management of forest ecosystems and sustainable supply of towns with firewood.

Nigeria can learn from the experiences of these two neighbouring nations to fast track the implementation of a separate forest policy that will promote the interest and well being of all stake holders in the forestry sector of the country. Special attention must be given to the participation of all critical stakeholders in the forestry sector in decision making and the implementation of forestry programmes and activities. This will enhance efficient forest administration and management in the country. The lack of a separate policy for forestry in Nigeria has affected sustainable forest management in Nigeria. It has led to natural forests being destroyed by other forms of land use, like agriculture, grazing

and construction activities as a result of rapid urbanization leading to desertification and degradation of the environment (FAO 2000). There is evidence of land conversion to agriculture in some forest reserves without any serious effort by the authorities to stop the trend (USAID/Nigeria, 2008). One fundamental premise for sustainable development is the recognition that environment and development are not exclusive of one another but are complementary and interdependent and in the long run mutually reinforcing (Ahmad and Sanny, 1987). This complexity explains the difficulty in operationalizing the concept of sustainable Development. Yet there has been ever increasing demand on the limited forest resources and the carrying capacity of the fragile forest ecosystem. Under the conditions of poverty for which Nigeria is known, the environment often exhibits the ravages of long years of mismanagement as illustrated by high rate of deforestation, overgrazing, desertification and endangering the forest species. Great opposition normally follows attempts by government to convert what is regarded as personal or communal property to reserves. In advanced countries, most forests are managed but in developing countries like Nigeria, relatively few forests are formally managed. Today, many national parks and reserves still harbour enclave villages; for instance, the Cross River and Gashaka-Gumti National parks (USAID/Nigeria, 2008). Many armed Fulani cattle herders also regularly move around freely with their animals in some of these reserves (USAID/Nigeria, 2008). Some of them have settled in these forest reserves, causing a lot of destruction to valuable species. Worse still is that most of these herders have used such forests areas as hide out for committing crimes such as kidnapping and cattle rustling. The issue of cattle rustling also has resulted to severe destruction of forest resources in forests reserves where the rustlers have used as their hide outs. There is also the case of terrorists, bandits and kidnappers in Nigeria that have taken over some forest reserves. This Day Newspaper (2021), reported that insurgents and bandits have taken over Adamawa States; Chad Basin National Park; Kamuku National Park, Kaduna State; Kainji Lake National Park; Cross River National Park. Other forest reserves across the country may not be as large but they are also increasingly being used as haven for perpetrators of all manner of crimes, including banditry, kidnapping, armed robbery, cultism and cattle rustling. In Rivers State, for instance, criminality is reportedly high in thick forested areas of Gokona, Etche, Emuoha, Ikwere, and Khana councils. Not long ago, security operatives raided a forest in Koro community in Tai local government of the state, where a notorious kidnapper who had terrorised the Ogoni axis for several years, was arrested. In Imo State, most of the forests in Ngor Okpala area have reportedly been taken over by kidnappers. The motorcycle bandits terrorising the northern parts of the country, the latest group to join the lucrative kidnap for ransom industry, operate from the forests. From Kankara in Katsina State to Kagara in Niger State to the most recent in Jangebe, Zamfara State, bandits now use abandoned forest reserves as their operational bases to camp abducted school children. The greater challenge is that this has become a serious national security challenge. In the past, there were forest guards, armed with dane guns, saddled with the responsibilities of protecting our forest resources. These have been confronted with heavy firepower from poachers, insurgents and bandits. This has resulted to the military invading the forests in a bid to flush out these criminals but not without the consequent effect of severe degradation and destruction of our forest resources. All these security challenges in our forest areas have discouraged

management activities and programmes, which have seriously affected sustainable forest management in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

Forest reserves serve important ecological and socio-economic functions and are clearly not for hunting, grazing or settlements. Historically, efforts have been made by traditional institutions, the colonial administrators, past and current government towards good forest administration and management in Nigeria. However, we are still far from achieving good forest administration and sustainable forest management. This is evident in the continuous dwindling of our forest reserves and resources. In recent times, most forest reserves have been abandoned without annual maintenance and are being threatened by encroachment. The sustained yield principle was neglected while forest reserves were consistently mined. Natural forests are being destroyed by other forms of land use. Good forest administration has a central role in achieving sustainable forest management (SFM). It is also critical to ensuring the effectiveness of schemes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Trees sequester a lot of green house gases (ghgs) from the atmosphere and are known as a major carbon sink. The continuous mismanagement and degradation of our forests will lead to an increase in global warming, which has become a global problem and concern. For development activities to meet human needs, there must be a trade-off between development and forest management in order for forests to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development in Nigeria. To put this trade-off between development and forest management in proper perspective will lead us to the emerging of stakeholder participation in ecologically sound development strategy, which should emphasize harmonization of economic social and environment concern in the process of development. Similarly, the time for a separate forest policy to guide forestry programmes and activities in Nigeria is long overdue. A revised and separate policy is therefore necessary to take advantage of emerging opportunities to maximize the rate of social and economic development of the country and secure optimum welfare and adequate means of livelihood from the forestry sector to all Nigerians. Forest and environmental policy instruments are facing difficulties for their implementation due to weak ownership of forestry policy implementation processes on the one hand and funding for the enforcement of instruments on the other hand.

In respect of this, it is recommended that forest administration at the three tiers of government should be well funded and properly equipped to effectively perform their tasks of sustainable forest management. The bill for a separate policy on forestry in the country should be speedily approved and passed into law. The adoption of local/traditional knowledge and the involvement of relevant stakeholders the conception, planning and execution of forestry projects, as well as, forest monitoring using remotely sensed data is also recommended. There is the need for the recruitment of well-trained and experienced forest personnel into the various forests organizations and agencies and the provision of adequate security in our forests if any meaningful forest management activity is to be carried out. The paper also recommended a review of the land use decree, a review of afforestation and reforestation methods, improved enforcement, agroforestry practices, restoration of degraded land and the control of bush burning and forest fires



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