

**CONSERVATION OF NIGERIA'S NATURAL
RESOURCES AND THE THREATENED
ENVIRONMENT**

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GENDER ROLE IN THE MANAGEMENT, CONSUMPTION AND UTILIZATION OF NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS (NTFPs) (A CASE STUDY OF GAMBARI FOREST RESERVE, OYO STATE)

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Abstract

Presently in many countries of the world, rural women are still the caretakers and users of forests. They have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable management. This paper investigated the role of gender in achieving sustainable management, conservation and utilization of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) with emphasis on leaves, leafy vegetables, firewood, snails and medicinal plants. The study was carried out at Gambari Forest Reserve and Settlements surrounding the reserve viz Onigambari, Onipe, Olonde and Manu. Three sets of questionnaires were used for the study — one each for Extractors, Utilizers, and Forests management personnel. A total number of 180 questionnaires were administered to randomly selected respondents while 176 were returned. 41% of the questionnaires returned were from utilizers, 29.4% from extractors while 27% were from the personnel involved in the management of the reserve. The study revealed that although management, conservation, utilization and collection of NTFPs in the reserve are not sex specific, a preferential treatment for men is obvious. This is more pronounced in the technical aspects of management, conservation and sustainable development planning.

Introduction

Women's widely recognized role in forestry sector as labourers, collectors, users and processors of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) and workers in small scale forest based enterprises, totally ignored their needs and priorities, as well as their entitlements to benefits. While women in developing nations normally have multiple, often disproportionate responsibilities, they have little ownership or control over productive resources. This imbalance in the ownership and control over resources places women in a subordinate and disempowered position relative to men as they are forever dependent. Consequently, women and men have contrasting perceptions, priorities and goals and hence development interventions affect them differently.

Unequal gender relations intertwine and overlap with inequalities by caste, class and ethnicity. Issues of gender equity therefore cut across broader issues of equity between communities. Gender is used as a socio-economic variable to

analyse roles, responsibilities, constraints and opportunities involved in natural resource management (Sigot, 1995), with particular reference to NTFPs.

Integration of gender, environment and development is however an essential goal of sustainable development as it brings into sharp focus the nexus between equity and sustainability in development. With greater concern and hence focus on environmental protection, 'there has been increasing interest in the use to which our forests are put. While women and men alike are recognized collectors and users of domestic forest products, their being the target population in community forestry projects is also not subjected to debate. But until recently when women are playing active role in sustainable management of forest resources, forestry used to be, seen as a male dominated profession. 30% of today's forestry professionals in the U.S forest service (with 28,000 employees) and 20% of the supervisors are women as compared to 1% in 1976. In many countries, women are moving into positions of responsibility in the private sector as well. They are rising executives in multi-national wood and paper companies, in international environmental organisations and in trade associations (Madhu Sarin, 1998). Women in developing countries are also identifying sacred forests to meet household needs-forests that are off-limits to timber extraction. They are planting trees to stabilize soils and hillsides and produce more forest products. They are creating new nurseries and establishing green belts and shelter belts. It is clear that given a chance, rural women in the world over will act to conserve forest resources and ensure a long term supply of the forest goods and services they depend on everyday (Stephanie Caswell, 1988).

Evidently therefore, gender equality needs be integrated into participatory forest management from the stage of conceptualizing policy through to detailed planning, designing of institutional mechanisms to implementation and monitoring and evaluation. Before this, the need to assess the present situation becomes imperative.

Methodology

Gambari Forest Reserve

Formerly Ibadan District Council Forest Reserve, Gambari Forest Reserve is divided into five series viz Onigambari, Busogboro, Onipe, Olonde and Mamu. The reserve lies between lat. 7.05 and 7.14N and long, 3.7 and 3.9E. It was originally 12,535.6ha of which 1,036ha was de-reserved by the owner (Oyo State Government) for the establishment of Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria. Later in 1986, another 1,000 hectares was given to SAFA SPLINTS, Nigeria limited, Ibadan for its industrial plantation. Presently, the working area in the reserve remains 10.429.6 hectares.

The settlements surrounding the reserve are typical rural settlements inhabited by women and men engaged in the collection and utilization of NTFPs such as wrapping leaves, leafy vegetables, fuel wood, snails, medicinal plants etc. The

present state of the reserve, which has rendered it sacred for timber exploitation also, necessitates the need to integrate gender with its sustainable and participatory management approach.

In 1997, survey was carried out with the aid of structured open-end questionnaire administered to randomly selected respondents.

Results and Discussion

The result shows Mat, apart from leaves, all other NTFP investigated were exploited by both men women in the study area. Women are however more collectors than men. On the whole 41.4% of the total collectors are men (Table 1).

Table 1: NTFP Extracted by Respondents in Gambari Forest Reserve

Sex	Leaves	%	Fuel wood	%	Vegetables	%	Others	%
Male	—	—	13	24.5	6	11.3	3	5.6
Female	10	18.8	15	28.8	4	7.5	2	3.7
Total	10	18.8	28	52.8	10	18.8	5	9.3

Source: Field Survey, 1997

Another set of questionnaire was administered on utilizers of NTFPs from the reserve. Among seventy four (74) utilizers interviewed, 18.9% are men while a separate interview conducted among randomly selected personnel involved in the management of the reserve reveals that only 18.4% of them are women (Table 2)

Table 2: Sex Distribution among Respondents

Sex	Extractors	%	Utilizers	%	Personnel	%
Male	25	47	14	18.9	40	81.6
Female	28	52	60	81.0	9	18.4
Total	53	—	74	—	49	—

Source: Field Survey, 1997

A further breakdown of the forty-nine (49) personnel interviewed shows that none of the women interviewed are professionals (Table 3).

Probing into other contributions of rural women folk into household sustainance apart from their being fully in charge of domestic chores, revealed that 41.7% of respondent collectors contributed significantly to their family upkeep (Table 4).

Table 3 Role of Respondents (personnel) in gambari Forest Reserve

Sex	Field Worker	%	Office Staff	%	Field Officer	%	Uniform staff	%	Others	%
Male	10	20.4	4	8.16	5	10.2	19	38.7	2	4.08
Female	3	6.12	6	12.2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total	13	26.52	10	20.52	5	10.2	19	38.7	2	4.08

Source Field Survey, 1997

Table 4 Response of Collectors' Contribution Towards their Family Upkeep

Sex	Yes	%	No	%
Male	15	28.3	7	13.2
Female	25	41.7	6	11.3
Total	40	70.0	13	24.5

Source Field Survey, 1997

The survey on product utilized by rural dwellers surrounding Gambari Forest Reserve revealed that men do not use leaves, only women do (Table 5). Very few men use vegetables.

Table 5 Produce Utilized by Respondents (Utilizers)

Sex	Leaves	%	Fuel wood	%	Vegetables	%	Others	%
Male	—	—	10	13.5	1	1.4	3	4.1
Female	20	27	30	40.5	10	13.5	—	—
Total	20	—	40	—	11	—	3	—

Source Field Survey, 1997

The major utilizers of fuel are women. Of course, the reason for this is not farfetched, most NTFPs are used for domestic house keeping chores, normally left in charge of women. As a matter of fact, the few male fuel wood utilizers are those running indigenous industrial devices such as baking oven.

The survey also looked at the literate level of respondent utilizers and extractors. This revealed that majority have no formal education, more than 60% have no post primary education and none of the extractors have a degree (table 6).

Table 6: Level of Education of Respondents

Educational Status	Utilizers	%	Extractors	%
No formal Education	32	43.24	22	42.0
Primary Education	20	27.0	15	28.3
Secondary Education	12	16.2	10	18.8
OND/HND	6	8.1	6	11.3
B.Sc./	4	5.4	—	—
Total	74	—	53	—

Source: Field Survey, 1997

The educational level of extractors and utilizers alone is borne out of the fact that the reserve workers at management level are not from surrounding villages. It is only some of the field workers and hired labours or taungya farmers that come from the neighbouring villages and none of them had more than primary school education.

Gender Implication of Survey Findings

The need to ensure the sustainability of natural resources especially forest resource can not be over-emphasized because the survival of man depends on it. Exploitation without due regard for the sustainability coupled with rapid increases in population have caused not only stress on the environment, but also on existing resources. While majority of the utilizers and collectors of NTFPs are women, (probably due to their being closer to nature and their survival hinging on forest products); very few women are involved in the management and conservation of the Gambari Forest Reserve from where they collect for utility. The categories of respondent where constitute the majority are mostly illiterates. This low level of literacy among women is a very tough impediment for meaningful rural development effort.

Taking into consideration the economic contribution of these women to their individual household monthly (Table 7), the need to keep them abreast on issues relating to the fate of their source of livelihood becomes highly necessary.

Table 7: Qualification of Respondents' Contribution to Family Uptake

Contribution	₦1,000	%	₦(2,000-4,000)	%	₦(4,000-10,000)	%	₦10,000	%
Male	2	3.7	13	24.5	5	9.4	2	3.7
Female	9	16.9	13	24.5	6	11.3	3	5.6
Total	11	20.6	26	49.0	11	20.7	5	9.3

Source: Field Survey, 1997

So many women are integrally involved with the forest — it is a part of their life and their livelihood—but for the majority, this is a participation with few choices.

Although, a cursory look at the survey findings from Gambari Forest Reserve, may tempt one to conclude that management, conservation and utilization effort is not gender biased, but a closer examination revealed a preferential treatment for men, most especially in the technical aspects of management, conservation and sustainable development of the reserve (Table 3).

Recommendations

That rural communities are increasingly looking up to the activities of their women folk consequent upon their male counterparts being lured to the cities, necessitate the need to recognize their significant role in the management, conservation and sustainable development of Gambari Forest Reserve. To achieve this, the following are recommended:

1. Education should be encouraged in the study area both for the budding youths and adults. Such education should not be gender biased and it should incorporate Home Economics and Rational Resource Conservation Education in its curricula.
2. Rural women in surrounding villages should also be encouraged to form associations and undertake initiatives which will not only contribute to the development and protection of these forests, but will also establish them as independent decision maker.

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