

FORESTS AND NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA: AN EVALUATION OF THE SYMBIOSIS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Forests play many diverse and multifaceted roles in our life. However, there is an emerging nexus between forest and national security in many countries, especially within the sub-Saharan region of Africa. Contrary to the noble objectives for which they were constituted, many forest reserves have become a source of security concern both at the local and national scale. In the light of this, we examined the relationship between forest and national security in Nigeria, with a view to identifying how forests impact security situations and how security situations in turn impact forests, and what need to be done to mitigate the negative upshots along the continuum. It is noted that the management of forests and other protected areas in the country has been quite fortuitous. The laws and policies associated with forest and protected area management are obsolete while the supervision, monitoring and surveillance carried out in the forest areas leave much to be desired. Given the shared features between forest locations and the geography of violent conflicts, it is observed that forests can provide refuge, funds and food for insurgents and terrorists. In turn, armed conflicts and activities also negatively impact the forest through “ecocide” (the destruction of the environment by military operations), hunting wildlife for food, and setting of land mines that kill and maim many wildlife species. Against this backdrop, we conclude that, more than ever, forest reserves in Nigeria and elsewhere need adequate protection, effective legislations, proper staffing, regular assessment of the state and status of reserves, and restoring the requisite management activities in all reserves across the country.

Keywords: Armed conflicts, Boko Haram, Forest, National security, Sambisa.

Introduction

Forests are communities of living organisms characterized by the presence of trees that have symbiotic relationships with each other and the physical environment (Lund, 2006). They play many diverse and multifaceted roles in our life (Amusa, 2002). The functions and importance of forests can be broadly categorized as: (i) economic service functions; (ii) environmental/ecological service functions; (iii) socio-cultural service functions; and (iv) scientific and research service functions. The economic service functions of the forest are found in the numerous goods and services provided by the forest for the welfare of mankind. The environmental/ecological service functions of the forest can be identified in terms of physical, biological and chemical benefits arising from the forest ecosystem. The socio-cultural service functions revolve around the numerous socio-

cultural activities of mankind that cannot be fulfilled without recourse to the forest. The scientific and research service functions of forest are very vital to deepening our understanding of the natural world.

Given their critical role in human life and national development, as well as concern over the severe depletion and in some cases near or complete exhaustion of the forests and their resources, governments in all regions of the world have continued to establish forest reserves, national parks, game reserves and other categories of protected areas. The United Nations has mandated that 25% of the surface area of every country should be set aside under permanent forest cover as the minimum ecological requirement for the socio-economic survival of the people (Ladan, 2014). Ironically, there is an emerging nexus between forest and national security in many countries, especially within the sub-Saharan region of Africa.

Today, many forests and gazetted areas are becoming the hideouts of choice for criminals while they go on their crime sprees. Contrary to the noble objectives for which they were constituted, many forest reserves have become a source of security concern both at the local and national scale. In recent times in Nigeria, forests and forest reserves have become bases for insurgents to launch attacks. They have become hideouts for armed robbers, criminals, cattle rustlers, kidnappers and unknown gun-men who unleash terror on local people (Ladan, 2014). In the light of the foregoing, it is important to examine more scrupulously the nexus between forest and national security. There is need to know how forests impact security situations and how the situations in turn impact forests, and what need to be done to mitigate the negative upshots along the continuum.

Forest Reserve Constitution and Management in Nigeria

In Nigeria as elsewhere, the pressures on forest areas arising from bush fallow cultivation and other factors was a major impetus to the establishment of forest reserves for the management of the nation's forest resources. Although the protection of habitats and species has long been part and parcel of the traditions and practices of various cultures in the country, given the increase in population and the onset of colonial administration, the various traditional measures were considered inadequate to ensure that the natural ecosystem was not seriously disturbed (Ezealor, 2002). The constitution of forest reserves by regional forestry authorities, beginning in 1889, flagged off a modern and more organized procedure for management of forest resources in Nigeria (Amusa, 2009). Mamu Forest Reserve was created as the first Forest Reserve to serve as a buffer between Ibadan and Ijebu territories. In 1956, the Yankari Forest Reserve in Bauchi province was upgraded and constituted as the first Game Reserve in the country. The upgrading of more Forest Reserves across the country followed in quick succession. The creation of Kainji Lake National Park in 1979 also marked the first major attempt at managing protected areas for recreational purposes in Nigeria. Currently, Nigeria has a protected

area network that includes a biosphere reserve, 445 forest reserves, 7 national parks, 12 strict nature reserves and 29 game reserves including the former Yankari national park (Table 1 and Figure 1).

Table 1: Game Reserves in Nigeria

S/N	Name of Reserve	Location	Vegetation Type
1.	Ebbazikampe	Kwara State	Guinea Savanna
2.	Okpara	Oyo State	Rain Forest
3.	Upper Ogun	Oyo State	Dry Forest/Guinea Savanna
4.	Ohosu	Edo State	Lowland Rainforest
5.	Ologbo	Edo State	Lowland Rainforest
6.	Iri-Ada-Obi	Edo State	Lowland Rainforest
7.	Ologbolo-Emu-Urho	Edo State	Lowland Rainforest
8.	Orie River	Edo State	Lowland Rainforest
9.	Gilli-Gilli	Edo State	Lowland Rainforest
10.	Anambra	Anambra State	Rainforest/Derived Savanna
11.	Uddi/Nsukka	Anambra State	Lowland Rainforest
12.	Akpaka	Anambra State	Lowland Rainforest
13.	Obudu	Cross River State	Lowland Rainforest
14.	Stubbs creek	Akwa-Ibom State	Mangrove/Rainforest
15.	Ibi	Taraba State	Guinea Savanna
16.	Wase Sanctuary	Plateau State	Sudan Savanna
17.	Wase Rock Bird Sanctuary	Plateau State	Sudan Savanna
18.	Pandam Wildlife Park	Plateau State	Sudan Savanna
19.	Pai River	Plateau State	Sudan Savanna
20.	Ankwe River	Nasarawa State	Sudan Savanna
21.	Damper Sanctuary	Nasarawa State	Sudan Savanna
22.	Nasarawa	Nasarawa State	Sudan Savanna
23.	Lama/Bura	Bauchi State	Sudan Savanna
24.	Kogin Kano	Kano State	Sudan Savanna
25.	Lake Chad	Borno State	Sudan Savanna
26.	Dagida	Niger State	Sudan Savanna
27.	Alawa	Niger State	Sudan Savanna
28.	Kwiambana	Zamfara State	Sudan Savanna
29.	Yankari	Bauchi State	Sudan Savanna

Source: Nigeria First National Biodiversity Report (2001).

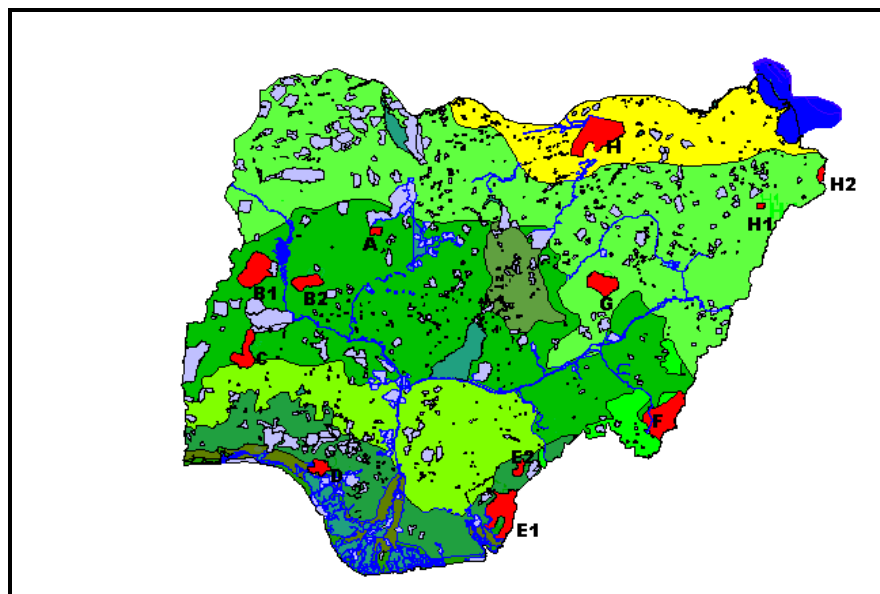


Figure 1: Nigeria's National Parks

Key to National Parks Map

S/N.	Name of Park	Area	Location	Vegetation Type
A.	Kamuku National Park	121, 130 ha	Kaduna State	Guinea Savanna
B1	Kainji National Park (Borgu Sector)	532, 000 ha	Niger State	Guinea Savanna
B2.	Kainji National Park (Zugurma Sector)			
C.	Old Oyo National Park	253, 000 ha	Oyo State	Dry Forest/Guinea. Savanna
D.	Okomu National Park	200 ha	Edo State	Lowland Rainforest
E1.	Cross-River National Park (Oban Division)	400,000 ha	Cross-River State	Lowland Rainforest
E2.	Cross-River National Park (Okwango Division)			
F.	Gashaka Gumti National Park	6, 402, 480 ha	Taraba State	Guinea Savanna /Montane Forest
G*.	Yankari National Park	225, 000 ha	Bauchi State	Guinea Savanna

H.	Chad Basin National Park			
H1.	(Hadejia-Nguru Wetlands/oasis Sector)	230, 000ha	Borno State	Sahel Savanna
H2.	Chad Basin National Park (Sambisa Sector)			
	Chad Basin National Park (Chingurme-Duguma Sector)			

Source: Nigeria First National Biodiversity Report (2001).

*Now a Game Reserve

It is noteworthy that the management of forest and other protected areas in Nigeria is backed by specific legislations. At the national level, the National Park Service (NPS) under the aegis of the Federal Ministry of Environment is responsible for the administration of the various national parks. The game and forest reserves are controlled and managed by the respective states in which they are located. However, the management of forest and other protected areas in the country has been quite fortuitous. The laws and policies associated with forest and protected area management are obsolete. Even at that, the level of supervision, monitoring and surveillance carried out in the forest areas leaves much to be desired. Staffing and provision of basic infrastructure are grossly inadequate. The principle of sustained yield forestry has been abandoned in most of the constituted forest reserves. Inventory records on forest resources are insufficient. There is inadequate participation of local people in decision-making in forests and forestry related matters. The forestry sector is also riddled with misappropriation of fund, high level corruption as well as incidences of illegal activities.

Interrelationship between Forest and National Security

A number of studies (Le Billon, 2001; Starr, 2002; Goodhand, 2003) on national security and armed conflicts have suggested that violent conflict is more frequent in areas that are remote and inaccessible; have valuable natural resources with property rights uncertain, disputed or neglected; have high proportion of poor households; poorly integrated into national democratic institutions; and receive few public services among others. Forests and other protected areas usually have many of these characteristics. They tend to be more remote and inaccessible. They often have valuable timber, wild animals and mineral resources which insurgents can exploit. Governments have tended to see forests and other protected areas as peripheral places with few people and little political importance or economic value, and have only focused on them to extract timber or minerals. Thus, they often receive little public services.

Consequently, forests can provide refuge, funds and food for insurgents. In many countries with civil unrests and violent conflicts, insurgents have used the forests to hide from government troops. In several cases, governments ignored insurgents or made only perfunctory efforts to control them as long as they remained in remote forested areas. As a result, the insurgents gradually build up military capacity that may not be easily contained by government forces. Moreover, insurgents often exploit resources in the forest including timber and mineral supplies to fund their armed activities. Although timber extraction may be difficult because logs are easy to detect and operations require secure control over the territory, such cases have been documented in Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Myanmar (Le Billon, 2000; Global Witness, 2003). Similarly, insurgents and their supporters cultivate, sell and tax illicit crops grown in the forest areas they occupy.

Armed conflicts and insurgent activities have negative impacts on the forests. Armies burn or clear forested areas with defoliants to spot the enemy more readily, actions technically referred to as “ecocide”- the destruction of the environment for military purposes (McNeely, 2001). They also hunt wildlife for food (SAMFU, 2002). The setting of land mines in the forest areas also kills and maims many wildlife species. Armed conflicts often result in the displacement of people. These internally displaced people (IDP) are most times accommodated in new areas or camps. They engage in activities such as tree felling, fuelwood collection and hunting which can rapidly deplete the local forest resources.

Sambisa Forest: From Nature Conservation to Terrorist Haven

Sambisa Forest is a forest in Borno State, Northeast Nigeria. It is in the southwestern part of Chad Basin National Park, about 60 kilometres southeast of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. It is geographically situated on Latitude 11°32'N and Longitude 13°20'E, covering an area of about 68, 600 hectares. The dominant vegetation of the forest is Sudan-Guinea Savanna (Ezealor, 2002; Mbaya and Malgwi, 2010). However, as a result of human activities, areas of the reserve have taken on a more Sahelian outlook. Dominant tree species include *Detarium macrocarpum*, *Ficus* spp., *Vitex doniana*, *Anogeissus leiocarpus*, *Balanites aegyptiaca*, *Prosopis africana*, *Acacia* spp., *Piliostigma thonningii*, *Combretum* spp., *Adansonia digitata*, *Diospyros mespiliformis*, *Tamarindus indica* and *Terminalia* spp. About 62 species of birds have been recorded in the reserve, including nationally uncommon species such as *Terathopius ecaudatus*, *Sagittarius serpentarius* and *Ardeotis arabs*, making it an important biodiversity area in the country. The site is thought to be the last in the country at which *Struthio camelus* (ostrich) occurs. A number of mammals of global conservation concern including *Loxodonta africana* (EN), *Hippotragus equinus* (LR/cd) and *Alcelaphus buselaphus* (LR/cd) are also found in the area.

Although legally protected as a game reserve, the Sambisa forest suffers from widespread felling of trees for fuelwood. In addition, agricultural encroachment, illegal grazing, poaching and over-fishing (including with chemicals, which also kills piscivorous birds), are serious problems. Management of the reserve has been largely abandoned, while facilities for tourism have fallen into state of disrepair. Tourists' lodges have collapsed with vegetation invading many of the roads while a number of rivers in the reserve have dried up. The neglect of management activities saw the Boko Haram insurgents take over what remains of the reserve on 5th February, 2013 by attacking the base station killing two rangers and forcing other staff to flee (Olugbode, 2014). Since its takeover by the Boko Haram terrorists, Sambisa forest has become the strongest base for the group. The forest is believed to be the main base of the insurgents as they have well fortified camps with their food supplies, weapons, motor vehicles and motorcycles that they use to launch attacks on settlements in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa States. Most of the villagers around the forest have fled the area to neighbouring Cameroun and Niger Republic owing to the high rate of insecurity. It is believed that Boko Haram kept the abducted 219 Chibok girls inside this forest (Ladan, 2014).

Until its final capture on December 22, 2016 by the Nigerian Army, Sambisa forest was a huge strategic vacuum and an ungoverned space that Boko Haram had to fill as a result of management neglect. The forest presented the golden opportunity for the Boko Haram to stay alive. It was a forest that provided the retreating terrorists with the protective shield each time they struck. Meanwhile, the Sambisa forest is now to become a military training ground. The Nigerian Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Tukur Yusuf Buratai had directed that the Army's 2017 small arms championship be conducted in the forest. The forest will be used to test fire fighting vehicles, other key equipment and weapons that require testing whenever the military want to induct new weapons and equipment into the Nigerian army inventory. This is another tacit de-reservation of an originally gazetted reserve.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that forest reserves in Nigeria and elsewhere need adequate protection through effective legislations, proper staffing, including recruitment of forest guards that are trained and adequately equipped to deal with any armed threat from any individuals or groups. Forest guards should be well integrated into the Nigerian security system. Apart from this, there is need for a country-wide assessment of the state and status of our forest reserves in order to forestall and nip in the bud the ugly incidence like the one posed by the Boko Haram. There is also need to revamp management activities in all forest reserves across the country with rehabilitation of facilities and infrastructure for effective operations. Adequate funds should be allocated to the forestry sector in order to allow the sector to perform its duties and ensure that criminals and insurgents do not ever attempt to take over the forests and forest reserves. Local communities around forests and

forest reserves should also be actively involved in the efforts towards reforestation and conservation efforts. Aerial surveillance and monitoring should be carried out periodically for both research and protection purposes. This will help in early detection of encroachers and illegal activities in the forests.

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