

Effect of Socio-economic Activities on Tree Species and Conservation trend in Eco-zones of Taraba State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study was carried out with the aim to assess the effect of socio-economic activities on tree species and conservation trend Ecological zones of Taraba State, Nigeria. Stratified and simple random sampling designs were used to distribute 270 copies of structured questionnaire to the people. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results showed that 64% of respondents were not participating in conservation of tree species due to poor infrastructural facilities and poverty in the study area. The majority of the people were involved in various forms of deforestation (farming 46%, fuel wood gathering 22% and settlement 9%). These practices had greatly affected tree species diversity and abundance in the study area; thereby increasing environmental problems such as flooding and soil erosion (16%). Most of the economic tree species (19) were decreasing in availability with *Rauvolfia* and *Sterculia species* endangered. The major factor responsible for tree species decline was anthropogenic activities (67%). Majority of the people were willing to support tree conservation. Thus, there is the need for further research to update the current list of conserved species on national red list species data bases. Also, Government stakeholders should provide more awareness on environmental education and alternative domestic energy in order to minimize indiscriminate felling of trees and over exploitation to prevent extinction of these economic tree species in the study area.

Key Words: Conservation; Degradation; Threaten; Endanger; Species.

INTRODUCTION

The highest rates of woody plant species loss are in the tropics (FAO 2009). Following decades of rapid land cover Conversions the tropical forest vegetation is much fragmented with considerable loss of woody plant species cover (Pabi and Attua, 2005; Amanor and Pabi, 2007).

The major causes of woody plant species loss are linked to rapid human population growth rates and poverty (FAO 2009). These drivers force people to harvest woody plant species using poor methods and at unsustainably high intensities (Tabuti, 2012). High intensity of logging and

illegal exploitation of woody plant species and other resources has continued to pose serious threat to the country's biodiversity (Okafor *et al.*, 2010).

Increasing human population growth rates and poverty (FAO, 2009) are the major causes of woody plant species loss in developing countries. These drivers are forcing rural community dwellers to harvest woody plant species using poor methods and in an unsustainable ways (Tabuti, 2012). High intensity of logging and illegal exploitation of woody plant species and other resources have continued to pose serious threat to the country's biodiversity (Okafor *et al.*, 2010).

Economic trees species play important role in the survival of man on earth thereby, providing array of wood and non-wood products which are significant in sustaining the overall socio-economic wellbeing of human. The protection functions and potential worth for these species have been overlooked or ignored. Some of these species are going extinct at an accelerated rate due to environmental degradation caused by human activities as well as poor conservation status. These are causing loss of habitat, degradation, spread of invasion plant species, pollution and climate change (Stain *et al.*, 2000); and also by other genetical and environmental factors (Yazici and Bilir, 2017). The aim of this study is to assess the economic tree species and conservation status of Eco-zones of Taraba State, Nigeria. The study would help to provide current information on threaten tree species and conservation status of tree species in the study area.

Study Area

The study was carried out in Taraba State, Nigeria. The State lies between latitudes 6° 34' 36" N and 9° 58' 51" N and longitudes 9° 52' 28" E and 12° 39' 51" E. It occupies a total land mass of approximately 54, 473km². The State is bordered on the northwest by Gombe State, west by Plateau and Nassarawa States and Adamawa State in the northeast; southwest is bordered with Benue State. An international boundary on the east separates Taraba State from the republic of Cameroon. The state is made up of 3 major ecological zones namely: southern guinea savanna located in the south western part of the State, northern guinea savanna in the northeast and montane Forest in the southeast.

Data Collection and Analysis

Simple random and stratify sampling designs were used to sample Taraba state. The study area (Taraba State) was divided into three ecological zones namely: Northern ecological zone, Southern ecological zone and Montane ecological zone. Simple random sampling design was used to distribute 90 copies of structured questionnaire in each Eco-zone to respondents living around forest reserves in the 3 ecological zones (Eco-zones) of the study area. A total of 270 respondents were sampled from the three eco-zones. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools (Tables, percentages and frequency).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the rate at which trees species were being conserved in the study area by the respondents. Based on the result, 13% of respondents used economic trees species for the purpose of food/fruits; 9% of the respondents cleared tree species for the purpose of building homes, houses and other structures; 12% felled tree species for charcoal and fuelwood purpose, 17% for cleared forested areas for the purpose of farming while 12% of the respondents do not participate in deforestation in the study area. Those who do not engaged in deforestation conserved these tree species for cultural or religious values. The majority (21%) of the respondents used forests and forest products for the purpose of crafting/carving for income generation as a result of high level poverty.

Based on this result on the level of deforestation in the study area showed high level of deforestation by 33% follow by 24% of the respondents who said there was very high level of deforestation, 235 said the level of deforestation in the study area was low while 20% of the people were undecided on the level of deforestation in the study area (Table 1).

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99 **Table 1: Socio-economic Activities in Eco-zones of Taraba State, Nigeria**

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Causes of deforestation		
Building	24	8.9
Fuel Wood/Sale	33	12.2
Farming	46	17.0
Do not participating in deforestation	33	12.2
Cultural/Religious values	21	7.8
Medicinal values	23	8.5
Food/fruits	34	12.6
Crafts/carving	56	20.7
Total	270	100.0
Level of Deforestation		
Very high	65	24.1
High	88	32.6
Low	62	23.0
None	55	20.4
Total	270	100

100 List of trees species assessed in the study area are listed in Table 2. The people around the forest
 101 reserve listed the endangered tree species which they thought were declining in availability and
 102 those they thought were increasing. Every tree species with increasing frequencies were
 103 compared with those with decreasing in availability and the higher of the two frequencies is
 104 taken as the status for the species. Based on the results (Table 2), nineteen (19) species were
 105 decreasing in abundance while eight (8) are increasing.

106 The conservation status of the 27 species encountered in the study area (Table 3) was confirmed
 107 on the IUCN red list of threatened species. Out of the 27 species, two species (*Rauvolfia sp* and
 108 *Sterculia sp*) were reported to be threatened with extinction, *Khaya senegalensis* was reported

vulnerable while 5 species (*Acacia sp*, *Albizia sp*, *Allophylus africana*, *Strychnos spinosa*, *Vitellaria paradoxa* and *Vitex doniana*) were endangered. Some species were reported least concern, while *Anogeissus leiocarpa*, *Strombosia postulata*, *Rytigniaum bellatum*, *Uapacatogoensis* and *Pterocarpus erinaceus* were not found on the IUCN 2016 catalogue.

Table 2: Economic Tree Species and their Conservation Trend in the Study Area

Species	Frequencies		conservation Status
	Decreasing in Availability	Increasing in Availability	
<i>Acacia sp</i>	26	18	Decreasing
<i>Afzelia africana</i>	32	1	Decreasing
<i>Albiziagummifera</i>	26	4	Decreasing
<i>Allophylus africanus</i>	4	0	Decreasing
<i>Anogeissus leiocarpus</i>	11	39	Increasing
<i>Bombax cosveolens</i>	5	0	Decreasing
<i>Borassus aethiopum</i>	23	0	Decreasing
<i>Deinbollia pinnata</i>	2	8	Increasing
<i>Garcinia mithmanii</i>	0	10	Increasing
<i>Hymenocardia acida</i>	9	39	Increasing
<i>Khaya senegalensis</i>	19	12	Decreasing
<i>Pleiocarpa pycnantha</i>	2	10	Increasing
<i>Prosopis africana</i>	7	18	Decreasing
<i>Psychotria sp</i>	7	1	Decreasing
<i>Pterocarpus erinaceus</i>	53	0	Decreasing
<i>Rauvolfia vomitoria</i>	8	0	Decreasing
<i>Rytignia umbellatum</i>	0	10	Decreasing
<i>Schefflera abyssinica</i>	9	1	Increasing
<i>Sterculia setigera</i>	16	1	Decreasing
<i>Strombosia postulata</i>	0	17	Decreasing
<i>Strychnos spinosa</i>	11	3	Increasing
<i>Terminalia species</i>	24	20	Decreasing
<i>Uapaca togoensis</i>	0	56	Increasing
<i>Vitellaria paradoxa</i>	19	8	Decreasing
<i>Vitex doniana</i>	14	5	Decreasing
<i>Ziziphus sp</i>	7	5	Decreasing
Total	336	286	

This finding revealed some of the threats to economic tree species conservation in the study area (Table 3). Anthropogenic activities (34%) were the major threat to conservation of trees species in the study area follow by animal grazing (23%), natural disasters such as droughts, erosions and floods (22%) while poverty and lack of funds to the people was the least factor hindering conservation of tree species in the study area.

Table 3: Threats to Tree Species Distribution and Conservation in Study Area

Factors	Frequency	Percent (%)
Anthropogenic activities	92	34.1
Animals grazing	61	22.6
Natural disasters	60	22.2
Poverty/lack of funds	57	21.1
Total	270	100.0

The result on level of conserving economic trees species in the study area showed is show on Table 4. Based on the result obtained from this study, the need for forest conservation in the study area was considered very important by 19% of the respondents follow by 41% of the respondents who said the need was important, 18% said the need was fairly important while 22% of the respondents did not see any need for forest conservation in the study area.

The result on level of participation in forest conservation in the study area showed that 8% of the respondents said the level of participation in forest conservation was very high follow by 13% who reported that the level of participation was high, 23% stated that the participation level was low and 55% (very low).

The result on level of achievement on tree species conservation in the study area (Table 4) showed 49% level of achievement was very low follow by 28% low level of achievement in tree species conservation, 13% high achievement while 10% level of achievement on tree species conservation in the study area.

Table 4: Level of Conservation of Tree Species in Eco-zones of Taraba State, Nigeria

Levels	Frequency	Percent (%)
Need for Forest Conservation		
Very Important	52	19.3
Important	111	41.1
Fairly Important	49	18.1
Not Important	58	21.5
Total	270	100.0
Participation in forest conservation		
Very high	22	8.1
High	36	13.3
Low	63	23.3
Very low	149	55.2
Total	270	100
Level of achievement in Tree Species Conservation		
Very high	27	10.0
High	36	13.3
Low	76	28.1
Very low	131	48.5
Total	270	100

DISCUSSION

This finding implies that there was high level of deforestation which could lead to desert encroachment, soil erosion, land degradation or species extinction in the study area. Deforestation could be responsible for the decrease in the availability of economic trees species in the study area. This observation agrees with FAO (2009) and McCarty (2001), who reported that human population growth is the major cause of plant species loss.

Population growth poses a serious threat on plant species due to anthropogenic activities. This implies that some economic tree species will be endangered and there could be soil degradation in the area. This result also agrees with Akinyemiet *et al.* (2008), who reported that anthropogenic activities are the major causes of soil degradation which in turn reduce the population of plant species. Increasing human population growth rates and poverty level (FAO, 2009) are the major causes of woody plant species loss in developing countries. These drivers are forcing rural community dwellers to harvest economic tree species using poor methods and in an unsustainable ways (Tabuti, 2012). High intensity of logging and illegal exploitation of tree species and other forest resources have continued to pose serious threat to the country's biodiversity (Okafor *et al.*, 2010).

Most of the respondents in the study area were not conserving trees species for various reasons; though very few of the respondents participate in forest conservation in the study area. The reasons for tree species deforestation include: fuelwood/charcoal, medicinal, food/fruits purposes while cultural/religious importance and ecological services were some of the reason economic tree species were conserve in the study area. This result agrees with the report of Vallenjo *et al.* (2011), which reported that tree species are considered essential to economic development and the maintenance of all forms of life.

Economic trees species play vital roles in the survival of man on earth thereby, providing array of wood and non-wood products which are significant in sustaining the overall socio-economic well being of human. The protection functions and potential worth for these species have been overlooked and ignored by the people in the study area. The conservation of tree species has become less important in our society due to high interest attached to farming, fuel wood extraction, settlement and industrial development as a result of the increasing human population and other selfish interest/wants. The result of this finding is in accord with Al-min (2013), he reported that the declined in tree species cover will affect all aspects of daily life of the people, especially the rural dwellers. Neelo *et al.* (2015), reported that excessive anthropogenic disturbances, such as logging or felling of trees, usually result in an immediate decline in species diversity or distribution.

The level of tree species conservation in the study area was regarded as common and unserious practice among people in most developing countries especially in Nigeria (in the study area). Though there were few people in the study area that participate in forest conservation. Most of the people in the communities are ready to support tree conservation strategies and minimize the rate of tree felling in the area if concerned stakeholders (Government and NGOs) will support the communities through the provision of basic social amenities needs. Economic tree species in the study area were declining; this could be connected to the low level of tree species conservation, low achievement on tree species conservation and lack of interest (and funds for) on economic tree species conservation in the study area. Those tree species that were increasing in the study area could be as a result of efforts or support from Government stakeholders and Non-Governmental Organizations. The increase on some of the tree species in the study area could also be associated with natural regeneration and law enforcement which help to preserve or conserve the increasing species.

CONCLUSION

Based on this finding, the level of participation in conservation of forests and forest products in the study area was very low. Government stakeholders and NGOs' efforts to conserve these tree species was achieved in a very low rate. The low achievement was proof with 27 tree species were listed as endangered species with 19 species decreasing and 8 species increasing in availability in the study area. The decreasing number of economic tree species in the study area with low interest in participation in forest conservation could result to extinction of these tree species. Most of the respondents that participate in conservation of tree species was for their selfish interest or to satisfy their need; these include: medicinal, farming, building food/fruits, cultural and religious purposes. Anthropogenic factor was the major threat to trees species conservation in the study area. Based on this finding, there is urgent need to encourage people in the study area on the need for conservation of tree species in the study area. This can be achieve through frequent orientation, re-orientation and legal prosecution of forest laws offenders.

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