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**Assessment of Participation of Churches in Social Forestry
in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

A study was conducted to assess the participation of churches in social forestry activities in Uyo Local Government Area (LGA) of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Social forestry is any activity leading to tree planting on any vacant land in order to avail people of forest goods and services. Uyo LGA was stratified into four sampling units based on the existing four clans (Etoi, Ikono, Offot and Oku). At each clan, 250 Christians were randomly selected and administered with structured questionnaires in different churches. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square. About 72.60% of the respondents were males while females constituted 27.40%, 76.20% of the respondents were 40 years and above in age, while 23.80% of them were

from 25 to 39 years. Educational background showed that 41.45% of the respondents had West African Examination Council Certificate or below, while 46.20% and 23.60% acquired OND/NCE and HND/BSc respectively. In terms of occupation, the respondents were farmers/business people (62.60%), civil servants (10.60%), and full-time preachers (23.60%). About 31.60% of the respondents planted trees whereas 68.40% did not. Of those that planted trees, 61.71% concentrated on fruit trees, 33.86% raised ornamental plants while 4.43% planted timber trees. Preference for type of plant was significant ($p \leq 0.05$). Homegardens showed significantly ($p \leq 0.05$) as favoured sites of tree planting. About 15.20% were willing to plant trees as against 84.20% that were not willing. Reasons given for their unwillingness were as follows: trees as hosts to evil spirits (72.29%), long maturity period (46.82%), ownership problem (39.39%), trees regenerate naturally (36.20%), inadequate land (32.20%) and lack of skill (19.81). These reasons, individually had significant ($p \leq 0.05$) influence on respondents' unwillingness to plant trees on vacant lands. There is need for enlightenment campaigns in churches in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom, Nigeria, to deflate wrong beliefs that trees host evil spirits.

Key words: Participation, churches, social forestry, Uyo LGA, Nigeria.

Introduction

Peoples' participation in community projects can change the nature and direction of development intervention and lead to a type of development which is more respectful of resource-poor peoples' position and interest as well as creating self reliance (Chambers *et al.*, 1989; Oakley, 1991, Burkey, 1993). In forestry development, God the creator demonstrated the importance of the concept of participatory development when God invited Adam to be involved in the nomenclature and management of all the forests and wildlife resources shortly after their creation. By the time Adam completed his own role, God respected and endorsed the nomenclatural systems of every plant and animal and management plans as articulated by Adam, and up till the present day, the names of plants and animals remained according to each plant and animal species. There are copious evidences that God even adopted participatory approach in relationship with people (Genesis, 2: 15-20; II Chronicle, 7: 14-15). Since primeval, the principle of participation has been widely adopted within forestry development programmes, though in different terminologies. Social forestry is often referred to as community forestry, agroforestry and/or extension forestry (Oakley, 1991). However, Atampugre

(1991) argued that all these are different ways of saying the same thing, i. e. forestry for the people. Social forestry embraces many ways in which forest goods and services directly affect the lives of people. It covers the spectrum of activities ranging from growing trees on all vacant lands, to tree seedling production, distribution and processing of forest produce at household, artisan or rural industry level to generate income (FORMECU, 1989).

Social forestry options commonly practised in Nigeria include urban forestry, nursery production, agroforestry, village/community woodlots, tree orchards, parks and gardens, farm trees, strip planting, amenity plantings, homegardens and green defense. According to Duerr (1931), sustainable development of any nation is based on forest creation, implying that social forestry practices will expand the growth of nations to a significant degree judging from the myriad of produce and products derived forests. Udo (2001) stated that there are abundant tree materials that are used in textile, ceramic, tannery, biogas, pharmaceutical, pulp and paper industries, apart from those utilized in timber and non timber forest product industries.

Social forestry is a people-based concept, and religious organizations form the most ubiquitous people-based organizations of any society in Nigeria. Miller (2002) acknowledged the power of religions to effect social change, and argued that while religions preserve traditions, they also provoke social and ecological changes. According to Tucker (2002, cited in Miller 2002), religious leaders and theologians helped give birth to progressive movements such as civil rights for minorities, social justice for the poor and liberation for women, and in England, religious groups were instrumental in launching the Jubilee 2000 movement that promoted debt reduction for poor nations.

Thus, religious organization such as the church can effect meaningful changes in the peoples' attitude towards social forestry, in order to complement government's effort in increasing forest wealth and conserve the environment. International Bible Society (1992) defines church as all those people who profess to be Christians or the whole number of true believers. In Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, the rapid spread of churches has led to drastic reduction of forest estate. Indisputably, the church wields enormous influence on its members and to a large extent, moderate members' lifestyle which is fashioned along the doctrine of the church. Thus, it is possible for the church to influence its members to accept the idea of social forestry because of the accruable short and long term benefits. The aim of this study is to assess the extent to which churches in Uyo Local Government Area (LGA) participate

in social forestry activities, i.e. planting and caring for trees in any vacant land. To justify participation in social forestry activities, five null hypotheses were formulated for verification:

- i. Tree planting in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria by churches was not significant;
- ii. there was no preference of types of tree planted by churches in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria;
- iii. there was no willingness to plant any type of tree by churches in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria;
- iv. planting of timber trees around church premises in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria was not rejected by churches; and
- v. land, long maturity period and perception of trees as hosts to evil spirits, individually did not constitute a hindrance to tree planting in churches in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Materials and Methods

The Study Area: Uyo LGA lies between latitude $7^{\circ}30'$ and $8^{\circ}03'$ East, and between longitude $4^{\circ}52'$ and $5^{\circ}10'$ North (Fig. 1). It covers an area of about 985.96 square kilometers and comprises a total of 75 villages. The population of Uyo LGA is 309,573 people (FRN, 2007), and about 99% are Christians and attend various churches to worship on weekly days.

Climate, Vegetation and Relief: The mean annual temperature in Uyo LGA is 27°C and relative humidity varies through the year from 70 to 80 percent, while mean annual rainfall is 2,484 millimeters (Ema, 1989). Uyo LGA has two distinct seasons namely; dry and rainy seasons. The dry season usually starts in mid November and ends in mid March. The rainy season starts usually in mid March and ends in mid November. The study area falls within the freshwater swamp forest, while the topography is generally undulating (Udofia, 2007).



Fig. 1: Map of Akwa Ibom State showing Uyo Local Government Area, the study area.

Data collection and analysis: The study used a formal multistage random sampling in selecting sample clans and sample churches for investigation. Due to the obvious lack of information about number of churches in Uyo

LGA from the Federal Office of Statistics, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN), the number of clans in Uyo LGA was adopted in the selection of sample size. Uyo LGA was stratified into four sampling units based on the existing four clans (Etoi, Ikono, Offot and Oku). At each clan, 250 Christian households who attended various church denominations were randomly selected and administered with structured questionnaires. A church denomination recorded in one sample clan, but found in another sample clan was not recorded twice to avoid duplication. In all, 1000 questionnaires were administered at all the four sample clans. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi square.

Results and Discussion

Information about the respondents in the study area

Respondents attended 86 different church denominations across the study area, 72.60% of the respondents were males while females constituted 27.40% (Table 1). This clearly shows male dominance, perhaps due to leadership roles men play in households and in churches in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It was also probable that females who collected the questionnaires, gave the questionnaires to their husbands for response as a mark of respect and honour. This is in consonance with the patrilineal family structure in the study area. About 76.20% of the respondents were 40 years and above in age, while 23.80% of them were from 25 to 39 years, implying that majority of them were mature to be able to volunteer reliable information on issues relating to social forestry. Educational background showed that 30.20% of the respondents had West African Examination Council certificate or below, while 46.20% and 23.60% acquired OND/NCE and HND/BSc. Respectively (Table 1). This indicates that about 70% of the respondents were educated to appreciate the value of social forestry and to communicate knowledge to others. By virtue of their educational advantage, they were in good position to understand the importance of participating in social forestry activities for the purpose of environmental conservation.

In terms of occupation, the respondents were farmers and business people (65.80%), civil servants (10.60%), full-time preachers (23.60%). Self employed (farming and business people) forms a majority of the respondents in the study area, while churches provided gainful employment to reasonable proportion of the populace. If churches provide full-time employment to a great number of people in the study area, they can as well serve to persuade

their members to plant trees on any available vacant land. The diversity of occupation of respondents explains that if they participated in social forestry, they could extend such knowledge to almost all shades of opinions in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Consequently, both private sector and public service could be enlisted in active social forestry activities in the study area. If churches had collectively participated in social forestry work, most of their members in the study area could have the benefit of acquiring the knowledge and skill of tree planting and protection.

Participation in social forestry by churches in the study area

About 31.60% of the respondents in all the churches investigated planted trees whereas 68.40% did not. Of those that planted trees, 61.71% concentrated on fruit trees, 33.86% raised ornamental plants while 4.43% actually planted timber trees (Table 2). Most of the respondents established fruit trees because of the food/protein/vitamin needs and also for small income. Ornamentals received considerable attention as respondents were also interested in the beautification of the living environment and church premises. Generally the front view of the sampled church buildings were observed to be devoid of plants, thereby lacking in aesthetics and rendering building vulnerable to wind/rain storms (Plates 1 and 2). Some of the ornamentals were potted and could be moved from one position to another.

Preference for type of plant (Table 4) was significant ($p \leq 0.05$). Oral interview with respondents revealed that preference for fruit trees was for economic reasons and early yield, unlike timber trees. Also, ornamental plants did not take much space in terms of crown coverage, and in most cases were potted or planted in hedges. If churches were educated on proper technique of planting timber trees in limited land condition as in boundary or border line, they could probable have positive disposition towards timber trees. Respondents had significant ($p \leq 0.05$) preference for homegardens in the location of planting (Tables 2 and 4). Their explanation was that planting around homes removes ownership conflicts and they could easily harvest their produce/products at will within close proximity. Some respondents complained about inadequate land and lack of money to procure distant farmland to enhance timber tree cultivation. Lack of ownership assurance and unclear sharing formula of benefits could discourage people from participating in joint/community ventures or investments. Social forestry in churches represents one of such joint/community ventures.

In as much as it was advisable to encourage homestead planting to assist in strengthening the economy of households, it was equally advisable that churches be encouraged further to realize the essentials of planting trees around the church premises for protection against wind/rain storms, reduction in noise pollution, improve in air quality, shade and timber to replace worn-out wooden furniture and facilities. These are tangible and intangible benefits that accrue to every member of any church. It was observed during the study that churches only planted herbaceous and seasonal ornamentals, which were not capable of providing abundant and perennial service that shrubs and trees offer, a condition that could be alleviated with some enlightenment campaign.

Willingness to plant trees by churches in the study area

About 15.20% were willing to plant trees while 84.80% of them expressed their unwillingness to plant trees (Table 3). Reasons given for their unwillingness were as follows: trees as hosts to evil spirits (72.29%), long maturity period (46.82%), ownership problem (39.39%), trees regenerate naturally (36.20%), inadequate land (32.43%) and lack of skill (19.81). The reasons, individually had significant ($p \leq 0.05$) influence on respondents' unwillingness to plant trees on vacant lands. If one conjectures the prospect of these negative influences of people, the future of wood supply is uncertain. Most of the respondents were vehement on the reason that trees are hosts to evil spirits wherever they were planted. Although this view lacks scientific support, it has affected their disposition to social forestry, and so every consideration should be made to deflate such a wrong belief.

Some of the respondents pointed to the longevity issue as hindrance, while some stressed that trees were created by God and that God is still able to regenerate them without human efforts. The Holy Bible reports that after establishing the forest, God handed over to man its sustainable management, which includes regeneration. On ownership factor, as stated by some of the respondents, Atampugre (1991) had noted that tree tenureship could pose a serious hindrance to peoples' participation in social forestry. This is because if people were not sure about the extent to which they would benefit from any business, they might not be willing to invest their energy, money time and interest.

Table 1: Biodata about the respondents in the study area

Sample Clan	No of church es attende d	Frequency											
		Sex		Age (Years)			Education			Occupation			
		M	F	25-39	40-54	>55	WAEC OND/NCE HND/BSc.				F/B	CV	FPr
Etoi	19	150	100	75	132	43	86	120	44	169	23	58	
Ikono	14	177	73	56	160	34	95	105	50	187	18	45	
Offot	23	189	61	42	159	49	86	109	55	164	21	65	
Oku	31	210	40	65	167	18	35	128	87	138	44	68	
Total	86	726	274	238	618	144	302	462	236	658	106	236	
%		72.60	27.40	23.80	61.80	14.40	30.20	46.20	23.60	65.80	10.50	23.60	

F/B = Farming and Business CV = Civil Service FPr = Full-time preaching

Table 2: Extent of tree planting, types of trees planted and site of planting by respondents in the study area

Sample Clan	Frequency								
	Planted trees		Types of tree planted			Location of tree planting			
	Yes	No	Timber	Fruit	Ornamental	Farm	Homegarden	Church	
Etoi	89	161	2	55	32	14	71	4	
Ikono	67	183	5	47	15	20	46	1	
Offot	61	189	1	60	0	6	53	2	
Oku	99	151	6	33	60	23	61	15	
Total	316	684	14	195	107	63	231	22	
%	31.60	68.40	4.43	61.71	33.86	19.75	73.10	6.96	

Table 3: Willingness to plant trees and reasons for not willing to plant trees by respondents in the study area

Sample Clan	Frequency							
	Willingness to plant trees		Reasons for unwillingness to plant trees					
	Yes	No	THS	LSK	ILD	ONP	TRN	LMP
Etoi	33	217	89	34	45	67	45	87
Ikono	39	211	125	23	89	86	78	89
Offot	46	204	198	33	62	83	98	122
Oku	34	216	201	78	74	98	86	99
Total	152	848	613	168	275	334	307	397
%	15.20	84.80	72.29	19.81	32.43	39.39	36.20	46.82

THS = Trees host evil spirits.

LSK = Lack of skill.

ILD = Inadequate land.

ONP = Ownership problem.

TRN = Trees regenerate naturally.

LMP = Long maturity period.

Table 4: Summary of test of hypotheses

	Hypotheses	X ² _{cal}	X ² _{tab}	Decision
Ho ₁	Tree planting in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria by churches was not significant.	30.75	7.81	Reject Ho
Ho ₂	There was no preference of type of trees planted by churches in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.	106.13	12.59	Reject Ho
Ho ₃	There was no willingness to plant any type of tree by churches in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.	3.30	7.81	Accept Ho
Ho ₄	Planting of timber trees around church premises in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria was not rejected by churches.	40.93	12.59	Reject Ho
Ho ₅	Land, long maturity period and perception of trees as hosts to evil spirits, individually did not constitute a hindrance to tree planting in churches in Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.	65.63	25.00	Reject Ho

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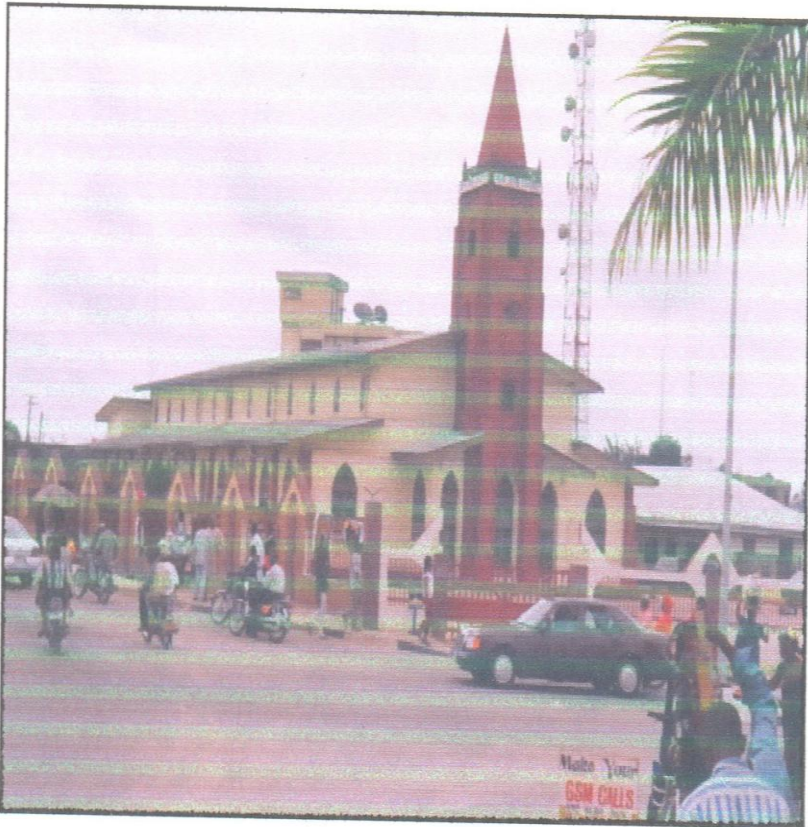


Plate 1: Qua Iboe Church building in Oku Clan, Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria completely lacking in greenery



Plate 2: Power Chapel building in Offot Clan, Uyo LGA of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria dotted with herbaceous flowers