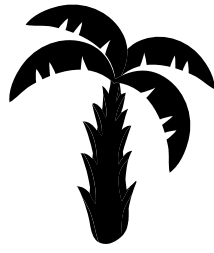




Oil palm plantations in forest landscapes: impacts, aspirations and ways forward in Nigeria

Ojo GU, Offiong RA, Akhaine SO, Baiyewu-Teru A, Allen F





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Contents

Overview

- 5** Oil palm plantations in forest landscapes: impacts, aspirations and ways forward in Nigeria
Ojo GU, Offiong RA, Akhaine SO, Baiyewu-Teru A, Allen F

Background reviews

- 12** Oil palm in the wider landscape and threats to Nigeria's forests
Godwin Uyi Ojo
- 20** A historical review of oil palm plantations and forest loss in Cross River State, Nigeria
Raphael Ayama Offiong
- 33** The state, people and oil palm production in Nigeria: understanding the policy nexus
Sylvester Odion Akhaine
- 42** Social impacts and gender imbalances related to oil palm in Nigerian forest landscapes
Abiodun Baiyewu-Teru
- 53** NGOs, CSOs and academia: capacity gaps and advocacy surrounding expansion of oil palm plantations in Nigeria
Fidelis Allen

Overview



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Summary

The following summary synthesizes the findings of a series of background reviews specially commissioned and undertaken as part of the work of the Green Livelihoods Alliance in Nigeria. It then goes on to present summaries each of the five reviews in turn. These are intended to provide an introduction to the full reviews that are included later in this report.

What is happening?

In Nigeria and specifically in Cross River State, large scale land acquisition or 'land grabbing' is increasing dramatically, much of it for new oil palm plantations. And whereas it is becoming increasingly evident that the negative social and environmental impacts of oil palm plantations appear to far outweigh the benefits, this recent expansion has showed no sign of slowing down.

To date, much of Nigeria's landscape has already been cleared for agriculture. Cross River State contains the richest rainforest areas in the country, where the establishment of new oil palm plantations is now the main cause of clearance. More and more estates are being planted by multinational companies along the fringes of forest reserves, exposing remaining rainforests to threats of deforestation, degradation and biodiversity loss.

The government wants to protect remaining rainforests and boost economic development, but in doing so, it finds itself caught between the contradictory priorities of conservation and development. In contrast, large scale plantations driven by monetary benefits are expanding tremendously in Nigeria with little adherence to extant laws, and without obtaining prior and informed consent from local communities. As a result, conflicts between companies involved and indigenous people are escalating dramatically.

Who is suffering?

The expansion of oil palm plantations as a major driver of land grabbing, deforestation and biodiversity loss in Cross River State, is leading to serious threats to its land and people. Forest is being cleared resulting in deterioration of the environment. Local people are impoverished as they lose a major source of income, land, and socio-cultural values associated with the forest. Environmental changes also lead to impacts on health and human wellbeing. Deforestation is also expanding due to increased forest encroachment and slash and burn practices, related to new roads, improved access and escalating poverty.

“ In the competition between forest conservation and oil palm plantation expansion in Nigeria, the losers appear to be indigenous communities.

Abiodun Baiyewu-Teru ”

And those who suffer the most from the negative impacts of oil palm production tend to be indigenous peoples, vulnerable groups, and especially women and children. Gender inequality has always been an issue in Nigeria, exacerbated with land grabbing, when they are consulted or compensated, and they lose their rights and abilities to earn a living and meet the nutritional needs of their families. Children may then be withdrawn from school, engaged in child labour and suffer from malnutrition.

Government dilemmas

The colonial experience in the oil palm trade showed quite some concern and efforts to avoid the forceful removal of people from their land. However, post-colonial governments seemed to be drawn blindly by the economic benefits of oil palm production and have neglected to consider and reduce the negative impacts on indigenous peoples and the ecosystems they live in.

In the case of Cross River State, a review on extant policies related to oil palm plantation revealed that there are no clear governance guidelines for the oil palm sector, apart from expanding production to generate more resources and emerge as a global leader in the industry. Missing links between policy, the need for investment, and the wellbeing of forest-dwelling people in the state, call for mainstreaming environment and human security issues in memorandums of understanding (MoUs) between the government and oil palm companies, as well as advocating for government to appreciate the centrality of people in the policy process.

“ Of course we are worried about the ecological consequences. But we have to grow the economy. We have to create jobs for our own people. How we do it sustainably is where we are struggling.

Amara Konneh ”

What capacity and information is missing?

In the midst of conflicts that surround oil palm plantations in Nigeria, CSOs and academia have been working actively to help communities bring these issues into the limelight. However, their efforts still remain rudimentary due to a significant lack of capacity and resources for advocacy purposes. There is also a clear need for more research, to identify what is sustainable land use and to provide solid data on the extent of oil palm plantations, but CSOs lack in-house research capacity and financial resources to fill this knowledge gap.

In addition, questions and fears of what the industry would do to local farming populations and their forests in Nigeria have received only modest academic attention so far, and the role of academia so far is only marginal. Also, community leaders do not possess adequate advocacy skills, and gender and conflict issues have not yet received adequate attention.

Ways forward

To reduce the negative impacts of oil palm plantations, the rights and welfare of people must be prioritized in the quest for economic development. As such, local communities must be recognized as stakeholders who have to be engaged in negotiations with governments and companies, and that their free, prior and informed consent is an essential prerequisite. They need to have the opportunity to make decisions regarding their own development. Environmental and human security issues between government and oil palm companies that put the welfare of local peoples centrally, must be mainstreamed, in addition to enforcing the compulsory environmental and social impact assessments that are explicitly required by law.

Furthermore, it is important that the total area of oil palm plantations in Cross River State and in Nigeria as a whole are known, as well as the trends in expansion, and their actual impacts on the forests and forest-dependent communities.

This review recommends, among other things, that NGOs, CSOs and academia establish a coalition specifically for research, advocacy and capacity building purposes. Other crucial actions that also need to be carried out, are developing a mechanism for sharing news on actions and analysis on a regular basis, and for agreeing and taking common gender- and conflict-sensitive positions, to help reduce gender inequality and avoid physical violence in the struggle to implement best practices in the large scale agricultural sector.

Oil palm in the wider landscape and threats to Nigeria's forests

Godwin Uyi Ojo

Large scale land acquisition is increasing dramatically in Nigeria. Although the act of expanding areas for cultivating food crops and fuels presents development opportunities, Godwin Uyi Ojo, Executive Director of Friends of the Earth Nigeria, argued that the negative impacts far outweigh any advantages as 'land grabbing' is causing serious environmental and social impacts to the land and the people living on it. The issue is deeply controversial due to the fact that it is driven by monetary benefits and conducted without obtaining prior and informed consent from local communities.

“ The best form of development is to place development parameters in the hands of the target beneficiaries.

Godwin Uyi Ojo ”

The worsening economic downturn and the food deficit have helped to make to Nigeria more dependent on external investment in large scale agribusiness. But the products produced eventually end up in international markets and therefore *“enrich not Africans predominantly, but groups and individuals who operate to Africa's impoverishment”* (Nkrumah, 1965). The situation is further exacerbated due to unexpected repercussions of the EU biofuel policy, which unintentionally promotes the cultivation of palm oil and other biofuels, taking away communal land rights.

European-owned plantation companies are expanding their businesses tremendously in Nigeria without caring much about the consequences. Wilmar PZ in Cross River state and Okomu Oil Palm Company in Edo state both failed to conduct mandatory environmental impact assessment before expansion, required for community consent and to fulfil corporate social responsibility commitments as promised. Also, the potential for economic gains, weak governance structure and poor land tenure system have pushed federal and state governments to be non-compliant of current environmental laws and to collude with large-scale plantation companies in shady negotiations. As a result, land grabbing expansion appears unstoppable and the threats that it is posing to the Nigerian environment and people are becoming ever more severe.

In this context, it is crucial to recognize local communities as important partners in the development process, who have the rights to be involved, to be consulted, and to make decisions. There is also a strong need to put in place transparency and accountability measures so that the local people are not excluded and that corporate social responsibility is not a hoax. After all, *“the best form of development is to place development parameters in the hands of the target beneficiaries”*, said Ojo.

A historical review of oil palm plantations and forest loss in cross river state, Nigeria

Raphael Ayama Offiong

Cross River State had the largest tropical rainforest area in Nigeria and has always been one of the biggest producers of export crops in this country. As such, the state has suffered from serious forest loss due to the expansion of plantation agriculture, particularly for oil palm. But how destructive are oil palm plantations for the region and its people? According to Raphael Ayama Offiong from the University of Calabar, the answer is largely missing, because there is a significant lack of data on both the current state of oil palm plantations in Cross River State as well as their environmental and social impacts.

“ There is a significant lack of data on both the current state of oil palm plantations in Cross River State as well as their environmental and social impacts.

Raphael Ayama Offiong ”

Since 1907, Cross River State has lost more than two thirds of its forest area to large scale plantations, in which oil palm alone occupies 62.5% of the cultivated area. Plantation estates are found around the tropical rainforest belt of the state because of the fertile soil and conducive environment. More and more

estates are being established by multinational companies along the fringes of reserve forest areas, exposing the remaining rainforests to the threats of deforestation, degradation and biodiversity loss.

Expansion of oil palm as the major driver of forest loss in Cross River State is having strong negative impacts on biodiversity and the livelihoods of local communities. Plantations require the clearing of forests, resulting in the modification and degradation of the environment. Local people are then impoverished due to the loss of a forest as a source of income, land, social and cultural values, and intense conflicts from land grabbing issues. Deforestation is also expanding due to increased encroachment and slash and burn practices, related to new road access and escalating poverty.

Nevertheless, the total area of oil palm plantations in Cross River State is not known, neither their actual impacts on the forests and forest-dependent communities. In order to propose research and policy developments that could have an impact on uncontrolled oil palm expansion, we have to know the area of oil palm plantations, and their environmental and social impacts in the entire state.

The state, people and oil palm production in Nigeria: understanding the policy nexus

Sylvester Odion Akhaine

A conducive environment and government interest are factors that have contributed to the resurgence of the oil palm industry in Nigeria, though “cycles of tragedy [are] often caught up with those who learnt nothing from previous occurrences”, said Sylvester Akhaine from Lagos State University. The absence of clear policy on environment and human security issues in agricultural regulations of central authorities and state governments in relation to oil palm production, has led to negative impacts on land and people.

This analysis of colonial experience in oil palm trade revealed an intriguing concern regarding displacement of local communities, by showing a willingness to avoid the forceful removal of people from their land. However, post-colonial governments were drawn by the economic benefits of oil palm production and neglected to consider the impact on indigenous people and ecosystems they lived in. Special attention was raised by civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs on oppressive processes of land acquisition and shady negotiations between oil palm companies and governments, along with unfair labour practices imposed on local people.

In Cross River State, the richest rainforest region in Nigeria, this policy review showed that there are no clear governance guidelines in the oil palm sector, apart from expanding production to generate more resources. At federal level, the Presidential Initiative for Vegetable Oil Development (VODEP) policy and Agriculture Transformation Agenda (ATA) programme indicated poor continuity due to the speed of policy transition. Cross River State government is inclined to sacrifice its well-crafted poverty alleviation programmes like Cross River Agricultural and Rural Empowerment Scheme (CARES), to support multinational oil palm companies who are in a scramble for the oil palm belt. Other legal instruments include the Land Use Act (1978), the Environmental Impact Assessment Act (1992), and Cross River State Forestry Commission Law No.3 (2010) but which are now at variance with agribusiness that can explain the dispute between companies like PZ Wilmar and local communities.

The missing link between policy, the need for investment and the wellbeing of the forest people in the state, therefore, calls for the necessity to mainstream environment and human security issues in memorandums of understanding between government and oil palm companies, and to advocate with governments so they appreciate the centrality of people in the policy process.

“ The missing link between policy, the need for investment and the wellbeing of the forest people in the state, therefore, calls for the necessity to mainstream environment and human security issues in memorandums of understanding between government and oil palm companies, and to advocate with governments so they appreciate the centrality of people in the policy process.

Sylvester Odion Akhaine ”

Social impacts and gender imbalances related to oil palm in Nigerian forest landscapes

Abiodun Baiyewu-Teru

“In the competition between forest conservation and oil palm plantation expansion in Nigeria, the losers appear to be indigenous communities” said Abiodun Baiyewu-Teru, Country Director of Global Rights Nigeria. It is evident that the negative impacts of oil palm production on local people, particularly women and children, far outweigh the benefits that come with it.

The rich biodiversity of Nigeria once vast forests is fast disappearing due largely to the development of oil palm plantations. While the federal and state governments appear interested in conserving remaining rainforest areas, they also desperately want to boost the economic gains for the state and therefore, end up between two conflicting priorities - conservation and agricultural development. However, the human factor seems to be forgotten in the process, as both companies and governments fail to engage with communities in obtaining their free, prior and informed consent, by only consulting community chiefs rather than a larger and more democratic representation of the entire community. In addition, oil palm companies often ignore compulsory environmental and social impact assessments, which are explicitly required by law.

“ **In the competition between forest conservation and oil palm plantation expansion in Nigeria, the losers appear to be indigenous communities.**

At the heart of law, development, governance and business lies people and communities.

Abiodun Baiyewu-Teru ”

Among those who suffer most from negative impacts, Baiyewu emphasized that they are mostly indigenous peoples and the most vulnerable, including women and children. Gender inequality remains an issue, and land grabbing takes away women’s rights to be consulted and compensated. Barred from accessing forest resources, women are less able to practice subsistence farming and meet the nutritional needs of their families. Finding another occupation is a challenge for them and even when they are recruited for work in plantations, they earn much less than when managing their own smallholder farmlands. As a result, this deepens women’s dependence on men and broadens the gender gap. Children may then be withdrawn from school, engaged in child labour and suffer malnutrition. Moreover, environmental shifts may lead to increased labour, reduced productivity and health and human wellbeing issues.

“At the heart of law, development, governance and business lies people and communities”, noted Baiyewu. It is thus important that the government takes this into account, to prevent growing negative impacts of oil palm plantations by prioritizing the rights and welfare of its people in the quest for economic development.

NGOs, CSOs and academia: capacity gaps and advocacy surrounding expansion of oil palm plantations in Nigeria

Fidelis Allen

More than 90% of the Nigerian landscape has been cleared for agriculture, leading to negative social and environmental impacts. Although indigenous communities, with the help of civil society organisations (CSOs), NGOs and academia have been making major efforts in calling attention to the issue, they are still struggling to have their voices heard due to a significant lack of capacity and resources for advocacy purpose, according to Fidelis Allen, Acting Director of Centre for Conflict and Gender Studies, Nigeria.

In Cross River State, land and the people are facing serious threats from land grabbing, deforestation and biodiversity loss. The intensity of conflict between communities and CSOs on the one hand and oil palm companies and the state government on the other hand has escalated dramatically. The main reasons are insufficient consultation with local people, violation of extant laws and policies, and destruction of high conservation value forest areas. It can be clearly seen that improper governance of the oil palm industry, with corporations increasingly searching for

investment opportunities to expand their landholdings in Nigeria, is happening at the expense of indigenous communities.

In the midst of this conflict, CSOs and academia have been actively working together to help communities and bring the issues into the limelight. However, their efforts still remain rudimentary due to several obstacles. Research is a key need, but they lack in-house research capacity and financial resources to fill all of the gaps in required knowledge, and to engage researchers on a regular basis. In addition, questions and fears of what the industry would do to local farming populations and their forests in Nigeria have received only limited academic attention to date. Community leaders also do not have adequate advocacy skills and gender and conflict sensitivities have not yet received sufficient attention.

Allen therefore recommends that NGOs, CSOs and academia establish a coalition specifically for research, advocacy and capacity building purposes. Other crucial actions that are also needed are to develop a mechanism for sharing analysis and actions on regular basis, and to reduce gender inequality and avoid physical violence in the struggle for best practices in large scale agriculture sector.

“ Although indigenous communities, with the help of civil society organisations (CSOs), NGOs and academia have been making major efforts in calling attention to the issue, they are still struggling to have their voices heard due to a significant lack of capacity and resources for advocacy purpose.
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Background review



Oil palm in the wider landscape
and threats to Nigeria's forests

Godwin Uyi Ojo

Background review

Oil palm in the wider landscape and threats to Nigeria's forests

Godwin Uyi Ojo

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Summary

Large scale land acquisition also referred to as land grabbing is increasingly assuming alarming proportions posing serious threats to tropical rainforests in Nigeria. Although large scale land acquisition presents some development opportunities for poverty and underdevelopment, it is however a panacea that is externally driven. The European biofuel policy that seeks to use food crops for food and fuel for machines has resulted in the increasing pressure on land for oil palm plantations. In Nigeria, the demand for oil palm is high and this creates a development opportunity in the generation of revenue, jobs creation and such other opportunities associated with corporate social responsibility packages. Such schemes might include scholarships for students, borehole for water supply, construction of roads, and cash payment to host communities as forms of social license to operate in the communities.

The potential for some economic gains has forced the federal and state governments of Nigeria to be non-compliant of extant environmental laws leading to environmental and social impacts from oil palm plantations including the destruction of livelihoods. From the foregoing two cases are highlighted to underscore external and local influences contributing to land grabbing in Nigeria. They are Okomu Oil Palm Company operating in Edo state, and Wilmar PZ in Cross River state, southern Nigeria. Often, community land rights are eroded due to disregard for community prior and informed consent (FPIC) with cases of community displacement.

While the oil companies claim to provide food for the local population there is strong reason to believe that the investors are out to make money and to produce products for international consumption. Further research agenda on the way forward should include mapping the supply chain of oil production in Nigeria to determine its volume and monetary value including how much is consumed domestically in relation to how much is supplied to international market. While some believe that Nigeria oil palm market is under developed hence the alleged importation of palm oil others believe that the quantity produced and derivatives end up in international markets in Europe and other industrialised nations.

There is also a need to put in place transparency and accountability measures so that any memorandum of understanding that is to guide community development must involve those target beneficiaries, so that corporate social responsibility is not a hoax and full of promises that companies make but which they do not intend to keep. A research agenda focusing on how local communities shore up resistance to oil exploitation can be supported by the use of social media and other forms of conventional media. Such a research agenda should also emphasize the need for free prior and informed consent of the local people whose community land rights is trampled.

Finally, alternative models for sustainable landscape development that respect community rights and improve livelihoods in a fair and equitable manner can be achieved through community based forests management schemes that place custodian rights on forest users who are natural conservationists. Since their lives and livelihoods depend on the sustainable use of natural resources in forested landscapes through communal governing institutions, local trust building and confidence is assured. To them, their forests is their life. It is not for sale. A concerted effort is required to conserve them.

Introduction

In the last two decades, there has been a growing increase in the expansion of oil palm in forested landscapes in Africa. The growth in this phenomenon of land grabbing is driven by transnational palm oil companies mainly from Europe, for establishing new plantations in tropical rainforest landscapes in southern Nigeria. The landscapes have come under severe threats associated with the drivers of climate change and responses to it, globalisation and trade liberalisation policies riding in the throes of free trade.

On a wider scale, both internal and external factors combine to exacerbate local and foreign influence on land grabbing which relates beyond land for agriculture to how European policies at the domestic level shape the nature and forms of development in Africa. A consideration of this type of policy thrust promoting trade liberalisation rather than fair trade between industrialised and non-industrialized countries inevitably opens up wider issues of access to communal farmlands, land stocks for fiscal speculation and agricultural land for cultivation with severe negative environmental and social impacts from rapidly expanding oil palm concessions. Also, important to the debate is the question of whether or not Africa can feed itself, which is squarely at the root of land grabbing. While some economists consider large scale land acquisition to be beneficial for its potential foreign direct investment (FDI) for development even though land is acquired at prices far less comparable to its value in the international market others maintained that the environmental and social costs far outweighs any benefits.

This paper examines the wider landscape through the lens of external and internal drivers of land grabbing in southern Nigeria to addressing the broader conceptual levels of food and hunger politics, the European Union (EU) policy impact beyond its shores, and the concerted global responses to climate change in the quest for alternatives for renewable energy sources. Internally, it also examines the wider context of internal political dynamics from an elitist society to consider the land governance system, challenges of corruption and neglect of small scale farmers in favour of large scale monocrop plantations. Outcomes show that the lack of free, prior and informed consent from the communities and the superimposition of large scale plantation development models are considered detrimental and should give way to the more traditional communal land governance in community based forests management systems that are the more favourable to the goals of sustainable development in forested landscapes in Nigeria.

The scale of land grabbing

The scale of large scale land acquisition or land grabbing in Nigeria is on the rise posing serious threats to the forests and people of southern Nigeria. The term land grabbing is controversial and suggests that land titles exchange hands inappropriately without equity and fairness. However, the investors maintain that they are not involved in land grabbing but doing land acquisition for strategic economic purposes including farmlands for conventional crops and non-conventional ones. In a study by Friends of the Earth, land grabs occur when “traditionally used lands by local communities is leased or sold to outside investors for food cultivation and biofuel” (FoE, 2010). It entails a transfer of rights to use or control land covering an area of 200 hectares or more. More importantly, it “imply the potential conversion of land from smallholder production, local community use or important ecosystem service provision to commercial use” (FoE, 2010).

Such transaction involves cash payments, favourable terms of acquisition that is usually below the market value, or outright give away by national governments to the companies touting vociferous corporate social responsibility packages. Such deal may be highly susceptible to mutual collusion and corruption between the companies and some national government officials to acquire land cheaply. It suggests too that land grabbing for the purpose of large-scale plantations for food or fuel production are largely contentious.

Africa remains as natural resource base for the supply of raw materials for industrial production and manufacture. From spices and textiles to slaves, ivory, palm oil, crude oil, and other prized solid minerals (Obi, 2005) in ways that suggest massive external influence. This sort of relation is also resulting in the growing capital-intensive monocrop plantations and agribusiness dominated by industrialised nations in the development of farm chemicals, pesticides and herbicides. The result of such unequal relationship is the acquisition and expansion of communal farmlands for oil palm plantations. In Nigeria, recent acquisition is in the neighbourhood of tens of thousands of hectares of farmlands involving both transnational and local companies.

Corporate operations in southern Nigeria

Briefly, Wilmar PZ is an international conglomerate for large scale oil palm plantation owners, produce processors and traders with active support from

powerful investors across Europe, America and other industrialised countries. The company acquired 38,000 hectares of communal farmlands in 2010 which it has successfully cultivated in spite of community opposition. The land lease was secured without community consultation. Specifically, Wilmar has built an oil palm refinery which can process and package 1000 tonnes of palm oil per day, equivalent to approximately one fifth of all the palm oil refined daily in Nigeria.

Wilmar PZ currently employs 300 workers in its state of the art oil palm refinery based in Lagos. It is also currently producing edible oil called Mamador, Devon King's brand, and other palm oil derivatives for other PZ Cussons products, household and food products manufactured in Nigeria. Yet, it is not clear how much of this is for export. Forestlands and farmlands with staples were destroyed to pave way for the plantation and without environmental and social impact assessments process involving due diligence and community participation.

Similarly, although the company claimed to be "revitalising unproductive palm oil plantations and developing new ones, helping to meet Nigeria palm oil requirements in line with the government's Agricultural Transformation Agenda" (<http://pzwilmar.com/index.php/sustainable-plantations>) yet community members claim that deforestation is occurring significantly by the clearance of high forests in Calaro concession, Biase and Ibiae concessions and environs to pave the way for the planned expansion

Wilmar PZ has in 2015 embarked on the expansion of the plantation with an additional 50,000 hectares of communal land for oil palm plantation that is proposed as oil palm refinery that will generate jobs and meet the energy needs of the country. About N500 billion revenue is expected to be generated annually while about 250,000 jobs will be created when it is fully operational from a US\$500 million investment (Etim, 2015).

Another case in point is the Okomu Oil Palm Company PLC with 62.69% controlling shares by Socfin group which is incorporated under the laws of Luxembourg, the largest producers of oil palm, coffee, rubber and other agro-commodities based in South Africa. Okomu existing oil palm plantation covers 15,578 hectares located at the fringes of Okomu Forest Reserve, Edo state in southern Nigeria. Its operations cuts across three local government areas. Since 2008, it has commenced aggressive expansion and currently bulldozing 11,000 hectares of communal forest lands for oil palm expansion.

The company fails to conduct the mandatory environmental impact assessment (EIA) that is mandatory for Grade A or pristine forests before commencement of the expansion drive and till date failed to secure any approval from the Federal Ministry of Environment (FME) exercising oversight functions. It is believed that such approval will eventually be given through the backdoor and without stakeholder participation in the EIA process. The destruction is fuelling deforestation and clearance of forests cover in the impacted local government areas in Ovia south west, Ovia North east, and Uhumwonde and Owan. Some of the communities impacted include Udo, Odighi, Odiguette, Oke, Uzebba, Sabongida-Ora, Owan, Uhiere, and several other communities. Company notoriety is similar to that of Wilmar in its environmental and social impacts. Some community members have been arrested for dissent and protest to halt the continued expansion of the plantation by a temporary stop to the bulldozers mowing down the forests. Apart from arrests, there have been cases of eviction and destruction of livelihood sources of the local communities.

From both companies, the result has been severe environmental and social impacts on communities. Resistance to expansion has been subdued by the marshalling of bogus corporate social responsibility (CSR) packages often deployed to divide and rule and set communities against each other. In Cross River State, the company MoU signed with government on CSR has not been made public, showing the level of lack of transparency and exclusion of the host communities to Wilmar. While some of the CSR packages such as schools and water are sometimes built but dysfunctional others such as borehole and decent job employment are hard to come by (Etim, 2015). The companies simply make promises they do not intend to keep. In most cases consultation and prior and informed consent is never sought. When consultation occurs, it is highly controlled and manipulative to achieved the desired result of less resistance to farmlands acquisition. The drive for expansion is driven by rapid returns on investment. According to a report, Wilmar PZ witnessed a 75% sales growth rate while audited report for the year ended 2016 showed that the company posted revenue of N14.365 billion showing a tremendous increase of 47% over N9.738 billion (Egene, 2017).

The politics of hunger

External factors play key roles in contributing to land grabbing related to the global politics of hunger. Framing the issue of land grabbing from a wider conceptual level on the interlinked interest of the state

and transnational companies provide the scope to understanding the drivers of land grabbing and how it can be minimised by policy change. The scale of Land grabbing in Africa is huge and greater than the size of the Netherlands landmass (FoE, 2010). An export-led exploitation of its resources derailed much of Africa and fuelling violent conflicts and wars. Kwame Nkrumah, founding father of modern Ghana argue that Africa is a paradox which illustrates and highlights neo-colonialism because although “her earth is rich, yet the products that come from above and below her soil continue to enrich not Africans predominantly, but groups and individuals who operate to Africa’s impoverishment” (Nkrumah, 1965). This situation is typical of Nigeria and persists as a response to the global natural resource scarcity till date.

The debate continues to rage over the important question whether Africa or even Nigeria can feed itself? With many of the 170 million population going to bed hungry and from the pangs of malnutrition the death toll is bound to rise. Also, given the food deficit that is tending towards food crisis of which Nigeria is embroiled it is hard to reject the proposition that Nigeria or Africa cannot feed itself and therefore needs external hands in large scale agribusiness to extend farmlands and generate food with external capital and technology.

In post-colonial Africa, two factors have contributed to a renewed land grabbing. The first relates to the need to feed hungry Africans through capital intensive and technology based plantations to augment the food deficits in the continent. That said, hunger has been politicised because global food production exceeds food needs, and people lack the purchasing power to buy them (Nair, 2008). To feed Africa, large scale farming mostly by European companies seem out to displace about 70% of the population engaged in agrarian farming. This process allows them to be particularly vulnerable and forced to part with their lands for hedge funds, building up land banks and stocks.

Given the EU agribusiness subsidies and capital support large scale farmers become the favourites over small scale farmers who are often deprived of the same sort of incentives given to external transnational companies doing business in Nigeria. The practice of large scale palm oil that is chemically induced through fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides that are harmful to the environment, animals, insects and plants. On the other hand, small scale organic farmers preserve the earth and produces healthy food for the population. It is clear that benefits of small scale producers far

outweigh that from large scale ones since plantations are not forests.

In reality, Africa can feed itself if the politics of hunger is sieved through to unmask the grand motives of large scale land acquisition. The produce from large-scale oil palm plantations are hardly for local consumption. Rather, it is often geared toward export to satisfy consumer demand in the international markets. While the land in Nigeria may appreciate in price and thus provide the needed foreign direct investment, such opportunities only throw up some privileged elites who often cash in the situation to become richer and make hay while the sun shines.

Such opportunism drives the deprivation of local people of their land and eventually turn them into servants and labourers in their own land that has been acquired as the Wilmar and Okomu cases show. In the end, local farmlands are used to produce crops for export rather than make those parcels of land available to local farmers. This not only increase land scarcity and conflicts between community-community and between community-company, it also contributes to food deficits that it professes to address in the first place.

EU biofuel policy

Another externally driven panacea to the climate crisis is the EU Biofuel policy initiated since 2003 that has impacted negatively on palm oil production. While this may not be a direct expectation its unintended consequences are grievous. According to EU policy Briefing, research shows that this policy inducing “indirect land use change which triggers an increase in global food prices and in food insecurity for the poor, promotes the creation of large land holdings and the use of available (‘marginal’) land in developing countries.” (Bourguignon, 2015). Since then, there has been a growing ambition to diversify Europe energy mix from sources other than petroleum products.

In particular, Articles 8 and 9 of the Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament on the promotion of the use of renewable energy sources stated the need for a mandatory “20% target for the overall share of energy consumption from renewable sources and a 10% target for energy from renewable sources in transport from biofuels in transport fuels and diesel by 2020” (www.eur_lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL). This European biofuel policy trust to increase its energy needs from biofuel is contributing to land grabs in diverse forms. This type of development is bound to have ripple effect in shaping land use change in Nigeria and elsewhere in developing

countries induced by the cultivation of palm oil and other biofuel feedstocks.

Another broader response to climate change and deforestation is the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) programme, promoted by the United Nations but also courted by companies. REDD is a mechanism designed to use monetary incentives to reduce deforestation but which in reality takes away communal land rights and reduces forests to carbon sinks without cutting emissions at source (Ojo, 2014). Cross River State tropical rainforests have been earmarked as a REDD project in an area already saturated with economic pressure on land leading to land scarcity for the vulnerable groups. This poses severe threat to the forests and conflicts in the communities that are the result of external policy and pressure.

Furthermore, another concern is the increasing use of palm oil products in a wide range of manufacture including medicine, cosmetics and food. Notably, conventional biofuels which are typically derived from crops that can also be used as food or feed are currently produced on commercial scale from palm oil plantations. In particular, palm oil has many uses with an increasing demand for biodiesel conversion on commercial quantities. In particular, and according to Wilmar company, its "land acquisition is part of Nigeria's implementation of its commitment under the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition -- a set of policies and financing commitments that promote large-scale commodity agriculture in several African nations, in what some have called a coup for corporate capital" (www.foe.org/news/archives/2015-11-communities-in-nigeria-push-back-on-wilmar-palmil).

In a recent study, it was expressed by Action Aid that such new alliance is nothing more than a deepening of the role of corporate agribusiness in Africa agriculture which will do more harm than good to small-scale food production (Action Aid, 2015). Furthermore, the stated goal of the new alliance is to, "end hunger, but the approach it takes – increasing foreign investment in private sector initiatives – is part of a drive to secure larger agricultural markets and sources of supply in Africa for multinational corporations, which may be counter-productive to that goal" (Conant, 2015). Companies involved in the New Alliance include Monsanto, Diageo, SABMiller, Unilever, Syngenta, and PZ Wilmar, all of which have major commercial interests in Africa and enjoy close connections with Northern governments." (Cooperation Framework to Support the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition in Nigeria, 2014).

Indeed, Wilmar's choice of investment and expansion in Nigeria including in Okomu ensures that such companies are safe for investment that is likely guaranteed. On the other hand, to complement this is the yawning market gap in Nigeria that is hard to fill. In turn, this spells land grabbing and shady deals in Africa that results in conflicts and community resistance against such symptoms of a wider and larger policy drive from outside the shores of Nigeria.

Weak governance structure and challenges of land tenure

Some internal factors contribute significantly to land grabbing. Internally, weak governance structures and poor land tenure system, are key factors at the heart of land grabbing facilitation. Land is ultimately controlled by the government of the day. In particular, the Land Use Act of 1978 gives overriding power over land to the national or state governments and held in trust on behalf of the people. In reality, such land is often appropriated at the mere citing of overriding state interests and for the common good of all. To this end, most land acquisition are held in shady deals and lacking transparency in ways that the invocation of the overriding state interest overrides the communal or individual interests. It is under this circumstance that Wilmar operations in Cross River state land deals were believed to have been acquired hence the call for its revocation.

Investors and dividends

Nigeria's worsening economic downturn in the last decade has contributed to the problem of land grabbing. With revenue from oil on the decline and armed conflicts in the oilfields in the Niger Delta, government is hard pressed to seek alternative sources in the diversification of its revenue sources (Ojo, 2012). The ability to attract foreign direct investment is largely considered as a measure of success. As a result, extant environmental laws are often sidelined to allow investors to invest and thus attract foreign direct investment, required for job generation and infrastructure development (Etim, 2015).

To underscore this fact, a new report presents over 40 investors in PZ Wilmar business dominated by banks and financial institutions. It was instructive to note that there were no Nigeria or even Africa partners which suggest an investment out to make brisk business and make money that will likely be siphoned out of the country (Conant, 2015). According to a report, many of Wilmar's North American and EU financiers have adopted Environmental, Social and Governance

criteria that should prevent them from investing in companies engaged in land grabbing and destruction of tropical forests. Yet despite the fact that some of these policies have been in place for more than ten years, financiers are still involved in these practices by providing financial services to companies like Wilmar” (Conant, 2015).

The Nigeria government is thus unable to enforce extant laws or prop up new laws to curtail environmental and social impacts. It is also unable to insist on transparency and accountability in land transactions. Hence, corruption is a major problem in land deals. The result is shady deals that is often more favourable to the external actors than the national and local governments under the guise of encouraging foreign investors as part of government key success stories.

Smallholder farmers and large scale plantations

Land grabbing in a wider context of state interest, globalisation and trade liberalisation also seek to work to the disadvantage of the smallholder farmers. The promotion of large scale land acquisition to the detriment of small scale ones means that the over 70% of the population would be hard hit in this period of economic recession. Yet, their organic farming practices that are environmentally friendly, can be complemented with subsidies for economies of scale in food production and improved infrastructures such as good road networks to enhance distribution.

Similarly, developing a post harvest sector that could see a reduction in food waste by 50% of production will improve net available food that could stem the continent’s hunger and land grabs. To some, what is needed is not large scale land acquisition but improved infrastructural development so that food production is properly packaged and preserved from waste. This is required for good and functional road networks for transportation of food from areas of surplus to areas of food deficits to ensure redistribution and equity.

Conclusions and ways forward

Oil palm development in southern Nigeria has induced severe threats to the Nigeria environment due to the pressure on land and scarcity for farmlands which result in conflicts and escalating food prices. To conclude, the paper showed how wider issues related to external policy shape development in Africa including Nigeria. It also showed that foreign direct

investment is a two-edged sword deployed by both external investors and the recipient country which makes it easy for land grabbing to thrive. The key lesson is how such external policy could be mitigated at source considering that palm oil remains useful in many ways for food and industrial production. While overconsumption in Europe and other affluence society would need to be curbed drastically developing countries should not compromise environmental and social standards in the name of national revenue and job generation that often allow environmental laws to be sidelined.

Ambiguous land tenure needs to be addressed in ways that recognises communal land rights that can be defended before the laws of the land. But to identify alternative models to address negative impacts of oil palm plantation is no easy task. More research is required to address this topic. However, alternative models for sustainable landscape development that respect community rights and improve livelihoods in a fair and equitable manner is desirable.

The best form of development is to place development parameters in the hand of target beneficiaries of a development project. This can be achieved not by eviction or threats of arrests of local farmers from their land but by recognising them as partners in the development process. In particular, support for community based forests management systems that allow them to manage and control their lands and to cultivate local staples rather than the prescribed ones for their commercial value that is geared for export. In Cross River State, farmlands acquisition and community member evictions must give way to genuine partnership that respects communal land rights.

The need for prior and informed consent (FPIC) cannot be overemphasized for any consultation and dialogue with the people. There is the need to conduct the mandatory environmental and social impacts and allow for public participation as stipulated by law. To this end, environmental and social impacts of the project must be disclosed and mitigated in a transparent manner involving whole communities including the men, women and youths rather than the chiefs and elders alone.

Ways forward including gaps in knowledge highlights areas of high priority for further research and this includes the need to investigating the value chain in the oil palm production process. In so doing, the actual volume of palm oil produced and consumed in Nigeria will determine the amount offered for international market. Is Nigeria producing net palm oil products to EU or the international markets than it requires locally?

This is crucial to gauging the level of external policy influence in shaping land use change and the nature of development in Nigeria and with particular reference to Wilmar and Okomu oil palm production including other local production and supply sources.

There is a need to exploring community land rights as part of the national laws so that communal lands are titled and secured by law. Any development that fails to meet the condition of free prior and informed consent has crossed the red line and therefore disqualified. There is also a need to exploring the more enduring prospects of community based forest management systems so that small scale farmers are not displaced by appropriation of their farmlands.

Thus, enhancing community strategies of resistance is relevant as part of community organising and resistance to projects not likely to be beneficial to the community at large.

Research should include an advocacy component to generate positive pressure for change to reduce deforestation and conflicts in forested landscapes. Community empowerment through advocacy would be required to make adequate representation to government and the oil companies to avoid breakdown of law and order. NGOs and civil society groups would need to intervene to ensure that community rights are protected for the interest of peace and development in Nigeria.

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Background review



A historical review of oil palm plantations and forest loss in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Background Review

A historical review of oil palm plantations and forest loss in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Summary

The paper focuses on the historical review of forest loss since 1980 and the possible causes in Cross River State. Although this was considered, the paper aimed at reviewing the loss of the tropical rainforest in Cross River State to plantation especially oil palm plantations. Oil palm plantations having been the major agricultural activity which had attracted a lot of financial benefits to the eastern region, Cross River State and Nigeria at large have seriously impacted the forest ecosystem. From the statistics gathered from various sources, it was seen that there are ten forest reserves in Cross River State with a total of 280,147 ha and Oban group forest appeared to be the largest with 73,257 ha making up 26.1% of the total forest area.

Specifically speaking, oil palm plantations in Cross River State started in 1947 (Kwa falls plantations now Wilmer plantations). Therefore, the 1980s did not witness much forest loss as compared to the 1940's, 1950's, 1960's, 1970's, and then 2002-2012. However, the 1980's was the period most private owned (small scale plantations) sprang up especially among the communities where oil palm plantations were located which is observed to have high paucity if not complete lack of data is witnessed in Cross River State. In relation to the aforementioned, the area of tropical rainforest in Cross River State in 1907 was estimated at 436,747 ha (4,367.47 km²). But with the advent of oil palm plantations in the area, the total forest is seen to be reduced to about 166,747 ha (1,667 km²). Therefore, it is the Cross River National Park (CRNP) that has a reserved area of 400,000 ha (4000 km²), that is currently the saving grace to the once luxuriant and rich Cross River Rainforest ecosystem.

In spite of these, the Cross River National Park is under threat as plantations are now being established along its fringes. Therefore, oil palm plantations have posed more problems to both the environment and the people as green livelihood options are fast eroded with the replacement of oil palm plantations. Hence, data on the currency of forest cover and oil palm plantations in general alongside their impacts on green livelihood options for sustainability is lacking. Consequently, it is therefore recommended that a comprehensive study be conducted in order to ascertain the total area covered by oil palm plantations and its consequences and or implications on green livelihood of the host communities.

Introduction

The fertile and tropical Cross River State (CRS), located in south-south Nigeria along the Cameroon border, has since the colonial era been one of Nigeria's largest producers of export crops such as cocoa, rubber, and oil palm (Udo, 1965). However, this was so due to the location advantage of the state, which lie in the humid tropical region of Nigeria, West Africa. Incidentally, this area holds the largest tropical

rainforest area in Nigeria. Hence, it attracted a lot of Greenfield plantation agriculture especially oil palm plantations to the area which have actually become the major driver of deforestation viz-a viz forest loss and its associated resources.

Based on these, this paper therefore seeks to examine the forest loss in Cross River state taking into

considerations the area once covered by tropical rainforest ecosystem which was the mainstay of the rural dwelling people of forests areas in terms of livelihood sustainability (food, income, revenue, medicine/ healthcare, employment, spices, recreation, water resources, cultural value, environmental aesthetics, conducive climate, games, religion and worship, raw materials for construction and so on) options. But with the coming of oil palm plantations and the argument that "plantations are forest" which is not in any way true, livelihood sustainability options that were highly enjoyed from the forest are now farfetched. In this regard, the people of the areas occupied by plantations today such as Calaro, Ibiae, Biase, Kwa falls, Obasanjo Farms, Eyop plantation (Wilmer), Oban oil palm plantation, Ayip Eku, Borum and Nsadop oil palm plantations etc, are now becoming impoverished by day as they do not have a major source of survival, thereby leading to conflicts, loss of socio-cultural values, environmental degradation and potential land grabbing issues in the area. In so doing, this paper offers an insight into the historical drivers of forest loss in Cross River State alongside the forest status and the level in which oil palm and other plantations have impacted the forest ecosystem and its resultant effects on green livelihood sustainability options.

Effects of forest loss on livelihood

Several studies have reported the negative impacts forest loss has on livelihood mostly rural sustenance. For instance, Yaro et al. (2016) evaluated the impact of forest encroachment on rural livelihood in Akamkpa, Cross River State and reported that collector of NTFPs constituted the highest number of encroachers, while farming was the second. The study also revealed the dwindling of livelihood opportunity due to the continuous forest loss, while lack livelihood alternative was the main reason for forest encroachment. Makki (2010) noted that deforestation increases food insecurity as 1.6 billion people in the developing world depend on forests for their food, fuel, and livelihoods. The real economic value of forests is much greater than the short-term benefits of logging or clearing land for agriculture. In the longer-run, the loss of biodiversity, habitat, and natural resources will affect food production in both developed and developing countries.

Appiah (2009) had it that human beings need food, water, fuel wood and shelter as intrinsic part of their domestic and livelihood survival systems. These necessities, however, should not in any way condone unsustainable exploitation of these base resources. With the increasing encroachment of concessionaires

into farming areas many farmers have started cutting down all timber that sprout on their farms to avoid future problems of timber felling on their farms. These attitudes by farmers are ostensibly in protest against their marginalization in the sharing of timber royalties. Besides, the activities of loggers destroy cash and food crops, endangering livelihoods of off-reserve farmers. The illegal felling of timber by chainsaw operators has become a major problem in recent years.

Tyler (2006) and Jempa (1995) contended that both the timber concessionaires and chainsaw operators are now focusing on the farming areas in off-reserve forests. Thus, timber resources in the farming areas especially in off-reserves are put under intense pressure. For instance, current estimates indicate that illegal chain saw activities alone account for about 1.7 million m³ of timber harvested in the country, while illegal logging also accounts for about 900,000 m³. These illegal activities together with estimated legal harvests of 1.1 million m³, sums up the total harvest of timber in the country to 3.7 million m³. Furthermore, environmental degradation and its attending problem of deforestation arising from unsustainable agricultural practices has resulted in the creation of impoverished soils and the changes in the micro-climatic patterns of forested areas, which hitherto supported vibrant vegetation. In many areas, agricultural policies are developed without considering the impact on forestry. The bias towards vigorous agriculture and the exploitation of wood fuel from forest areas leads to the tendency to treat forests as though they are convertible rather than renewable resource. This scenario invariably characterizes many areas with abject poverty.

Kotey et al. (1998) reasoned that continuous depletion of the ecological resources has the long-term tendency of exacerbating the poverty situation in these communities. A perilous situation as this leaves these people worse-off than before. The notion persists that most tropical forests are being depleted owing to a rise in human consumption rather than a rise in human numbers. Thus, there is a sort of intensive consumption of the forest relative to the ostensible growth in the population numbers it subsists. In the forest communities, loggers, by establishing a network of long-truck tracks, open up forest areas that had hitherto remained inaccessible to the small-scale (subsistence) farmers. This action they argue have encouraged farmers, who are arguably, the principal agent of deforestation at least in most tropical environments, to use their slash-and-burn methods in the depletion of both off and forest reserves. This therefore calls for some stringent measures that will safeguard the sustainability of the resource by

prescribing up-to-date, well-monitored activities intended for the better management and conservation of off-reserve tree and other forest resources. Thus, the overexploitation of forest resources has endangered the livelihood of forest fringe communities than has improved it.

Effects of plantations on forest and biodiversity loss

The severity of oil palm plantations' impact is driven by a number of factors, including changes in the forest structure, use of dangerous chemicals, frequent human disturbance, and increasing habitat fragmentation. Plantations are markedly less complex than natural forests, as they have a uniform tree age structure, lower canopy height, and sparse undergrowth (Yaap et al., 2010). Aboveground biomass of mature palm trees is less than 20% of the original forest (Saxon and Roquemore, 2011), which has consequences for microclimate and shade-adapted species (Yaap et al., 2010). The conversion of complex native forest to oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) monoculture results in the local removal of the majority of specialized species. The resulting biological community reflects the available habitat: simpler, species-poor communities dominated by a few generalist species (Petrenko et al., 2016).

Studies are in agreement that forest clearing for any reason has strong, negative impacts on biodiversity (Petrenko et al., 2016). Though, plantation agriculture has assumed increasing importance and acceptance in tropical countries like Nigeria where they are grown in large commercial scale, as one of the possible ways of meeting the increased demands for wood and latex production as well as ensuring environmental conservation among others. However, plantations result in the modification or degradation of the environment (Aweto and Enaruvbe, 2010). On this note, Tilman et al. (2001) cited in Petrenko et al. (2016) stated that given the limited global land area for agriculture, the rapid expansion of the oil palm industry comes at the expense of other cropland, secondary forest, and native tropical forest. Most (96%) of palm oil production occurs on the island of Sumatra and in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), where crops such as cacao and rubber are also grown.

Early palm plantations were thought to be replacing existing croplands and utilizing degraded land (Gibbs et al., 2010), but evidence has accumulated to show that intact tropical forests have been, and will continue to be, a major source of new land for palm plantations (Koh and Wilcove, 2008). Petrenko et al. (2016) stated that the staggering amount of land required for

oil palm plantations translates into competing uses of land, and in most cases, the destruction of ecologically valuable tropical forests. Losses of endemic species, foregone carbon sequestration, forest fires, and negative impacts to human health and welfare are all consequences of this phenomenon. They further noted that although not all biodiversity loss is directly attributable to oil palm plantations, palm production has been found to reduce biodiversity more than other types of crop plantations. Fitzherbert et al. (2008) found that oil palm supports fewer species than rubber, cocoa, or coffee plantations, although all plantation types decrease species richness when compared to intact forest. For example, the conversion of rubber plantations to oil palm resulted in a 14% decline in bird diversity (Peh et al., 2006).

FAO (2006) noted that though, plantations have become increasingly important sources of wood and fibre, they have also become increasingly criticized by some for their environmental and social impacts. Plantations mostly industrial timber plantations (ITPs) in their various forms have the greatest potential to cause damage on the environment (Menne, 2003). However, 'woodlots' have similar impact as they multiply and invade, eventually becoming a large single ITP. The problem of plantation trees escaping into natural areas is very serious. In parts of South Africa (SA) where forests cover larger areas, such as Knysna in the southern Cape, much forest was destroyed by logging and replaced with ITPs in the early part of the last century. Although it is no longer encouraged, this still happens when a small patch of forest is an inconvenient obstacle to the establishment of a larger plantation, or when plantations (and forest) are felled between rotations. The narrow but ambiguous SA definition of forest encourages the view that woodland and thicket are worthless. A lack of adequate monitoring and enforcement of the local timber planting permit system has led to a situation where illegal plantations are established with impunity, or permit conditions simply ignored (Bainbridge and Allerton, 2002). Also, plantation agriculture is believed to cause loss of habitat.

Menne (2003) stated that birds and mammals that have evolved in bush-clump/grassland mosaic, where small non-contiguous patches of forest occur within grassland, need both vegetation types. For instance, some birds that nest within forest are dependent on grasslands for much of their food and nesting material. Similarly, grazing herbivores need to forests for shelter, and refuge from predators. Only protecting the forest, whilst allowing the grassland to be converted into timber plantations or some other monoculture, must affect species that depend on both habitats.

Rosoman (1994) argued that trees generally increase diversity compared to pasture and croplands. However, exotic monoculture tree plantations do not help maintain landscape and biological diversity. Regimented, uniform rows of monocultural plantations are the opposite of diversity. Compared to natural forests the biological diversity of monocultural tree plantations is low. Diversity has been suggested to be a primary indicator of ecosystem sustainability. Young pine plantations have been found to be poor habitat for native birds. Species that feed on fruit and nectar (such as tui and kereru), and those that nest in holes or are insectivorous are particularly absent from plantations (Rosoman, 1994). The frequent disturbance caused by short rotation clear felling and herbicide spraying are among the most destructive and limiting factors on biodiversity. However, old growth plantations can provide good habitat for native species, especially orchids. Exotic monocultures also increase fire risk and can act as a source of pests and pathogens that spread into adjacent indigenous forest. Pine plantations act to cut off islands of remnant indigenous forest from each other, reducing the chances of native species populations exchanging genes (Rosoman, 1994).

On this note, Rosoman (1994) stated that around the world monocultures have been found to be susceptible to pests and diseases. Major international agencies such as the World Bank and the ITTO recommend mixed species forests, preferably of indigenous species. Putting all our eggs in the monoculture basket does not make sense. Alternative species and ecologically sustainable forestry systems must be pursued as a safeguard. The flora of tropical forests not only serves as the lattice for a complex ecosystem, but constitutes a major source of biodiversity. Oil palm plantations lack forest trees, lianas (woody climbing vines), epiphytic orchids and indigenous palms (Danielsen et al., 2009). Furthermore, a decreased abundance of fruit-eating birds and mammals greatly reduces seed dispersal, while a decline in bee abundance reduces pollination; both dispersal and pollination are necessary for maintaining plant variety (Senior et al., 2013).

Prescott et al. (2015) found 58 epiphytic species recolonizing palm plantations after deforestation, which are then typically removed in order to protect the intended crop. However, the study found that epiphytes did not affect crop yield and suggests that native biodiversity should not be removed from plantations. Oil palm plantations do appear to host more mosses and ferns than old growth forests, but the species are those that commonly colonize disturbed areas (Danielsen et al., 2009). Petrenko et al. (2016)

reported that plantations like oil palm do not support the biodiversity of native forests. Few of the species in native forests may survive in plantations, and the biological community becomes dominated by invasive and generalist species. Species that are highly specialized to live in the unique tropical forests of the region, and that requires specific diets and habitat features are the most vulnerable to expansion of plantations. Furthermore, measurements of biodiversity loss are likely underestimated given that (a) sampling efforts may be less accurate in dense, tropical forest (especially when many species reside high in tree canopies and (b) there is a time lag between habitat loss and extinction, so the presence of a species does not indicate it is thriving or its ultimate survival.

Cross River State forest reserves

In Cross River State, the government of the state had gazetted certain areas as forest reserves even before the establishment of the Cross River National Park (CRNP) in 1991 (FAO, 1998). In line with these, ten forests that have been gazetted are as follows: Afi River, Agoi, Cross River North, Cross River South, Ekinta, Oban Group, Ukpon river, Lower Enyong, and Uwet Odot reserves (Beak consultants, 1998). From Table 1, it was observed that the entire forest reserves in Cross River State had a total land cover of 280,147 ha (2,801 km²). Invariably, the forest reserves span across the entire state.

Furthermore, the forest reserves in the state simply shows that the areas with the largest coverage are Oban group (73,257 ha), having about 26.1% of the total reserves, Ekinta, 38,263 ha (13.7%), Ukpon River, 34,274 ha (12.2%), Cross River South, 29,119 ha (10.4%), Uwet Odot, 25,088 ha (8.95%) and Cross River North with 16,422 ha (5.86%). Hence, these areas where the forest are reserved are the same areas that the same governments have allocated lands for plantation agriculture. Therefore, the plantations serve as the major provider of easy access into the forest area thereby exposing the remaining largest rainforest in Africa to threat of degradation, biodiversity erosion, loss and subsequent extinction.

In the same vein, in spite the reserved forests areas which are under threat, the Cross River National Park have actually saved the tropical rainforest by conserving 4,000 km² (400,000 ha) (CRNP, 2010) within the Oban and Okwangwo division. This chunk of protected areas is what is actually left in the state as the total areas occupied by plantations that are officially established and information placed in the public domain, the plantations are already occupying about 2,499 km² (249,938 ha) as against 2,801 km²

(280, 147 ha) forest reserves. Therefore, it can be deduced that what might be left is about 302 km² (30,209 ha) (see Table 1 and Figure 1). This figure is quite threatening to the forest reserves. On the other hand, Dunn (1994) in Philip et al. (2014) posits that the tropical high forest areas including the Cross River National Park has a total area of 7,290 km² (792,000 ha) while other forest which includes community forest is 216 km² (21,600 ha), and plantations cover 460 km² (46,000 ha). From here, it can still be seen that plantations are still of immense threat to the rainforest ecosystem.

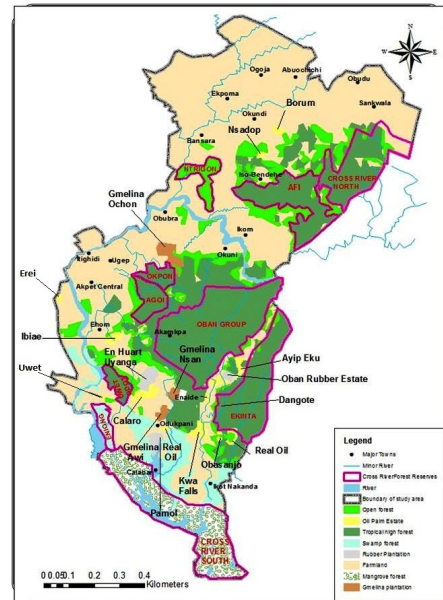


Figure 1: Forest Reserves in Cross River State
(Source: Cross River State Forest Commission, 2002)

Table 1: Cross River State forest reserves

S/N	Location	Hectares	%
1	Afi River	53605	19.1
2	Agoi	5490	1.96
3	Cross River North	16422	5.86
4	Cross River South	29119	10.4
5	Ekinta River	38263	13.7
6	Ikigon	1882	0.67
7	Oban Group	73257	26.1
8	Ukpon River	34274	12.2
9	Lower Enyong	2747	0.98
10	Uwet Odot	25088	8.95
Total		280,147	100

(Source: FAO (1998); modified by Offiong (2017))

Plantation agriculture in Cross River State

In Cross River State, considering its advantage position in terms of location in the humid tropics which is the most preferred environment for the growth and cultivation of oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*) and cocoa (*Theobroma cacao*). This conducive environmental characteristic is what gave site to the acquisition of land within and around forest reserves for the establishment of oil palm plantations across the State, especially the southern part of the State which was the then Akamkpa local Government Area now Akamkpa and Biase Local Government areas respectively.

Within the region, Calaro oil palm estate, Ayip Eku oil palm estate, Kwa Falls oil palm estate, Oban rubber/oil palm estate, Cross River rubber plantation (CREL), and Uyanga, excluding private estates were located here. In the same vein, establishment did not end here, as it was also established in the present Biase Local Government Area, with Ibiae oil palm, Erei oil palm, Biase oil palm, Ikot Okpura, and Biakpan Estates.

Furthermore, the estates were further established in the central Cross River region with specific emphasis on Nsadop oil palm estate, Borum oil palm etc. it is worthy of note at this point that all the estates were located around the tropical rainforest belt (see Table 2, Figure 2). Moreover, taking a close look at the various Cross River State official gazettes, individual

survey plans, field research and investor questionnaire, it has been keenly noticed that the establishment of plantations dates back to 1907 in Cross River State, Nigeria. A total area of 122,172 ha have been lost to plantations with oil palm plantations taking about 75% of the converted forest areas in Cross River State. In addition to these, Table 2 shows privatization in Cross River State Estates (Schoneveld, 2014).

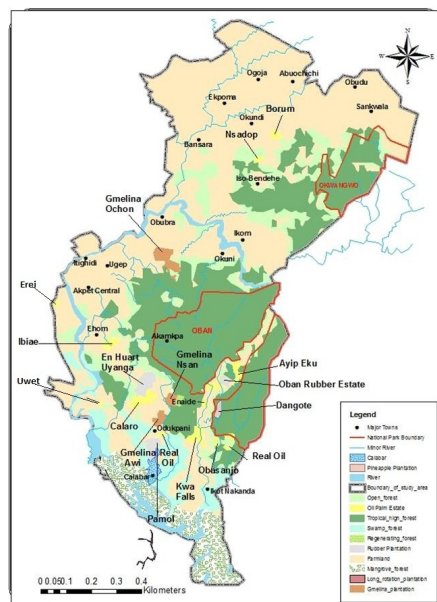


Figure 2: Plantations distributions in Cross River State (Source: ENDC (1962), Commission of Inquiry (1990); various privatization notices, CRS Forestry Commission, 2002).

Table 2: Privatization status of Cross River State estates.

Plantation name	District	Year established	Gross area (in ha)	Area planted on acquisition (ha)	Crop	Investor	Year of privatization/ status
Kwa Falls	Akamkpa	1947	2,826	1,877	Oil palm	Obasanjo Farms*	2003
CREL-1	Akamkpa	1957	8,844	7,901	Rubber	Eng Huat Industries	2003
CREL-2	Akamkpa	1979	18,537	0	Rubber	Eng Huat Industries	2003
Ikot Okpora	Biase	1959	6,092	518	Rubber	Pamol	2003
Biakpan Rubber	Biase	1962	2,584	1,605	Rubber	Royal Farms	2003
Agoi/Nko Rubber	Yakurr	1963	3,915	1,693	Rubber	Pamol	2003
ONREL	Akamkpa	1955	4,688	1,262	Rubber/oil palm	Real Oil Mills	2003/2006
Ayip Eku	Akamkpa	1979	12,411	3,606	Oil palm	Wingsong M-Housea	2008
Calaro	Akamkpa	1954	6,398	4,977	Oil palm	Wilmar	2011
Biase (former CDC estate)	Biase	1960	8,688	0	Oil palm	Wilmar	2011
Ibiae	Biase	1963	5,561	2,419	Oil palm	Wilmar	2011
NNMC	Akamkpa/Odukpani	1986	25,000	10,349	Gmelina	Negris Group	2012 ^b
Boki	Boki	1963	4,618	1,735	Oil palm	-	Under negotiation
Nsadop	Boki	1964	5,411	1,280	Oil palm	-	Under negotiation
Erei Oil Palm	Biase	1979	4,153	758	Oil palm	-	Unclear
Various cocoa estates (7)	Boki/Ikom/Obubra	1954-1965	15,274	7098	Cocoa	-	Under negotiation
Total			135,000	47,078			

These estates were purchased by Wilmar in 2012. According to the Forestry Commission, a total of 100,000 ha will be allocated to Negris Group within forest reserves, though the precise location is still to be determined (Source: ENDC (1962), Commission of Inquiry (1990); various privatization notices).

With regards to the state-owned estates, a total land area of 135,000 ha was given out. From this information, it can be seen that a total land area of 47,078 have already been cultivated. The implication of these activities on the ecosystem is that, from the total area occupied by plantations, oil palm alone occupies about 62.5% while the remaining 37.5% is occupied by rubber and cocoa plantations. This simply shows that forest loss in Cross River State actually started in 1907 with the establishment of Pamol plantation. This was continued with the establishment of Kwa Falls oil palm estate in 1947 and subsequent ones in 1950's, 1960's, 1970's, 1980's up to 2008. In the same vein, more estates are still being established by individuals especially with improved seedlings of oil palm and ready market by multinational companies like; Wilmer PZ, Pamol, Real oil mills, Eng Huat industries etc., in the State. With all of these plantations around the tropical rainforest belt of Cross River State, with fertile soil and a conducive environment, the rainforest is under serious threat of degradation, and upsetting both the ecological equilibrium and rural livelihood sustainability options for forest dwelling and bearing communities in Cross River State.

Trend of forest loss

The tropical rainforest loss in Cross River State can be traced back to 1907 when Pamol started the development of rubber plantation. This was later followed by Wanton destruction of the tropical rainforest for oil palm plantation between 1947 and 1979. This plantation establishment was mainly done around the forest region due to the conducive soil and other environmental attributes such as; climate, water etc. In considerations of the plantations owned and established by the Cross River State government between 1947 and 1979 (oil palm plantations), it can be seen that large part of the forests areas were and have been lost to oil palm plantations in 1979, 1965, 1960 and 1957 respectively (Figure3).

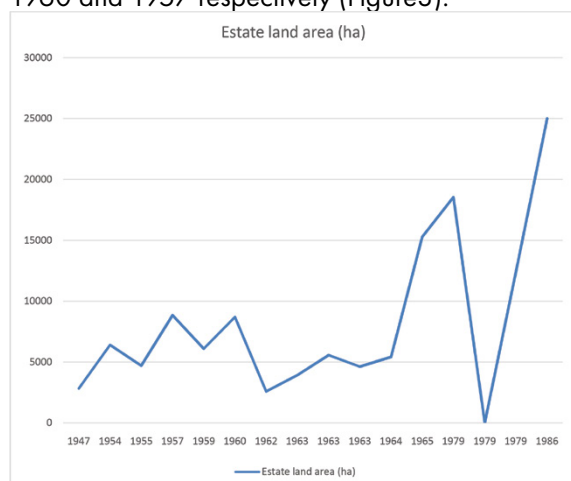


Figure 3: Cross River State owned plantations showing developmental trend and acquisition

Furthermore, while these activities were ongoing within the tropical rainforest belt, more access was further created to the human population who now brought other forms of land uses in the area. Hence the open forest (Figure 2), were once covered by tropical rainforest ecosystem. In the same vein, the recently acquired area for green field plantations by private companies and individuals in the area, Pamol inclusive as depicted in figure 4, it can be seen that the Government of Cross River State had concessioned 50,000 ha of land to NNPC/Petrobas and another 7,756 ha for the cultivation of oil palm plantation. This area is found around the Ukpon river forest reserve. Invariably, in Akamkpa Local Government Area where the Oban group, Ekinta and Uwet Odot forest reserves are allocated, about 75% of the oil palm plantations are specifically located there and about 15% in Boki Local Government Area where the Cross River North forest reserve is located (Figure 1).

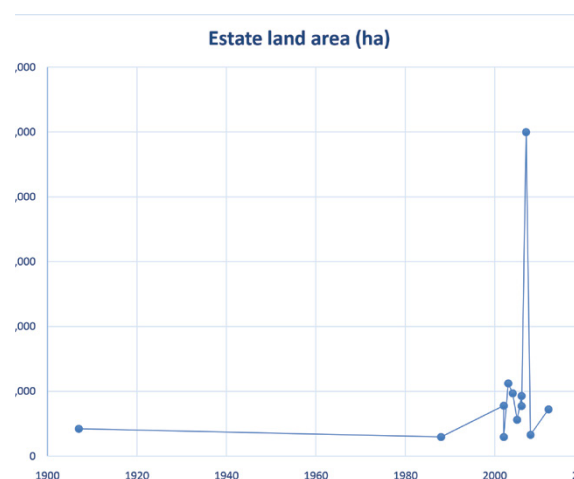


Figure 4: Private owned plantations showing developmental trend and acquisition.

Threats of oil palm plantations on forest ecosystem

However, it is worthy of mention here that with pervasive nature of oil palm and other plantations establishment and expansion, the Cross River National Park is under threat as it is located within the Oban group. Ekinta and Cross River North forest reserves which have been highly encroached by human populations. Therefore, with the total forest reserve areas of 280,147 ha, other forests (community forest) of 21,600 ha giving a total of 301,747 ha (FAO, 1998; Dunn et al., 1994), and the total area of plantations being 135,000 (Tables 2 and 3). It can be seen that, the area covered by tropical rainforest before 1907 was 436,747 ha (4367 km²). Sequel to these, the total forest area left now is about 166,747 ha (1,667 km²) in Cross River State excluding the Cross River National Park.

Table 3: Areas of rainforest ecosystem converted to Large-Scale Greenfield Plantations in Cross River State

Project developer	Location	Year planted	Gross area (ha)	Crop	Note
Pamol	Odukpani	1907	4,229	Rubber	Used to be almost 6,500 ha in extent, parts have been acquired for urban expansion. Entire estate is developed.
Real Oil Mills	Akamkpa/ Odukpani	1988	2,975	Oil palm	Was purchased in 2005 from Pamol. Approx 1,270 ha converted.
Obasnajo Farms	Akamkpa	2002	7,805	Oil palm	Purchased by Wilmar in October 2012. Approx 4,740 ha converted. Additional 930 ha converted outside concession boundaries
Obasnajo Farms	Akamkpa	2002	7,805	Oil palm	Purchased by Wilmar in October 2012. Approx 4,740 ha converted. Additional 930 ha converted outside concession boundaries
Obasnajo Farms	Akamkpa	2002	2,986	Oil palm	Purchased by Wilmar in October 2012. Approx 1,095 ha converted.
Sea Agriculture	Akamkpa	2003	11,246	Oil palm	Considered a speculator. Was sold in 2012 to an unspecified buyer. No land developed.
Real Oil Mills	Akamkpa	2004	9,700	Oil palm	Approx 300 ha converted. To saw mills within estate.
Dansa Agro-Allied	Akamkpa	2005	5,621	Pineapple	Commenced in 2012. 450 ha converted plans to develop entire estate by 2016.
Dansa Agro-Allied	Akamkpa	2006	9,313	Oil palm	To commenced in 2013. None converted-plans to develop entire estate by 2018.
Unknown	Ikom/Obubra	2006	7,756	Oil palm	Acquired by the government, but unclear who it has been allocated to.
NNPC/ Petrobas	Obubra	2007	50,000	Oil palm	Yet to commence development
Nedu limited	Akamkpa	2008	3,300	Oil palm	Approx. 1,000 ha converted. Has not obtained a certificate of occupancy.
Southgate	Ikom	2012	7,241	Cocoa	Certificate been revoked. The government is searching for a new land.
Total			122,172		

From threats in remaining forest area and the Cross River National Park, further encroachment through settlement expansion, agricultural activities and expansion (farmlands), plantation expansion, cultivation (Rubber, oil palm, cocoa and others), infrastructural development, industrial activities due to the already established plantations, which serves as the “sphere of influence” to the aforementioned drivers of threat (Figure 5). It is obvious that the most vulnerable forest area with high concentration of oil palm plantations is the Oban group, Agoi, Uwet Odot, Ukpon River and Ekinta forest reserves. This threat is capable of impacting the Oban division of Cross River National Park.

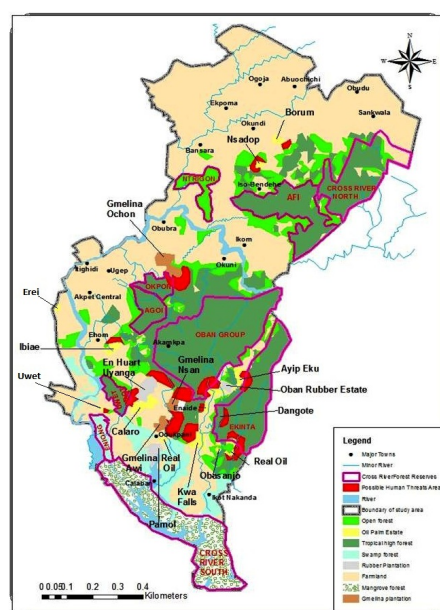


Figure 5: Trends and potential threats to forest ecosystem due to oil palm plantations (Source: Cross River State Forestry Commission, modified by Offiong, 2017).

Implications of oil palm plantations on host communities

In the light of the oil palm plantations establishment, expansion and infrastructural developments in the estate as specifically witnessed in WIMER (Eyop, Kwa Falls, Calaro, Biase, Ibiae) plantations in Akamkpa and Biase Local Government Areas, the following are the associated problems in the area:

- Loss of arable farmlands for cultivation of food crops especially in Calaro oil palm estate.
- Loss of land for settlement expansion as the population of the area is increasing annually.
- Pollution of streams and water bodies by fertilizers and other agrochemicals used by companies.
- Consequent upon further expansion, forested watersheds dry up due to exposure to high levels of sun. This exposure has given way to high level of evapo-transpiration within the watersheds.
- Loss of source of income that were usually generated from the extraction of non-forest timber products (NTFPS) in the area.
- Occupational dislocations have also been observed in the area as most of the community people depended on the forest resources for their daily livelihood. These have become a very serious problem as WILMER have not been able to absorb majority of them into their company as staff.
- The loss of raw materials, medicinal herbs, forest snacks and spices, etc. However, for those who still depend on forest herbal products now travel long distances to fetch required materials.
- Conflicts among landlord communities and the companies have also arisen as the result of royalties, rent, job opportunities, contracts allocation and the general allocation of resources in the area.
- Loss of biodiversity is high as animals cannot be longer seen within and around the plantations.

Conclusions

In the light of the review on the forest loss in Cross River State, plantation agriculture and subsequent expansion is the main driver of forest loss in the area. This is consequent upon the fact that both Government and private owned plantations especially oil palm plantations are mainly located within the forest region of Cross River State. Cross River State has ten forest reserves that are currently facing degradation and subsequent degradation of forest resources. However, Information on the current states of forest reserves, community forest, total number of oil palm plantations

inter alia, the ecological impacts of oil palm plantation development and expansion, the impact of oil palm plantation on livelihood sustainability among other forest loss issue and conflict arising from oil palm plantation in Cross River State is yet to be known.

Therefore, the major gap in knowledge is that, the total number of large, medium, and small scale oil palm plantations holders is not yet fully known alongside, their corresponding impacts on rural dwellers who depend on the forest resources.

Policy decisions and recommendations

In line with the review so far, the following recommendations are hereby put forward for consideration towards further research such as;

1. A study should be conducted on the total area covered by oil palm plantations in Cross River State. Focusing on the rainforest belt.
2. The current status of the rainforest ecosystem should be determined for effective, efficient and sustainable framework development for rainforest conservation.
3. The impact of oil palm plantations on forests ecosystem and its associated resources.
4. The impact of oil palm expansion on the social, economic, health and livelihood sustainability options of forest-dependent communities where forest conversion to oil palm plantations have taken place should be studied.
5. Identifying and mapping of oil palm plantations (large, medium, and small) in the entire Cross River State and its resultant impact on land use and land cover changes should be encouraged.

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Background review



The state, people and oil palm production in Nigeria: understanding the policy nexus

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Background Review

The state, people and oil palm production in Nigeria: understanding the policy nexus

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Summary

The need for diversification of the Nigerian economy through agroindustry has endured since the colonial times when the country was being inserted into the global economy on the basis of cash crop production. The call has begun to resonate incrementally in government circles as the country reels under the pains of economic recession, aftermath of the collapse of crude price. Among many cash crops on the radar of the 'green revolution' is oil palm production, made more attractive because of its inherent value chain and high capacity for employment creation.

While 93.7% of estate holdings and 84.6% of smallholder farmers are located in the nine states of the Niger Delta, about 27 states have conducive climatic condition for oil palm production. Overall, Cross River state is the flagship in the race for oil palm production on a large scale with the Singaporean firm PZ Wilmar blazing the trail. While the company has an ambition to set up about 50,000 hectares of oil palm plantation, its holding is currently put at 26,500 hectares while the state total is put at about 33,000 hectares ahead of other states in the Niger Delta region.

Notwithstanding the huge expansion, there is no clear policy on the part of government. So far much of the forest reserves acquired from the local people have been sold to agribusiness interests with no clear policy on compensation of the local as well as remediation measures for livelihood and environmental impact of such investments. Thus, this paper analyses government's attitude towards oil palm production in Nigeria with a particular emphasis on Cross River State. It further underlines the poverty of policy for the reason that there is no link between policy, the need for investment and the wellbeing of the forest people in the state. It calls for a comprehensive review of extant legal and institutional frameworks in favour of human security within the wider political ecology of the state.

Introduction

In an article titled, "The Last Resource Frontier", Collier (1999) qualifies Africa as the last frontier for resource discovery and notes the rising commodity-price bolstered enthusiasm for resource-extraction in the continent. Collier failed to mention in his short piece the more fundamental problem of land grab in relation to plantation agribusiness and its impact on the people. It should be noted however, that plantation agriculture is not a new phenomenon in the continent but was central to the colonial economy, especially the British who were goaded by the imperatives of its industrial revolution.

Oil palm plantations gained currency in the inter-war years in Nigeria and Belgian Congo. Indeed, despite being based on peasant production, the country was

a leader in oil palm production with potential threat from Malaysia which today leads in the industry. Between 1909 and 1913 Nigeria produced over 82,000 tonnes and about 75 percent of global output came from Nigeria and there was nothing from the contemporary global leaders in the oil palm industry (Akhaine, 1991). But by 1966-91 Nigeria was overtaken by Indonesia and Malaysia which produced 158,000 and 25,000 tonnes respectively. By 1974 Nigeria had disappeared from the global chart of major palm oil producers. Two factors accounted for this decline. One is the discovery of crude oil in 1958 and the other is the effect of the civil war (1967-70). As is well known, southern Nigeria, especially the eastern region was the hub of oil palm industry and the civil war devastated much of it.

It is important to illuminate aspects of oil palm production under the colonial economy, more so for its relevance to the central focus of this paper, and government policy on oil palm plantations in relations to the wellbeing of the local communities. Kilby (1967) notes that:

It is clear that palm oil production based on plantations has considerable advantages over an industry based on natural palmeries. In addition to higher oil yields per tree, processing in large plantation mill gives a greater extraction efficiency, a better quality oil, and owing to planned full capacity operation—lower processing costs than are obtainable under a peasant smallholder system.

The colonial officials in Nigeria were not so much inclined towards this obvious fact about plantation alternative. The policy conversation between the colonial governments in Nigeria and the colonial office in London and representatives of British capital reveals an intriguing concern for the local community despite a latent consideration for cost of governance. The view of British capital was among others the acquisition of plantation land to either be on freehold or long term lease; protection of mill-owners against rivalry; ease of acquisition of plantation area; lease for legally binding contracts with Nigerians to supply palm fruits (Meredith, 1984). The colonial administrators did embrace the suggestions above but rather sought a kind of division of labour between British capital and the native oil palm producers. In the view of Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor of Nigeria, the European buyers will naturally buy the agro-products of the native producers and so also the handling of freighting and transformation into finished products. And this for him was 'cooperation and division of labour, not competition. The consideration for the local communities came out more vividly in the views of GH Findlay, Senior Resident in Calabar who back in 1933 warned against palm plantations:

Great care must be taken to avoid forcing anything upon the people which is likely to break the fabric of their social and economic existence. The ancient sanctions are disappearing or changing sufficiently rapidly to allow for adjustments necessary to meet modern conditions. I do not wish to force the pace (Meredith, 1984).

Besides, Hinds (1997) made the point that the attitude of the colonial government towards oil palm plantations was informed by a concern for the displacement of the local communities in the thickly populated eastern swathe of the country. It is against

this background that we now examine contemporary development in the oil palm industry.

Contemporary development in the oil palm industry

British colonial administration's disposition towards the development of oil palm plantations was socially mediated. The threat from the 'East', namely, Indonesia and Malaysia both leaders in the oil palm industry today was always acknowledged (Meredith, 1984) while the potential of that industry for the development of the local economy was similarly acknowledged. Nigerian post-colonial governments did not reckon with this reality. As already noted above the discovery of crude in commercial quantity and the consequent Dutch disease that petro-dollars bred undermined any conscious inclination towards the potential of the oil palm industry.

Cycles of tragedy often caught up with those who learnt nothing from previous occurrences. In the midst of debt overhang and the international financial organisations mediated solutions often in the form of adjustment policies, the mantra of privatisation became the other of the day and many of the state-owned enterprises and companies were sold to private investors (Akhaine, 2015). Our focus here is not the audit of the privatised firms in terms of performance, the point is that in the context of dwindling oil receipt due to global decline in the price of crude, Nigeria's main foreign exchange earner, the need for alternative revenue generating outlets has become attractive. Nigeria's central authorities talk on agriculture as the focus of its economic diversification and the state governments are also taking a cue. About two years ago, the Central Bank of Nigeria sermonised about the desire to resuscitate the oil palm industry:

Indeed with an estimated 3m hectares of land under cultivation, abundance of suitable arable land, over 4m direct jobs currently there is no gainsaying that potentials for job creation of this key industry cannot be overemphasised...Well harnessed, the oil palm can again become a very significant sector of the national economy providing the wealth for economic development and the much needed jobs for Nigeria's teeming population (Emefiele, 2015).

Both Abia and Anambra state governments have expressed optimism about the prospect of the oil palm industry in boosting employment opportunities and an independent economic base for their states. Specifically, Abia state targets the development of 7.5

million seedlings within three years, precisely 2016-2019. It also envisions 10, 000 hectares of oil palm across the state based on its policy of zero-tolerance for land waste. On its part, Anambra state is poised to encourage private investors into the oil palm industry. For demonstration effect, it is disposed to granting large hectares of land to Chicason Group, producer of life vegetable Oil and allied products, which targets 135,000 tons of palm oil (Onuchuwu, 2015). There abound studies to support the poverty alleviation potential of the oil palm industry. Adebo et al. (2015) have underscored in a study the poverty alleviating effect of oil palm production, especially among small holders in Ekiti State, Nigeria. That Plantation estates hold more employment opportunities is no gainsaying. Etim (2015) sees the job creation window in his celebration of the Cross River oil palm sector:

For generations now, economies across the globe have taken to oil palm plantations as a method to eradicate poverty with the economies of Malaysia and Indonesia standing testimony to it... Due to the immense commercial value of palm plantations, many African states are also adopting the formula of the South-East Asian states to eradicate poverty and Cross River State is set to be one of these.

In the midst of this infective optimism, no mention is made about its potential impact on indigenous communities and their ecosystem. Okwuagwu (2013) in an interview with Vanguard newspaper points only to the healthy impact of oil palm plantations on the environment. According to her, "oil palm plantation stabilises the environment, where [we] are talking of development. Ozone depletion, the oil palm is one single plant that cleans the environment". Is there specific state policy guiding this zeitgeist in the oil palm industry? Or are there any ongoing conversations on the possible impact of oil plantations on indigenous communities, parallel to that expressed by the colonial administration in Nigeria? We seek an answer in subsequent sections of this paper.

The case of Cross River State

It should be noted that virtually all the states of the Niger Delta are native to the oil palm and have been central to oil palm production in the country since the colonial times. The pre-eminence of Cross River State in the resurgence of oil palm industry can be explained by two factors, namely, climate and government's vision. Santosh Pillai, the Managing Director, West Africa, PZ Wilmar Limited elaborates on the climatic factor: "Oil palm can grow anywhere but does well in only select belts of the equator—five degrees north

and five degrees south—that is where oil palm grows very well. Cross River and Rivers State come under that oil belt" (Vanguard, 2015). Government's attitude is driven by the need to boost revenue generation through a conducive investment climate. Specifically, in 2010, Senator Liyel Imoke administration in Cross River State sought to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the oil palm sector and Wilmar blazed the trail. The company enjoys a reputation of being the largest oil palm plantation developer and palm oil producer in the world. Its partnership with PZ Cussons upped the stake. The company bought over the 5,500-hectare, defunct Cross River government owned Calaro Oil Palm Estate, Kwa Falls Oil Palm Plantation sitting on 12,805-hectares then owned by Obasanjo Farms, the 5,450-hectare Ibiae Oil Palm Estate and the 8,000 hectare estate in Biase.

According to some government sources, PZ Wilmar would inject over \$450 million into the plantation project in Cross River State (Draft Policy on Agriculture). Pillai in an interview with the Vanguard newspaper (2015) stresses his company vision for Cross River State and Nigeria:

We, therefore, set out on a journey to set up 50,000 hectares of oil palm plantation in Cross River State. If you visit Cross River State today, we have already acquired 26,500 hectares of land and we are growing the oil palm at Calaro Oil Palm Estate; Ibiae Oil Palm Estate and an estate in Biase.

Subject to availability of land the company's intention is to develop 50,000 hectares of oil palm and more in sync with their goal "to grow oil palm in this country because Nigeria has competitive as well as comparative advantage to grow oil palm and to be a global leader also." This would be complemented by crude palm oil mill in Cross River State and a refinery in Lagos where the company would "refine it, refractionate it and package it into world-class brands – Mamador and Devon Kings" and avail Nigerians consumers with world-class quality edible oil. Currently, it is developing over 26,500 hectares of land of palm estate.

On its part, Cross River State government is not rest content with merely opening the doors for investors. It would continue to play the role of supporting farmers in the state with basic inputs like fertilisers, improved seeds and agriculture extension services. Watchers of the development in the state sums its potential as follows:

The potential for oil palm development in Cross River State is the development of at least

1,000,000 hectares of palm estate, with an annual production of 5,000,000 tons oil palm production, annual income of N500 Billion and job creation statistics in the region of 250,000 at the first instance (Etim, 2015).

The business facade dominates the discourse on oil palm industry in Cross River State. What about the human aspect? Prospects of job creation is not enough to take care of the human dimension of oil palm production. The state in whatever form owes it a primary duty to protect the lives of its citizens, in this case, the indigenous people whose age long habitat would be affected by expansion of oil palm plantations. Lurking in the background is the impression that natural forest are not being affected by the plantations, and rather, that old plantations are being replanted. For example, In Ibiae Estate, under the Cross River State Agricultural and Rural Empowerment Scheme (CARES), a poverty alleviation program, approximately 1,100 hectares were allocated in 2009 to small-scale commercial farmers for 25 years to plant oil palm. Each farmer received 10-20 hectares of land. The Ministry of Agriculture claimed that only 32 farmers had developed 470 hectares with oil palm at the time the estate was privatized to Wilmar. It further said that farmers under CARES were informed not to invest further on the land allocated to them due to its privatisation (crossriverwatch online, November 16, 2012).

However, it is important to note that communities and the civil society organisations like the Environmental Rights Action/Friends of The Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) and NGO Coalition for Environment (NGOCE) who have so far expressed alarm intervened over the activities of Wilmar—its expansion into community lands in dissonance with extant rules and international best practices.

Environmental Rights Action/Friends of The Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN) and NGO Coalition for Environment (NGOCE) in their sensitisation of the communities on ways to protect their land have also drawn attention to the oppressive process of land acquisition by Wilmar on indigenous communities with no due recourse to them. Some of the communities which include Betem/Ehom, Akpet and Idoma communities, Biase local government area and Mbarakom/Uwet/Njagachang and Mfamosing/Aningeje and Akamkpa local government areas claimed that lands were taken from them through their chiefs and elders who were compromised to sell their lands at a cheap rate. The groups also adverted to unfair labour practices at Wilmar plantations where workers earn less than N10, 000, a rate far below

the national minimum wage of N18, 000. Within this context the communities rallied by ERA/FoEN called on the State Government to set in motion the review of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) it allegedly signed with Wilmar on behalf of the communities and ensure that all impacted communities and civil society groups are part of the process in ways that are transparent and inclusive.

Equally, in 2012, a group of civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Cross River State accused Wilmar of undermining appropriate Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) procedures in its activities in Ibiae Palm Plantations. The CSOs include the Rainforest Resource and Development Center (RRDC), NGO Coalition for Environment (NGOCE), Ekuri Initiative, Citizens Network Nigeria, Biakwan Light Gender Empowerment Network, Citizens for Environmental Safety, Executive Director, Action for Rural Development, Uclenta Development Initiative, Environmental Development Initiative, Stir Network, Young People's Initiative, Association for Alternative Development (AAD), Nigerian Organization for Solidarity and Development (NOSAD) and Women and Children Initiatives. The points at issue were a breach of five essential protocols of the RSPO namely, absence of an agreement with landlord communities, unlawful acquisition of land leased to CARES farmers, failure to properly account for migrant communities within the estate, non-commitment to transparency, non-compliance with applicable municipal laws and regulations. The point was made that under the 'Fundamental Terms for Privatization of Ibiae Estate' (May, 2012), clause 4(4), Wilmar was required to "assist landlord communities in the provision of such facilities as shall be mutually agreed by the investor and the landlord communities".

Government, people and the environment

Here, we look at both federal government policy and Cross River State policy on oil palm plantations.

Federal policies

The Presidential Initiative for Vegetable Oil Development (VODEP) was introduced in 2002 under Olusegun Obasanjo administration and has relevance for oil palm industry. The policy had the following goals: replanting of plantations, rehabilitation of existing plantings, new plantings, massive production of seedlings, production and procurement of breeder/foundation seeds, huge outputs of fresh fruit bunches

(FFB), and capacity building for Small farmers and processors, Institutes etc. (Initiative for Public Policy Analysis, 2015: 11). Policy mortality in Nigeria is legendary. The Goodluck Jonathan administration came up with its own idea on how to transform the oil palm production in the country, hence the Agriculture Transformation Agenda (ATA).

In what appears a transformation of VODEP, ATA was initiated by the Goodluck Jonathan administration, including the 'Oil Palm Transformation Value Chain Action Plan' that sought to focus specifically on oil palm development in the country covering 24 States where oil palm is grown, namely, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross-river, Rivers, Bayelsa, Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Delta, Edo, Ondo, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Ekiti, Benue, Kwara, Kogi, Nasarawa, Plateau, Taraba, Adamawa and Kaduna (Southern Kaduna). With a time span of four years, 2012-2015, it aimed "at bridging the gap in national vegetable oil production, estimated at 350,000 mt through the establishment of a total of 240,000 hectares by smallholder farmers and estates, and enhancement of yield" (Daily Times, 2015). Other objectives captured by Momoh (2015) include "increase the yield and productivity of both the unorganised and organised plantings; arouse greater interest and concern for engagement in competitive market activities within the oil palm value chain; and create employment especially for youth and reduce poverty in affected States." While ATA also sought to enlist investment Support from local, private and multinationals in the oil palm industry, there is however an obvious lacuna, i.e. no clear governance framework.

State policies on oil palm production and the environment

The Cross River State Draft Policy on Agriculture has in its final section 'institutional framework for policy implementation' which embraces the Role of Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources engrossed as:

- Providing an enabling environment to support sustainable agricultural practices for increase food yield.
- Delivering services that support sufficiency in food production and guaranteeing food security.
- Constantly collaborating with the Federal Department of Agriculture, Donor Agencies and other relevant stakeholders to implement the National Policy on Agriculture.
- Collaborating with ADP and other stakeholders in the provision of appropriate extension services on modern farming practices under the Unified Extension Services System.

- Collaborating with other stakeholders to appraise and adopt productivity enhancing methods and modern technologies in Agriculture.
- Providing back stopping to farmers' organisations and investors.
- Promoting infusion of nutrient dense crops into the farming system, adequate diet and healthy life style.
- Promoting and providing conducive environment for enforcement and grades and standards of quality of produce for export and local markets.
- Promoting value addition to Agricultural Produce and supporting product development along commodity value chain for market expansion.
- Promoting agrobusiness among youths and vulnerable groups.

Others include the Cross River Agricultural & Rural Empowerment Scheme (CARES); Role of the Private Sector and Civil Society Organisations; Role of Development Partners; Role of other Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs); Role of Local Government Councils in the State; Role of Farmer Organization; Role of Academic and Research Institutions and the Role of Financial Institutions. Again, like the federal policies on agriculture and especially oil palm production, there is no inclusion of any legal framework for the management of social economic relation in the production process. The draft document gleefully accommodates the information of the presence of Wilmar in the oil palm production as well as Danso Agro Allied Products Limited in the oil palm industry. This is complemented by its strategy in the sector, namely:

- Collaborate with relevant stake-holders to sensitize and build capacity of farmers on good agricultural practices (GAP) for increase yield (12-20MT/ha).
- Create an enabling environment for private operators, farmer's organization and NGOs supplying input to farmers.
- Remove obstacles which hamper smallholder farmer's access to credit facilities.
- Encourage the establishment of farmers-owned and controlled cooperative plantations;
- Collaborate with FMARD and CADP for establishment of oil palm nurseries for distribution to farmers along with agrochemicals at subsidized rates (Ibid).

Proximate legal/institutional frameworks

In the absence of clear policy on environment and human security issues in the agricultural policies of both

the central authorities and state government in relations to oil palm production, this section of this paper seeks solace in proximate and relevant legal and institutional frameworks that address the environmental and human security concerns. We shall restrict ourselves to the Land Use Act, Environmental Impact Assessment Act and the Cross River State Forestry Act and examine their utility in addressing the aforementioned concerns.

The Environmental Impact Assessment Act (1992)

This vests control of all land in the state. The law places upper limits on landholdings by citizens at 0.5 ha of undeveloped urban land, 500 ha of non-urban land and 5,000 ha of grazing land (Initiative for Public Policy Analysis, 2015). Under the Act, state governors have power over the issuance of Certificates of Occupancy. The Act embodies two types of occupancy. One is the "Statutory occupancy rights enjoyed by individuals or entities for both urban and non-urban land". And Two, the "Customary occupancy rights, which may be granted in non-urban areas for terms of 50 years, which are renewable. Despite this extant Act, land is still largely controlled through community-based customary laws in their variations across the country. Nonetheless, the Land Use Act undermines the aforementioned customary norms. As noted by Initiative for Public Policy Analysis (2015) the Land Use Act has been broadly criticised for its ability to override customary tenure in place at the state and community level and the inability of customary landholders to challenge the Land Use Act. The Act therefore offers people very little protection against formal title holders. This is exacerbated by the levels of bureaucracy and expense required to register land under the Land Use Act.

There is the view that it is de-empowering for acquisition of land for oil palm plantations: "Accordingly, the Land Use Act acts as an impediment in the growth path of palm oil plantation. It restricts acquisition of large areas of land in the palm oil belt of the country". Given the investment of much power in the state executive to control land, it is subject to manipulation and often in favour of private capital. Little wonder, the helplessness of communities in oil palm estates in Cross River. Does the Environmental Impact Assessment Act have any remedy for impacted communities?

Despite its lofty provisions, Initiative for Public Policy Analysis notes its restricted application:

There has been a high level of approvals for projects submitting an EIA. EIAs from the

agricultural sector have been low in number. Between 1995 and 2003, for example, just two were submitted. While it is possible – and highly likely – that this is a function of the small number of large-scale agricultural projects in Nigeria, it also indicates that there is limited oversight of agricultural activities in the country.

Cross River State Forestry Commission Law No. 3 (2010)

Of interest are Functions of the Commission and the General Powers of the Commission (Sections 6-7).

6. Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any other Law of the State, the functions of the Commission shall be, to:

- (a) regulate the activities of Ministries, Parastatals, Local Government, Departments, Organisations, statutory bodies as they relate to forest and forest resources and wildlife conservation issues in the State;
- (b) undertake biotechnology and other forms of research that will enhance the development of scientifically sound forestry policies and programmes in line with current conservation, socio-economic and technology options;
- (c) establish links with relevant national and international regulatory policy-making and funding bodies for the benefit of bio-diversity conservation and sustainable forestry in the State;
- (d) ensure sound wild life and forest management within Cross River State;
- (e) ensure strict compliance with international conventions and treaties on natural resources management;
- (f) develop eco-tourism and generate revenue therefrom;
- (g) promote research and development; and
- (h) perform such other functions which are incidental to conservation and sustainable management of the State's forest resources and revenue generation.

General Powers of the Commission

7. (1) The Commission shall, subject to the provisions of this Law, have power to do such things as are considered necessary and expedient in the carrying into effect of its functions.

7. (2) The Commission shall, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any other Law of the State have power to

- (a) formulate policies and evolve strategies for the promotion and effective implementation of sustainable forestry development and conservation;

- (b) subject to the provisions of this Law, make, alter, and revoke rules and regulations of the Commission;
- (c) by regulation, review forestry tariffs from time to time; and
- (d) mediate on any dispute that may arise between the Commission and any person, community or organization.

There is evident obsession with biodiversity conservation and sustainable forestry in the provisions of the law, but not so much with human security despite defined responsibilities with stakeholders.

Conclusions and ways forward

In this paper, we have attempted to capture the trajectory of the renewed quest for plantation agriculture, especially oil palm plantations by both the federal and state governments in Nigeria. The colonial experience in the oil palm trade and its impressive concern for the interest of the natives and their environment is provided as useful background in the interrogation of the social essence of the oil palm business in 21st century Nigeria. We juxtaposed federal policies with state policy. Cross River state has been focused upon for its prime location in the oil palm business. We analysed a handful of legal cum institutional instruments underpinning the seeming nostalgic drive for leadership in the global oil palm industry.

Basic conclusions therefore can be drawn. One, the quest for alternative source of revenue central to the drive for oil palm plantation in the country. This is comprehensible given the travails of the crude business and gloomy forecast about its future and nagging quest for diversification of the country's economy. There are no clear governance guidelines for players in the oil palm sector beyond a pre-occupation with augmentation of production to generate more resources and emerge a global leader in the industry. This is clear from the analysis of the content of VODEP and ATA at the federal level and the Cross River State Draft Policy on Agriculture. There is obvious lack of

continuity in policy given the speed of transition in policy, for example from VODEP to ATA at the federal level. There is no recourse to extant policies with great potentials for any meaningful reconciliation. At the state level, the Cross River State government is inclined to sacrifice its well-crafted poverty alleviation programme, CARES, on the altar of multinational capital who are in a scramble for the oil palm belt of the state. Such legal instruments on land and environment, namely, the Land Use Act, EIA and the Forestry law though relevant to the oil palm industry in terms of land acquisition and forest conservation, are currently at variance with the agribusiness. This explains the dispute between PZ Wilmar, the oil palm giant and the local communities involving claims and counter claims about adherence to best practices in oil palm production.

- To transform the status quo and bridge lacunae in the policy nexus between government and the impacted communities in the quest for commercial production of oil palm the following steps would be invaluable:
- Mainstreaming of the Environment Assessment Act in MoU between government and investors in the oil palm plantation.
- Deliberate engrossment of human security clauses in MoU.
- Monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance with the rule of law in the agribusiness.
- Advocacy engagement with institutions of government, especially those in the policy circuit to appreciate the centrality of the people in the policy process since development is about the people.

Importantly, the Cross River State Draft Policy on Agriculture should be revised to include governance guidelines in relation to communities and their environment. Above all, further research involving fieldwork to understand the policy environment and chart a way out of the pro-market fixation of policymakers is desirable.

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Background review



Social impacts and gender imbalances related to oil palm in Nigerian forest landscapes

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Background Review

Social impacts and gender imbalances related to oil palm in Nigerian forest landscapes

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Summary

For Nigeria, after the black gold has come the golden. But does it bear with it the similar consequences of a resource curse? In particular, do its 'developmental benefits' outweigh its negative environmental and socio-economic impacts especially for its host communities? This paper attempts to predict the socio-economic impacts related to oil palm plantations in Nigerian forest landscapes. This study is germane taking into account the devastating effect of oil palm plantations in Southeast Asia, and the recent inquest of oil palm plantations into West Africa. It becomes imperative to study its impact on its host communities, the most vulnerable and often overlooked segment of society– women and children.

Oil palm cultivation by smallholder farmers is not foreign to Nigeria and has been considered a cash crop by local communities. For instance, in South East Nigeria, oil palm trees are referred to as "Osisi na ami ego" ('the money tree') as every part of the plant is considered to be of economic benefit. However, oil palm plantations and the challenges that accompany them are new to the country. One of the effects that is becoming visible is the tension between conserving Nigeria's rapidly depleting forestlands, and the economic development oil palm plantations supposedly portend. Another set of effects are its socio-economic consequences on its host communities – in particular, women and children, who are often invisible to policy makers.

Introduction

There has been a vast documentation of the negative environmental and social impacts of oil palm plantations in the rapidly expanding oil palm production in South East Asia given of course the proliferation of such plantations in the region. However, there have been very little research done into their impacts in West Africa, in particular Nigeria, and specifically on the most vulnerable populations – especially women and children.

The oil palm tree is native to West Africa, and may be found in Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Valuing the use of this versatile oil derived from this tree, the British commenced its exportation mainly from Nigeria from 1832 and by 1911, during which period it exported about 157,000 tonnes of the produce (75%

of which it derived from Nigeria) (Walker, 2010). Eventually, the British exported the plant to South East Asia about 60 years ago, and has been grown in commercial quantities especially in Malaysia and Indonesia. By 1966, both countries had exceeded the entire produce of West Africa. By 1983, Malaysia had produced 3 million tonnes, dwarfing the entire West African production of 1.3 million tonnes (FAO, 2002). The global demand for palm oil continues to grow, and is today valued at about \$50 Billion (African Farming, 2014) and may triple within the next 50 years (Sustainable Nutrition for All, n.d.).

While the foregoing has positively impacted the economy of South East Asia by providing jobs for millions of people, and also created many businesses in its value chain that has enhanced the region's

development, it has had several widely and deeply felt negative environmental and socio-economic impacts on oil palm plantation host communities, and their neighbouring communities. A major impact has been the deforestation due to the expansion of oil palm plantation in the region.

FAO Land Cover Data suggest that almost half of oil palm plantations in South-East Asia (in particular, Malaysia and Indonesia) have replaced forest lands (Varsha et al, 2016). Interestingly, it has lost the most forest land than any other region globally (Laurance, 2007). Consequent to the loss of vast forestland has also been the loss and skewing of the region's bio-diversity (Hughes, 2017). The loss of water in traditional swamp areas due to plantation drainages also make the available lands unsuitable for cultivating certain crops by small farm holders. The runoff and palm oil mill effluents often find their way into, and pollute the water bodies on which the communities around the plantations/ palm oil mills depend.

In addition to the impacts of changes in bio-diversity to the cultivation of other crops cultivated by plantation host communities, the scarcity of available lands has made them more expensive and out of reach for smallholder farmers. Since oil palms tend to take over the economy of the communities in which they are situated, jobs options for locals are often restricted to these plantations, which often exploit workers, and have unsavoury labour practices (Accenture for Humanity United). The cost of wood which is driven up due to deforestation means that local communities cannot afford them for construction purposes, and the mono-cultivation of oil palm also drives up the prices of food staples in the region (Sheil et al., 2009). There have also been several reports of conflicts resulting from land scarcity, insecurity due to migrant labourers, and host community clashes with plantation companies' due to their loss of water, lands and livelihoods (Sheil et al., 2009).

Recent restrictions on logging and land acquisition have driven oil palm investments back to West African countries, including Nigeria. A bevy of foreign companies including big players such as Wilmar, Olam, Sime Darby, Golden Veroleum and Equatorial Palm Oil (The Economist, 2014) are scrambling for available plantation land in Africa, between West Africa and the Congo, 1.8million Hectares of land have been conceded to oil palm plantation and according to a research company, 1.4million hectares is still being sought (The Economist, 2014).

On the surface, the blitz of investment by these companies portends development opportunities for

these African countries. The government of Gabon for instance estimates that Olam's investment in their country will create 15,000 new jobs (The Economist, 2016). The start of the shift of oil palm plantation to West Africa has nonetheless not been without controversy, given the negative antecedence in South East Asia. The companies that are seeking to establish their business on the continent come with some damaging track record and within the short period of their incursion into West Africa, they have started to live up to their notoriety. They have been trailed with allegations of land grabs, environmental degradation, and negative human rights impacts on their host communities. In some instances, they have resulted in conflicts and continue to generate controversies. Wilmar, the world's largest oil palm company, which has recently forayed into the Nigeria for example was ranked as the least sustainable company by The Newsweek Green Rankings (Alimenterre, 2013). The big question therefore is that: will the socioeconomic costs of the negative impacts of oil palm production in the region outweigh their benefits?

Oil palm plantations in Nigeria

As noted earlier, oil palms are indigenous to West Africa, however, even before the introduction of large scale plantations to the sub-region, oil palms trees were considered to be economically viable cash crops and contributed to rural economies especially for smallholder farmers. In South East Nigeria, oil palm trees are referred to as "Osis na ami ego" (The Money Tree) as every part of the plant is considered of economic benefit. Currently, about 80% of Nigeria's oil palm is cultivated by smallholder farmers (BBC News, n.d.) covering a combined area of at least 1.65-3million hectares (Walker, 2010); similar practices exist across West Africa. However, the dynamics of the cultivation of this cash crop is fast changing in the region with the influx of large scale oil palm plantations.

Various state governments in southern Nigeria had in past, unsuccessfully attempted to stimulate regional economic growth by investing in about 72,000 hectares of oil palm plantations. This was inclusive of 6,750 hectares of oil palm within an area thought to be one of the largest remnants of tropical rainforest in Nigeria held by the Rivers state government in partnership with Risonpalm Ltd (Walker, 2010) in the 1990s. Due to controversies that trailed the environmental impact of the project, and its mismanagement, the project failed, but was later revived. Presco, the subsidiary of a Belgian company holds two oil palm plantations with a total coverage area of 13,000 hectares at the Obaretin and Ologbo

areas of Edo state, and another 3,000 hectares at Cowan Estate, Delta State (Walker, 2010).

At the core of the oil palm plantation trade in Nigeria, were the State run oil palm estates in Cross River state which several times became inactive due to poor management. There were attempts to revive these plantations by privatizing them. Among the plantations sold during this period was the Kwa Falls Plantation which was sold to Obasanjo farms. Some of the privatization initiatives however failed when the investors could not meet the payment deadlines (Schoneveld, 2014). In 2002 however, the government changed its approach of privatizing the various plantations in the state, including the oil palm plantations and decided instead to lease them to smallholder farmers for rent, under a scheme known as the "One Man, One Plot scheme" with the strategic objective of micro-level poverty alleviation (Schoneveld, 2014). Under this arrangement, the government provided smallholder farmers with seedlings and cleared the lands. Less than a decade later, they again changed strategy and declared the scheme unprofitable, alleging that the smallholders lacked the skillset to effectively manage the plots allocated to them (Schoneveld, 2014).

As part of its obligations under the G8 New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, the Nigerian government also entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Wilmar which committed to developing 50,000 hectares of oil palm (Friends of the Earth US, Environmental Rights Action Nigeria, 2015). Resultantly, in a joint venture with PZ Cussons, Wilmar purchased several plantation sites in 2011/2012 in Cross Rivers state Nigeria. Its current holdings include plantations at Baise, Ibiae, Obasanjo, and Calaro concessions, all covering an area of almost 30,000 hectares. (Business Day, 2014). It therefore appears that the epicentre of the incursion of the oil palm business is in Cross River state of Nigeria. The joint venture in addition has built a palm oil refinery in Lagos with the intention to sell its product to the local market (Business Day, 2014). In a newspaper report, the joint venture described its investment as 'only the beginning' and revealed plans to expand their holdings to reach a total of 240,000 hectares and provide jobs for over 250000 persons in a period of between 5-6 years (Business Day, 2014).

Is all truly well?

While without doubt, there are economic advantages to the oil palm plantations springing up in Nigeria, there are inherent negative impacts which clearly need to be addressed. The most apparent negative

impact is the loss of forestland - an essential ecological and economic resource which is fast dwindling in Africa. Along with the loss of land is the loss of biodiversity. Already there is copious evidence that the biodiversity of the avid green forestland in Nigeria is fast disappearing. Incidentally, Cross River state, the allure of oil palm plantations in Nigeria is also home to the Oban-Korup Forest the largest closed-canopy rainforest in Nigeria, which is houses some of the most diverse and rarest species on the continent. The Oban Forest Reserve was created in 1912 by the then colonial government (Powell, 2007). It was in 1991 granted recognition as a National Park (WCS Nigeria, n.d.). A good portion of the land mapped out for Obasanjo Plantation falls within the Oban-Korup National Park. While the government appears to be interested in conserving what is left of the fast diminishing rain forest, it is desperate to develop the economic potentials of the state - hence, the conflicting priorities between conservation and 'agricultural development'.

Realizing the imminent environmental disaster facing the country and its own vulnerability, the government of Cross Rivers state set up its Governor's Forest and Climate Task Force to implement subnational REDD+ policies (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) utilising the Readiness Preparation Proposal (RPP). The REDD + RPP makes stringent provisions which directly affect the land ownership structures of communities indigenous to the parameters of forest lands. A core problem, according to the communities is that they were not duly consulted by the state government before the policy implementation plans were developed and that they would be further dispossessed of community land under the Governor's Forest and Climate Task Force (Lang, 2016). Curiously, Wilmar apparently anticipates access to more land by the projections discussed earlier. Under the Lands Use Act of 1978, the governor of a state holds the land in trust for the people and therefore has the discretionary powers to utilize the forestlands that have not been gazetted by the Federal government, or, under the customary land holding of indigenous communities, as the governor deems fit (Lang, REDD in Cross River, Nigeria: "Property rights, militarised protectionism, and carbonised exclusion", 2017). The host communities of Akpet, Betem, Idoma and Igbofia-Ehom attest to the fact that they had willingly entered into an agreement with the government company - Eastern Nigeria Development Corporation (now defunct) in 1963 granting the government company use of their land for the development of an oil palm plantation for 99 years (Environmental Justice Atlas , 2014). As earlier mentioned, the government initiated plantations were epileptic and eventually were abandoned till

the government conceded these same lands out to Wilmar. The problem is that this agreement predates the Land Use Act of 1978, which in essence could have dispossessed these communities of the ownership of their land. However, since the government was no longer utilizing the lands for 'overriding public interest', their ownership should have reverted back to the indigenous communities from which they were derived. The new arrangement with the company was therefore not done with the free, prior or informed consent of these host communities, which had – after the failure of the government plantation, repossessed their lands for agricultural use as smallholder farmers (Environmental Justice Atlas, 2014).

Failure to engage communities for their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)

The oil palm plantations host communities in Cross River state, claim that unlike the 1963 agreement, in which government had sought their consent and paid compensation to affected landlords, they were not adequately consulted before their lands were conceded to the oil palm company in 2002 (Schoneveld, 2014). According to them, while there was some semblance of consultations, only community chiefs were consulted. They further argued that community chiefs could not have fully represented the interests of the communities and individual land owners (Friends of the Earth. Environmental Rights Action Nigeria, 2016).

In the 2002 allocations round to local companies such as Real Oils Company, the state government failed to protect the interests of the host communities by leaving their traditional chief to negotiate the terms of their agreements with the companies and how much compensation was due to them without providing detailed information on the transaction (Schoneveld, 2014).

The Nigerian government is a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. More importantly, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights guarantees this right to indigenous communities as was demonstrated in the Endorois' case, in which the African Courts, relying on Articles 8, 14, 17, 21 and 22, asserted the rights to religious practice, to property, to culture, to the free disposition of natural resources, and to development. (Centre for Minority Rights Development (Kenya) and Minority Rights Group International on behalf of Endorois Welfare Council v. Kenya, 2003) In addition, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, of which Wilmar Limited is a member requires the free, prior, and informed consent of host communities and

lays out a detailed process for this (Forest Peoples Programme, 2015). Specifically, it mandates that "evidence shall be available to show that communities are represented through institutions or representatives of their own choosing, including legal counsel". It also requires that their impact assessments be evidenced by the participation of affected parties (Forest Peoples Programme, 2015), which in the case of communities affected by the Wilmar plantation has not been achieved (Friends of the Earth. Environmental Rights Action Nigeria, 2016).

The government

The Cross River State government has been the core facilitator for oil palm and other plantations in its state. Confronted with dwindling resources from crude oil revenue, it was quick to latch on to the inspiration that its then state governor had acquired from his visit to Wilmar's plantation in Indonesia, and his vision to replicate a similar 'success' in his state, and draw in essential income through the rent and royalties he believed such a large expanse single plantation would bring to his state (Friends of the Earth. Environmental Rights Action Nigeria, 2016). What the government failed to do however was to evaluate the impact of such a project holistically, and to fully investigate the reputation of the company that they were inviting to 'revolutionize' their state.

The Cross Rivers Government therefore aided large companies in particular – Wilmar, to acquire oil palm estates in the state. Their service has however not been guided by due diligence or a set of guidelines to measure and mitigate negative impacts (Schoneveld, 2014). The 2010 acquisitions by Wilmar was however different from the 2002 allocations in which it had failed to intervene in the company's interaction with its host communities. It became more vested in their negotiations, explaining that Wilmar was not an indigenous community and hence did not yet understand the nuances of local host communities (Schoneveld, 2014). It therefore set up a bureau to monitor the process. Again, in this round of negotiations, the focus of the consultations were the community chiefs, rather than a larger and more democratic representation of the entire communities. Even then, the leaders had expressed scepticism but were eventually persuaded to accept the proposed project, and received financial compensation alongside promises of some CSR projects in their communities.

The Federal Government's declaration of the Oban and Okwango forests as forest reserves in 1991, would appear to a clog in the wheel of the state government's

aspiration to expand its revenue base through the development of plantations in the state. Its allocation of part of the Oban-Korup forest reserve to the Obasanjo Plantation is an evidence of this friction. In addition, in its quest to fulfil its REDD+ obligations, it is infringing on the rights of indigenous host communities to utilize land for subsistence as it tries to meet its carbon obligations while developing virgin areas (Lang, 2017).

Failure to conduct environmental and social impact assessments

Section 12(1) The Environmental Impact Assessment Act of 1992 requires that agricultural projects which cover more than a land mass of 500 hectares, or displaces more than 100 households require an environmental impact assessment. The law also envisages multi-stakeholder inputs for environmental impact assessments, giving room for stakeholder comments (Section 7) and that the public will be notified of the availability of the report and where it may be obtained (Section 24). Given the magnitude of Wilmar's concessions in Cross Rivers state, which in addition to the large area they would cover could force the eviction of over 10,000 persons and impact on the livelihoods of about 20,000 persons (Friends of the Earth. Environmental Rights Action Nigeria, 2016); they are required by virtue this law to conduct – at the least – an environmental impact assessment that would have sought the participation of their host communities. The oil palm host communities claim that they were not informed of the conduct of any environmental impact assessment and that they were not consulted in its process if it were ever conducted (Environmental Justice Atlas, 2014). When the Rainforest Resources Development Centre filed a case against Wilmar for among other things, its failure to conduct an environmental and social impact assessment in November 2012, the company quickly produced one, conducted by 3 consultants who were staff of the state Ministry of Environment in March 2013. The veracity of the EIA conducted by these consultants is questionable, especially because it was to be vetted by the Cross Rivers State Ministry of Environment. It is noteworthy that the State Ministry of Environment issued an EIA Compliance letter and "Provisional Compliance Certificates" for Ibiae and Calaro Plantations; when this Ministry's duty was to monitor compliance with the regulations of the Federal Ministry of Environment and not to usurp their authority by issuing certifications that fall within Federal purview (Friends of the Earth. Environmental Rights Action Nigeria, 2016).

Friends of the Earth in their publication "Exploitation and Empty Promises" list lacunas in the ESIA conducted by Wilmar as:

1. The ESIA for Ibiae, Calaro, and Obasanjo plantations were not conducted before the commencement of the plantation projects.
2. The ESIA failed to state the number of people who could possibly be impacted by plantation projects.
3. It failed to acknowledge impacts of the Obasanjo Plantation overlap on the Cross River National Park and the Ekinta Forest Reserve, especially as the affected areas have not been de-reserved as required under Federal laws (National Park Act (1991); Cross Rivers State Forest Laws (2010)).

Key impact of oil palm plantation on the rights of women and children

At the heart of law, development, governance and business lies people and communities. While they are potentially the core beneficiaries of commercial and development activities, they often bear the brunt of the worst effects of businesses and suffer the violation of their rights. For instance, while plantations potentially will create jobs, they need fewer manpower than smallholder farms. Mono-cropping a large expanse of land also means that indigenous communities will be faced with the challenge of growing sufficient food to sustain their families. They will also be exposed to the high health care costs of the environmental impacts of such projects.

Cross River state, the epicentre of oil palm plantations in Nigeria is a coastal state located in the South-South region of the country and shares border with Cameroon to the East, at which site it also shares the territory of the Oban-Kran rainforest reserve. It is renowned in its status as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. The state is made up of three major ethnic groups and has a population of about 3.8 million persons with roughly equal population of men and women (National Population Commission). The major occupations in this state are agriculture, fishing, basket making, and tourism (My Top Business Ideas). In the Pecking Order of this society as in almost all, the most indigent and vulnerable tend to suffer most from the dark side of business activities. In Nigeria, as in most developing countries, that translates to women and children.

Women and oil palm: a sociological perspective

As in most states across Nigeria, gender inequity is pervasive. Challenged by illiteracy, poverty, and debilitating cultures which militate against their socio-economic advancement, most women live in the rural

areas, are economically vulnerable, suffer various forms of gender based violence, and an inability to maximize their productive potentials (Bassey, n.d.). In spite of the foregoing, they play a cardinal role in household food security and are engaged in virtually every aspect of food production (Ben, 2015). As primary caregivers, the impacts they suffer ricochet to the children for whom they are primary carers.

As earlier asserted, oil palm is considered a cash crop of great economical worth in West African states, including Nigeria. In Nigeria, every part of the tree is considered economically viable, and within the socio-economic context of smallholder farming, women are considered essential human resource in the processing of various products from the tree. Some of the roles often ascribed to women in processing oil palm products are the manual processing of palm kernels into palm oil, the marketing and sale of palm kernel palm oil, processing and sale of palm kernel oil from the oil palm kernel seed, and the processing and sale of local brooms, baskets, and other products derived from non-fruit parts of oil palm trees. The socio-political economics of oil palm plantations will therefore impact them, and in diverse ways.

Gender roles and gender expectations

As in most societies, gender roles differ and impact the way men and women experience the world. The activities of men are more often regarded as being economically productive, while most of those carried out by women and children are considered to be socially productive in nature and secondary when prioritizing the needs and aspirations of communities (Bank). For example, in Cross Rivers State, 53% of all agricultural labour in Nigeria are carried out by women. However, their activities are largely directed at producing food for their households, while those of men tend to be directed at the production of cash crops (Ben, 2015). Women are also often responsible for ensuring the provision of non-monetary essential goods for their households. These essential goods include: the provision of clean portable water, (which often not pipe-borne in most rural communities and they have to travel long distances to provide), fuel for cooking - again in rural areas, is often bio-fuels such as firewood - especially given the exorbitant cost of fossil fuels such as kerosene or butane gas. Provision of regular food staples often derived from their subsistence farming, and fodder for feeding domestic poultry animals which are also often raised for subsistence family feeding.

Shifts in the environment on which they are heavily reliant will result in increased labour and less productivity for them. For instance, the pollution of fresh

water bodies often necessitates that they travel longer distances to fetch potable water as most communities do not have access to pipe-borne water, which in turn means that they will provide lesser amounts for their families in spite of the increase in their labour, resulting in challenges to family hygiene, health, wellbeing and productivity. The stripping of forest land by plantation companies, and the conservation of other forests by the government also means that they do not have sufficient access to firewood, food, and medicinal crops which they would normally forage from the forests lands close to their homes. For the same reason, they will struggle with providing fodder for their domestic poultry and may face violence from these two contenders in the course their quest to provide sustenance for their families. Host communities such as Betem, and Ibogo villages report that their water supply from their rivers have been adversely affected by the land clearing activities of the plantation companies since January 2015 (Friends of the Earth. Environmental Rights Action Nigeria, 2016).

Because of the state government's protectionist stand in support of big time plantations, over the needs of indigent communities, the opportunity costs are often borne by the indigenous communities which are barred from accessing the resources of the forests. At the core of this are women and children, in the light of their roles as explained above. According to the Governor's Forest and Climate Task Force, the state intends to conserve one million hectares of forestland for climate friendly activities within a period of 10 years (Governors' Climate and Forests Task Force, 2017). It states further that this could generate substantial economic value for the state.

The implementation of the REDD in Cross River, on paper is ideal for the conservation of the Earth's rapidly diminishing rain forests, but in reality, the costs for such projects are inordinately borne by indigent, forest dependent communities who are indigenous to these lands. As was succinctly put by Adeniyi Ashiyanbi, of Kings College London, and the School of Oriental and African studies: "...material efforts to secure the forest for REDD+ manifest as forms of carbonised exclusion, in which carbon credentials justify state resource control and a regime of militarised protectionism which curtails local resource access while perpetuating both elite capital accumulation and forest decline" (Lang, 2017).

Access to land

Most occupations in Cross River state are hinged on access to land rights especially as most citizens in the state engage in farming or food processing. With the

competition between conservation and development that the state government is grappling with, as can be expected, local communities are losing valuable land either to plantations, or the state's REDD conservation obligations.

With the exception of lands held under the purview of the Lands Use Act of 1978, ownership of land is vested in the community. Allocation of farmland is to clans and households along patrilineal roots (Eko, 2013). According to a research published by European Centre for Research Training and Development UK, in Cross River state, approximately 79% of men obtain their farmland through patrilineal inheritance, while about 76 % of women have access to farmland through their husbands. Another 13% reported hold farmland through their sons (Eko, 2013). Since they cannot be 'owners', women therefore are not considered 'stakeholders' when negotiations are made for the use of lands or compensations paid for them. The Land Use Act perpetuates this state of affairs, when government 'compensates' 'owners' of lands acquired for public use. The acquisition of communal lands for plantation purposes by the state government on behalf oil palm companies not only took away women's access to livelihoods but also dispossessed them without compensation. As seen through the consultations held with community heads who are all male, female members of communities were not engaged. Compensations received are also shared per family, all of which are patriarchal. Forced acquisition of farmlands often necessitates that families redistribute farmland allocations among its members to accommodate those dispossessed. As the land needs of men are often considered more important than those of women, a woman may lose her previous allotment in such circumstances (Eko, 2013).

Livelihoods

The livelihoods and productivity of women are heavily threatened as can be deduced from the foregoing sections. Within the given socio-cultural context above, without access to land, women are unable to practice subsistence farming, and where they head households, this may jeopardize the nutritional needs of their families. Where they have lost their farm lands to plantations such as Wilmar, their core challenge will be finding other occupations, especially because their chances of finding a job on such plantations are may be slim. While Wilmar claims to have created 5000 new jobs (Business Day, 2014), the population of persons whose livelihoods may have been impacted by Wilmar's activities exceed 20,000 (Friends of the Earth. Environmental Rights Action Nigeria, 2016). Unfortunately, these figures are not desegregated

by gender and therefore do not show how it has impacted women. Plantations need fewer workers than smallholder farms, and are most likely to employ men than women. For the women that have gained employment on Wilmar's plantation, they report that they earn much less than when they managed their own smallholder farmlands (Friends of the Earth. Environmental Rights Action Nigeria, 2016).

Without new skill sets and access to capital, they cannot aspire to other types of employment and cannot access credit because they do not have collateral in the form of landed property. As primary caregivers, the nutritional, health and educational needs of their dependants become compromised and may result in the desperation of these women. In this state of affairs, women are forced to become more dependent on their men folk, and may as a result engage in transactional sex, forced marriage, and/or suffer different forms of gender based violence.

Children

In situations where indigenous households are confronted with unemployment, children may be withdrawn from school and engaged in child labour to help augment their families' resources. In a country such as Nigeria which does not criminalize the withdrawal of children from schools, has the most number of out of school children in the world, and has not been strong in implementing the Child's Rights Act, this situation repeats itself time and again. As noted earlier, their nutritional needs are also in danger of being compromised. In 2016, UNICEF in a news report stated that 2.5 million children across Nigeria were suffering from acute malnutrition (Vanguard News, 2016). Any further compromise of the ability of communities to engage in subsistence farmer could further skew these figures and endanger Nigerian children.

Health and environment

In the competition between forests conservation and plantations, the losers appear to be the indigenous communities. Women in Cross River had previously been able to forage produce such as kola nut from forest trees for sale, and vegetables such as afang and medicinal herbs from the forests in their vicinity for use by their families. However, due to the enforcement of REDD in the state, these activities have been banned and have adversely affected their income and their ability to meet the nutritional needs of their families (World Rainforest Movement, 2016). In reality, it is not these indigenous communities that are a threat to the environment, but big monoculture tree plantations

such as Wilmar. Monoculture plantations, rather than the subsistence farming and foraging done by indigenous communities, disrupt the biodiversity of forests (Osarogiagbon, 2011). It has now been proven that plantations capture only 20% of the carbon that intact natural forests are able to hold (Lang, 2011). The negative impacts of the government's 'development' quest therefore seem to outweigh its benefits.

One of the challenges of the disruption of bio-diversity is the imbalance it brings to the ecosystem and how this adversely impacts human health – in particular, the health of children and their fledgling organs and immunity. While there has been no scientific research on the environmental and health impact of monoculture oil palm plantations in Nigeria, the lessons of similar projects in South-East Asia are instructive. It is documented that at least 25 chemicals – pesticides and herbicides are used by plantation workers in a certain plantation without protective gear and suffered side effects such as nosebleeds, stomach ulcers, etc. In addition, the women who work in plantations were generally less healthy than other women. The women in host communities however reported increases in miscarriages and birth defects related to oil palm pollutions (Bassey, 2016).

Competition and conflicts

When companies like Wilmar employ migrant workers, and fail to make adequate provision for the burden, an additional quick flux of migrant workers will place on their host communities' resources, it results in stiffer competition for already scarce resources. For instance, because of the influx of migrant workers, housing becomes more expensive, as do other commodities and shared public goods, including education for children. Competition for scarce resources in already indigent communities will often result in conflicts.

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Another source of conflicts is when host communities bear the negative impacts of such projects but not its benefit. For instance, while host communities in Akwa Ibom state will bear the environmental and economic consequences of a mono-culture oil palm plantation by Fri-El Green Power, which intends to develop biofuels for electricity in Europe, it does not intend to supply electricity locally (Walker, 2010), hence they will not benefit from its dividends.

Conclusions

From the foregoing, it is evident that the potential negative impacts of oil palm production on women and children in Nigeria potentially outweigh their benefits. It is therefore imperative that the government be circumspect in their policies. In spite of the gloomy prognosis presented above, there are opportunities to develop the local economies of plantation host communities – particularly for women, through state policies and contracts that encourage local supply chains. It will however need the support of state governments and the oil palm tree plantation companies for this to work. Most importantly, to build the capacity of the human resource in the communities. The need to provide compensation to the communities that have suffered the impacts of their activities is also essential. In Cross River's neighbouring state - Akwa Ibom state, the Fri-El Green Power has an 80% stake in their business, while the state government has 20%, with an obligation to transfer 10% to their host community as their equity stake. In this way, the community is able to directly benefit from the dividends of the project. However, the most important policies that the government needs to implement is preventing further negative effects of oil palm plantation by ending further investments and prioritizing the rights and welfare of its quest for economic development.

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Background Review



NGOs, CSOs and academia: capacity gaps and advocacy surrounding expansion of oil palm plantations in Nigeria

Fidelis Allen

Background Review

NGOs, CSOs and academia: capacity gaps and advocacy surrounding expansion of oil palm plantations in Nigeria

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Summary

Issues and impacts on indigenous communities

- *Host communities to multinational palm oil plantations in Cross River State are concerned about many issues, directly or indirectly shaping human and non-human life negatively. Having acquired thousands of hectares of land in expansion for export and integrated agriculture purposes, with hopes for more, the risk of crowding out smallholder farmers has become an issue. Undermining this population of people in the informal palm oil production workforce deserves proper attention for the purpose of reconciling various interests, such as economic growth aspirations of government, community people and the company in question.*
- *Infractions, land grab, biodiversity loss, deforestation and economic survival (livelihoods) and conflict are serious issues facing communities.*
- *Sustainable palm oil plantation expansion cannot be attained in vertical disregard of local populations' concerns--welfare, food security and peace.*
- *Corporation- driven plantation expansion, in context of government privatization policy, undermine local needs and promote growth at the expense of human security.*
- *Poverty, hunger and food insecurity are part of the discourse on palm oil plantation-related-conflict between local communities on the one hand, and corporations (such as Wilmar and others, in the business in other states of palm oil belt of Nigeria) and government on the other, over what has been termed unfair and illegal concessioning of ancestral land.*

Role of CSOs, CBOs and academics

- *Campaign activities by non-governmental organizations, working with community leaders, regarding the aforementioned issues, were noticed in both local and international media, and reported by relevant international research institutions in 2012. Petition to Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) by civil society on plantation expansion processes undertaken by Wilmar is a key approach to extracting good behaviour from the company and alerting the world of the danger lurking with associated issues of land grab, biodiversity loss, deforestation and tension in relations between the company and community people. Community antipathy seems more obvious within Cross River State, even though multinational corporations' interest in taken over state palm oil plantations for the purpose of expansion and export, and its undermining of smallholder farming activities, apply to all of Nigeria's 21 states, making up the palm oil belt of the country.*
- *Regular academic inquiry into politicians' policy rhetoric of diversifying the Nigerian economy through large-scale agriculture and its outcome in terms of impact on smallholder farming populations is generally inadequate. Professional local and international non-governmental organizations are making efforts to fill*

this gap through rapid assessment of the situation with palm oil plantation activities in the case of Cross River State, but not with any real success of filling the apparent gap.

- Learning societies in Nigeria, especially those within university and research institutions, are yet to focus substantial attention on the growing importance attached to the palm tree from the perspectives of all stakeholders, including poor peasant communities.
- Non-governmental organizations lack financial resources to engage researchers on a regular basis to conduct cutting-edge analyses to drive advocacy. The real issue is the gap in the social character of most of what passes as research outputs. Those undertaken by non-governmental organizations through hiring of experts, remain grossly insufficient for dealing with the present. Real time analysis is crucial, especially in context of the dynamic nature of human beings, but they are hardly available. At best, the newest of any result of analyses found on the internet dates from 2016, and 80% of all reports produced by NGOs are between 2011 and 2014 periods. This is inadequate for tackling the issues that affect human and non-human life on a regular basis.
- Opportunities for policy advocacy with multinational plantation companies, government, and communities, on best practice and impact of large-scale palm oil business exist but few local non-governmental organizations with real interest and motivation are available.
- Regular research or analysis is a key factor of ensuring proper land-use in context of palm oil plantation expansion in states with corporations undermining smallholder-farming populations.

Identified capacity gaps

- Conventional non-governmental organizations working to support and mobilize groups to demand responsible palm oil plantations are few in Cross River State.
- Community leaders lack adequate advocacy skills to organize.
- Researching social, conflict, economic and ecological problems associated the palm oil business and the role of civil society, community-based organizations and the academia is mainly insufficient.
- Lack of regular and adequate cutting-edge analyses
- Poor utilization of available knowledge on the issues in internal decisions of communities, non-governmental organizations and policy makers.
- Lack of sufficient capacity to conduct rapid field-oriented (theoretical and empirical) assessment of situations by civil society and community-based groups.
- Non-existence of research-civil society coalition or research coalition for knowledge-driven advocacy.
- Lack of research institutions and experts with background in civil society orientations.
- Poor dissemination of the limited knowledge on impacts of palm oil plantation expansion in Cross River State.
- Many research outputs on corporate industrial activities, policy and wellbeing of people and their environment are rather too academic and lacking required taste for civil society work.
- Inappropriate research questions and lack of social character of knowledge produced by researchers.
- Gaps exist when it comes to making research directly beneficial to society through full utilization of outputs and follow-up by civil society organizations, for advocacy and capacity building.
- Poor conceptualization of issues and lack of ideological direction.
- Activities of NGOs and host communities to Wilmar, have not been gender and conflict sensitive enough.
- NGOs and community leaders have brought issues associated with palm oil plantation expansion to public view at local and international fronts but are yet to achieve desired change when it comes to sustainable productions.

Recommendations for NGOs, CSOs and academics

- Create a research coalition with civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations to support advocacy and boost capacity for successful engagement with policy actors.
- Organize regular capacity building meetings for analysis and action on issues.
- Take gender and conflict sensitive positions on issues pertaining to palm oil expansion to reduce inequality between men and women, and avoid physical violence in the struggle for best practices in large-scale agriculture.

Introduction

This is a background review report on impact of oil palm plantation expansion in the forest landscape of southeast of Nigeria. It focuses on Cross River State, one of 21 palm oil belt states of Nigeria, famous for its unique rich forest. Relying on documentary sources of data, including scholarly papers in journals, baseline reports, books, records of civil society and community-based organizations' conversations, letters of complaints written by their leaders, government gazettes, reports, media publications, this report highlights the role of non-governmental and community-based organizations, the academia and capacity gaps, to date, in tackling the impacts. Furthermore, the report looks at the capacity of these groups and possible gaps with regards to response to issues emanating from expansion of the business, in order to guide broader and field oriented study in the near future.

The upper end is to ascertain and encourage best practices that curtail the undesirable bearings of oil palm production, and boost the most progressive local impacts. Solid evidence from quality research and collaboration in the utilization of results of research for active and proper messages against impacts of oil palm production are part of the longer term or higher goal. The proximate objective, however, is to provide CSOs with evidence and increased capacity that supports their lobbying and advocacy work, by addressing issues relating to the expansion of oil palm plantations.

Tropenbos International's aim in the Green Livelihood Alliance (GLA) programme in Nigeria is to support the emergence of a common vision on alternative, sustainable and climate-smart agro-commodity landscapes, and use of tailored approaches that enable equitable development of oil palm, respect rights and aspirations of local people, and acceptability in terms of fair use of international public goods (Pasicznik and Vellema, 2017). This report has been structured into seven major sections, namely: summary, introduction, context, issues and impact, the role of CSOs, CBOs and academia, capacity gaps, and conclusions.

Context

The context is crucial. Despite being a branded rentier state, with petroleum as the major component of its economic growth aspirations, majority of Nigerians, especially those in rural communities, take peasant agriculture as main occupation and pastime (Schoneveld 2013). Emergence of petroleum as key

national income and foreign exchange earner for Nigeria has not taken away the agrarian farming culture. Essentially, it is about a timeless culture, running throughout the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial age. Peasant palm oil farming was important for colonial exploitation. On a general note, regarding agriculture, local farmers were conditioned into investing their labour and time into cash crops rather than food, to meet European economic interests. However, European-style plantations of tree cash crops did not appeal to the British colonizers. The colonial government found the peasant economy conducive for achieving its interest in Nigeria. Generally, the colonial state in the entire West Africa, between 1906 and 1939, resisted attempts by multinational corporations hijacking the palm oil business in which peasant production dominated (Meredith, 1984).

The value of large-scale agriculture-driven colonial economy was well acknowledged by the colonial state, but it was not the best option considering the role of the peasant economy to the stability of the state. Establishment of palm oil plantations in Nigeria rather took shape after the colonial era (Schoneveld, 2014). Ironically, the colonial state saw a lot of economic value establishing forest reserves. It was important for the growing timber business. Most forest reserves in Cross River State today, have their origins in the colonial era. The story started changing from the 1950s. In short, it was not until 1954, when, federal constitutional reforms gave regional governments substantial powers in matters of development policy. That signalled the beginning of localization of agricultural policy with attention to be paid to opportunities for palm oil plantations. The compatibility of smallholder farming during the colonial era with the government's interest of meeting needs of the home government with raw materials and cash crops is instructive. Avoiding the problem of land deprivation and conflict associated with plantations was a key consideration in a country where the native authority system was seen as key to the success of the colonial state. The post-colonial state has come with tremendous change with political leaders preaching at random the value of plantation as alternative to petroleum.

One area of interest is palm oil production on large scale. Production at that level requires extensive land use. The smallholder type, which local people is used to and practice as a matter of culture on low scale, is a direct contradiction to plantations. Nigeria's forest landscape is a victim of this rising importance of plantations, in West Africa. In the case of Nigeria,

already more than 90 percent of the country's landscape has been cleared, with Cross River State, as the only state in the country where little of the forest seems to have been left in an atmosphere of growth.

Rivers, Imo, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Abia, Bayelsa, Ondo and Cross River States are key areas in Nigeria with strong local culture of palm oil production. The product is natural for them, different from plantations. Local community people are culturally tied to the palm oil. Every part of the palm tree is useful one way or the other. For example, one part serves as raw material for the production of local soap, which locals cherish. Locals who use it as medicine and for several other purposes cherish the kernel oil. Nearly every part of the palm tree is useful, one-way or the other. For example, local broom for brushing or sweeping is derived from the leaves of the palm tree. Most Nigerian meals contain the oil. The traditional subsistent and low commercially produced oil is seen as special for meals in rural communities for which efforts are usually made to guarantee quality. Locals equally adjudge the local soap derived from the palm fruit highly medicinal for skin diseases. Palm oil plantations in Nigeria, are driven mainly by three major multinational investors: SIAT (Belgium); Fri-El Green Power (Italy), and Wilmar International (Singapore) (Carrere, 2013). Government positive position, raises a number of questions. First, what is the impact of such expansion on local, peasant agriculture based economy with palm oil production as key traditional or cultural practice? The next section looks critically into the issues with expansion of palm oil plantations in Cross River State.

Issues and impacts on indigenous communities

At the centre of the epic conflict, emerging from new interest in large-scale palm oil production in Cross River State, are activities of Wilmer International, State government, landlord communities and non-governmental organizations. Locals face and feel a strong sense of threat to their economic survival, bordering on smallholdings of natural palm forest landscape. The forest and the land come seriously under threat, when the fact of smallholder farming activities with the natural palm as a means of livelihood or poverty alleviation are framed accordingly (Adebo et al., 2015).

Global demand for palm oil, increased large-scale investment in export-oriented productions, national politicians' effort at reinventing agriculture-driven economic growth with employment creation as toast,

in an age of petroleum price-fluctuation and conflict-ridden industry are issues of concern. Discourses of diversification of economy and alternative sources of growth are fuelling an argument for expansion of agriculture; in err of smallholder farmers who lack capital or resources to compete with the expansive drive of large-corporations, especially multinationals. Cross River State government's concessioning of forest land and palm oil estates to Wilmar, in furtherance of its privatization policy has attracted the anger of locals. Deforestation, biodiversity loss, and exclusion of local smallholder farmers are critical issues, and Allen et al. (2014) identified the following as key issues:

1. Lack of adequate consultation with landlord communities in the concessioning of palm oil plantations. Plantations previously owned by Eastern Nigeria Development Commission (ENDC) were inherited by Cross River State government. Communities expected the government to follow a process that not only fully involve them but addressed their fears and concerns before offering Wilmar International franchise to own the plantations.
2. Violation of government laws or policies.
3. Deforestation and neglect of conservation values.
4. Loss of biodiversity with only little effort at preventing fragmentation of species in their natural habitats.
5. Emerging conflict between landlord communities and civil society organizations on the one hand and Wilmer International and the Cross River State government on the other.
6. Destruction of high conservation areas.

These issues mirror governance deficits. Improper governance of the palm oil industry in age of globalization, with corporations increasingly searching for investment opportunities to expand their landholding is a key defining moment (Sayer et al., 2012). This is happening at the expense of poor locals.

Ibiae, Biase and Caloro palm oil estates belonged to Cross River State government before privatization, with Wilmar as the most recent recipient of franchise. As earlier noted, this state has the richest rainforest region in Nigeria. At the same time, it has the most threatened non-petroleum extractive industry in the country. For example, level of biodiversity loss has been alarming in the last six years. This period marks the start and continuous desire for sale/purchase of hundreds of thousands of hectares of land, for which local communities originally accessed in order to meet food, medicine and several other needs. These are

troubling issues associated with agriculture capitalism, impacting on people and their environment, which have long been recognized as demanding action by government, for which the civil society has to play the role of advocacy.

PZ Cussons has special relationship with Wilmar International in the palm oil business, which has specific significance for plantation expansion, starting from 2010. Having acquired thousands of hectares of land for that purpose, communities are concerned about their survival. The Privatization Council of the state government is the eye of the state government on delivering this franchise to the company. The franchise itself is part of an overall ideological frame and conviction that government has no need to be in business of any guise or type, when the private sector is capable of providing funds needed for investments. The tension generated, and the reality of daily struggle for the return of status quo are clear signs that all is not well with the people.

Deforestation and destruction of High Conservation Value (HCV) areas is an issue occupying the minds of members of the RRDC. At issue is non-compliance with relevant laws, such as the Environmental Impact Assessment law and voluntary codes of conduct, such as the RSPO. One would expect that the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil production is a voluntary organization with a mission of ensuring industry actors observe decorum and avoid destructive practices.

Local groups have accused Wilmar of circumventing laws meant to regulate the industry with the help of state agency actors. A section of the civil society and community-based groups are of the opinion that the company started operations in the communities without undertaking an EIA. It received certificate of clearance from the state Ministry of Environment even before any form of EIA was conducted. Nigeria's EIA is meant to protect environmental impact of development activities on people and their environment. There are also forestry laws, and numerous similar ones, which can be deployed to check flight from standards.

Issues point clearly to extractive industry development crisis, of the needs it ought to serve. Whether those of traditional smallholder farming populations or export needs with big-time investors as major beneficiaries. Excluding those without capital from mainstream palm oil business will be a key issue with growth of the sector at industrial levels. Table 1: Land acquired controversially by Wilmar International in Cross River State. In Ibiae, 5,483 hectares are threatened, 5,561 hectares in Calaro and 8,688 in Kwa Falls, from deforestation, national park encroachment;

biodiversity loss; livelihoods; access to forest and land. Impact are in diverse forms. Nevertheless, there are policy measures to address them. In many producing countries, local and export-oriented productions face a lot of challenges. The challenges, in many parts of the world, including Nigeria, are providing lessons for those with or without such measures. The origin of the oil palm is usually traced to West Africa, but today, more than 43 countries across the tropics are involved in production, with Malaysia and Indonesia being the largest producers.

Biodiversity loss is a key consequence of palm oil plantation expansion. In this, the rainforest of Cross River State, presence of birds, the great apes, and several other remaining species of life in the state have come under severe threat. It comes with prospects of widespread establishment of palm oil plantations (Wich et al., 2015). Biological realities have become fragmented into isolated areas. Natural habitats have been tangled with almost no easy way to redeem the situation outside prevention. Reasons include disruption of natural habitats are hardly recoverable, alongside an increase in plantations and productivity. As Yaap et al. (2010) have argued "it is unlikely that oil palm management practices could be improved enough to significantly increase biodiversity value of plantations." The extent to which biological communities can be secured in a highly limited current atmosphere of market demand from Europe's biodiesel craze in the coming years is difficult.

Smallholder palm oil production is age-long, and has never constituted an issue, on a scale of mass community anger and discontentment. Review of the empirical and theoretical literature yields key results of insight into the nature and impact of the palm oil business on local communities and their peasant economies. Decades prior to formal colonization of the entire West African region where the crop is popularly believed to have originated. But even the colonial state under the British Secretary of States for Colonies and the colonial government in Nigeria, saw the danger of encouraging expansion of plantations in the palm oil industry. To be sure, foreign investors made several efforts to no avail as the government was rather tenacious on its conviction that the social stability of the colonial economy depended on a thriving smallholder agriculture.

Role of CSOs, CBOs and academia

Non-governmental organizations and community leaders in Cross River State, made their initial formal reaction to Wilmar's plan of plantation expansion in 2012. Prior (2011), the company had registered its

Biase Plantations Limited, as a subsidiary, within its African investment portfolio and purchased franchise to start business. Rainforest Resource and Development Centre (RRDC), a local NGO along with other groups, with petitioned the company to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) in February 2012. The issue was, as now, about the way the company purchased the franchise without proper consultation with the landlord communities. It was also about land grab and its implications for the survival of local people. By that initial complaint, a door for organizing with non-governmental organizations providing a voice for local leaders was opened. A process of response by the company and counter response started.

Meanwhile, regular research has been acknowledged as key to any effort at promoting proper land-use policy with government, corporations, and communities in context of palm oil agriculture. The role of researchers in reconciling existing conflicting interests of expansion of the industry and those of biodiversity and socio-economic interests of communities have been noted (Wich et al., 2014). In this case, local and international non-governmental organizations working with local groups have made initial efforts at making their campaigns research-driven. But this remains fundamentally rudimentary. The reasons are not far from the fact that local non-governmental organizations lack in-house research capacity for conducting proper research. Besides, the value-oriented nature of NGOs demands activist researchers or those with capacity for cutting-edge analyses that are relevant for advocacy. Often, NGOs adopt the rapid research approach with little or no attention given to rigor. On the other hand, often the researchers they hire are not fully seen as authors of the work they produce. Instead, non-governmental organizations that were never part of such research beyond assisting in field data collection take the benefit of authorship of the reports that are eventually produced. This state of affairs is counter-productive. Often, the net results include, a sense of personal loss for such academics, whose prime motivations have to include satisfaction from being an author of a report published accordingly. In any case, as yet, scholars and researchers are not visible enough with analysis to help advocacy, policy-making, implementation and monitoring around threats posed by palm oil plantation expansion in Nigeria.

On 7 October 2015, Environmental Rights Action facilitated a meeting of community people and leaders of local non-governmental organizations in Cross River State. Apart from the opportunity it provided for analysis and capacity building, participants

discussed the impact of palm oil plantation expansion. The communiqué issued at the end of the meeting spoke glowingly about the perspectives of community people. One of the issues in the analysis that emanated in course of the discussions was the fact that Wilmar, at its beginning of business in Cross River State, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the host communities (including Betem, Ehom, Akpet and Idoma, all in Biase Local Government Area). Promises of contribution to the development of the communities, through provision of social amenities such as roads and potable water have not been made good (ERA, 2015).

ERA works with local people struggling for land rights and access to resources with the state government and the company in question. What is critical for the landlord communities is the way the land which they have had long-standing, ancestral claim of ownership to was acquired without proper consultation. And even long after purchases, meaningful effort at recognizing them as stakeholders and vulnerable groups in the business has not been sufficiently demonstrated. Best practice is a key aspect of what is being demanded of Wilmer International and the state government for which ERA and Rainforest Resource and Development Centre (RRDC) collaborate to support local communities to be able to make these demands on relevant authorities.

Concerns continue to mount. Initial efforts at understanding the issues were made by Environmental Rights Action /Friends of the Earth Nigeria) through joint planning with local groups and by engaging the author as consultant to investigate tension between local communities on the one hand and the government and the company in question on the other in 2014. The effort yielded good results, which informed advocacy and initial capacity building for the local civil society.

In November 2012, the executive director of Rainforest Resource and Development Centre (RRDC), Mr Odey Oyama, had submitted a letter of grievance to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil production. The RSPO was established as a voluntary mechanism for ensuring sustainable palm oil production. Members cut across a range of stakeholders including producers, bankers etc. It has developed principles to guide activities of producers in the sector. He raised five allegations against Wilmar International, namely: (i) unlawful acquisition of land for the purpose of palm oil plantation, (ii) non-compliance with local laws and regulations, (iii) lack of transparency in operations, (iv) lack of accountability with migrant communities, and (v) lack of agreement with communities.

These allegations form a critical component of community agitations for land rights, access to environment and poor community consultation against expansion of palm oil plantations. The RRDC is a local non-governmental organization, working with community leaders. The NGO is active in articulating grievances of communities for the purpose of advocacy. Clearly, the local civil society, including community-based organizations has helped to bring the issues to limelight, which is an advantage on its own.

In a similar vein, RRDC, wrote on 11 February 2016 to the Conservator General of National Parks Services in Abuja, asking the office to take action against Wilmar for encroachment into Cross River State National Park. This complaint was extended to the Minister of Environment in a letter addressed to him on 25 July 2016. The latest letter written by the NGO to the secretariat of the European Union (January 2017) express worry and action by the Union over its recent policy on biofuels. The implications of such a policy for poverty escalation and environmental despoliation were sounded in the letter. All this, suggest a particular approach for engaging government and other stakeholders in the struggle for sustainable palm oil industry. Cutting-edge analysis, from the side of the academia and researchers is yet to make significant impact in the handling of the issues. In any case, studies that are directly relevant or sought for the purpose of advocacy are limited.

The aforementioned allegations point seriously to threats to community peoples access to livelihoods. The natural palm tree, which is common and remains the cornerstone of peasant agricultural practice among communities in Cross River State is pivotal. The literature, including those produced by non-governmental organizations, acknowledges the negative impact of expansion of palm oil plantation on local people and at the same time give the impression that it is in the interest of the country or state, as the case may be for the government to industrialize the palm oil sector. They give the impression that such expansion is in the interest of development and economic growth. By logical extension, these problems are secondary to economic growth. This conclusion takes full departure from arguments that any economic growth aspiration or development model that fails to take into consideration the interest of the poor, inequality, and consultation with citizen groups is guilty of negligence. The palm oil industry has come directly under the influence of international capitalism, which some have tagged risky for any aspiration of poverty reduction and taming of inequality among rural dwellers in Nigeria (Ayokhai and Naankiel,

2016). The review links civil society, including learning societies and research institutions, with a crucial role in mitigating biodiversity or environmental impact of palm oil development (e.g. Yaap et al., 2010).

There are challenges in the way. First, the social basis of research, which ought to be in the sub-conscious mind of every researcher is mainly lacking. The civil society has to be knowledge-driven, to be able to make real impact. This is not the case, especially, in an age, when research can also become an ideological tool in the hands of powerful groups in society. Academia is yet to play a significant role in ensuring responsible palm oil production in Nigeria. The knowledge driven industry which many eulogize today means socially relevant community of knowledge producers untainted by anti-people ideological issues. The reality, is that business, especially big business as with the case of palm oil plantations, is mostly driven by capitalist interest. Community people, who are mostly farmers, belong to the group without capital. The land is the most important resource they have. Analysis of the issues, have two dimensions, narratives of legitimization on the basis of elite interest and rhetoric of development and economic growth. The second, mostly beneficial to civil society and community groups struggling for justice, emanated mostly from non-governmental organizations, whose works have consistently been suspected by governmental leaders.

In a 2014 policy brief written by Budidarsono, Sirait and Pradhan for the World Agroforestry Centre, it was argued that growing trend of expansion of palm oil plantations needed understanding from research, behaviour of all actors in the business, including smallholder farmers of the product. In the case of Nigeria, the role of the academia, as yet, is marginal. Knowledge has a social character. Its production and utilization are important elements in any development process. Review of the literature shows a section with vigorous but value-laden viewpoints which politicians hardly incline to read and adopt for policy. Yet, the question and the fears of what the industry would do to local farming populations and their forests remain less attractive to scholars. The literature--empirical and theoretical literature- is not only scanty on the impact of expansion of plantations on communities and environment, it fails to capture meaningfully whatever modest role the civil society, community groups and academia are playing concerning the problem.

The impact of large-scale production of palm oil on local populations and their environment has received only modest academic attention. Efforts in this regard may broadly be categorized into the development

discourse, where agriculture is mostly seen in terms of means to an alternative political economy. Scholarly and grey literature reviewed in this study reveal that the role of academia in understanding the impact of palm oil expansion is marginal.

Capacity gaps

Conventional NGOs working to support and mobilize groups to demand responsible palm oil plantations are few in Cross River State. Participant observation during a capacity training programme, organized by Environmental Rights Action with representatives of NGOs and community leaders in Cross River State, in 2015, revealed gaps with the civil society.

First, is community leaders' lack of advocacy skills to organize. This is an important point to note, if we acknowledge the fact that ultimately, they should drive whatever change that they need when it comes to the impact of palm oil agriculture expansion. They are directly affected and so need to be equipped to directly engage relevant authorities on the issues that affect them. Civil society organizations therefore should look in this direction to assist community leaders sufficiently in a way that supports performance and good results. Researching social, conflict, economic and ecological problems associated with the palm business and civil society in these matters in Nigeria is mainly insufficient. Meanwhile, a growing conviction about the relevance of knowledge-production in the success of civil society, continues to compel a need for communities struggling to be heard regarding these issues, to be guided with relevant information or empirical analysis. Results of such analyses are needed to guide decisions and content of campaigns.

In other words, regular and adequate cutting-edge analyses are crucial. As yet, they are hardly available to support advocacy. But even more serious is the challenge of effective utilization of the limited available knowledge on the part of communities, non-governmental organizations and policy makers. In some cases, making sense of the knowledge is even a bigger issue within civil society, government, and industry governance systems. The point is that, capacity is needed. Civil society organizations lack sufficient capacity to conduct rapid field-oriented (theoretical and empirical) assessment of situations. In several other cases, research reports are produced without consistent and robust plans of outlets for dissemination and advocacy. Establishing a strong research civil society might help to fill this gap.

In addition, many research outputs on corporate industrial activities, policy and wellbeing of people

and their environment are rather too academic and lacking required taste for civil society work. Whereas, appropriate questions, the research process, findings and dissemination are all important, adequate plans on socializing research outputs is hardly part of the analyses. In other words, gaps exist when it comes to making research directly beneficial to society through full utilization by civil society organizations, for advocacy and capacity building. The other leg, is poor conceptualization of these processes in light of specific areas of problems in Nigeria by many professional learning societies who have continued to deny civil society groups the opportunity for a more knowledge-oriented advocacy for social change. These are serious issues underlining the importance of a coalition of research civil society that can complement or be part of civil society groups.

In light of growing interest of government and corporations in palm oil plantations in Nigeria and the implications this has for the forest, biodiversity, livelihoods, and rights of communities, such a research coalition can serve important functions, including the opportunity to mainstream knowledge production in civil society advocacy. Large-scale, export-oriented palm oil production, being driven, in near complete disregard for local community access to resources, inequality, poverty, livelihoods, has to be given due attention in terms of best practice. The lack of a research arm of civil society in the form of a network with local and international relevance is a gap that needs to be filled. As obsession with natural resource-driven economic growth continues, creative exploration of what works and what does not depend on productive relationship among policy actors. Policy makers and politicians tend to be less involved in determining what works and what does not, suggesting that other components of the policy community, such as the civil society, has to be available to have the capacity and resources to play this role. So far, this role has been inadequate with the case of achieving sustainable production of palm oil in Cross River State. It means the civil society needs to also arm itself with a research wing with capacity to support evidence-based engagement with policy makers and corporations.

Activities of NGOs and host communities to Wilmar have not been sufficiently gender and conflict sensitive. For example, among some of the landlord communities, internal migration has been issue. The issue of settler/native relationship, where those regarded as migrants have no voice in the struggle for sustainable palm oil development is destructive and not developmental. Those who because their ancestors migrated to where they are now, centuries

ago, are wrongly seen as visitors or strangers without rights to land. Meanwhile, these are people who do not know any other place to call home. They suffer double tragedy of denial of access to land thousands of hectares of land acquired by Wilmar and aggression from fellow community people who see them as strangers. This situation does not work well for successful collective struggles for change. Also, it means communities are not conflict sensitive. The other leg is the lack of sufficient gender sensitivity. Traditional governance and decision-making processes; and local social movement activities remain mainly gender insensitive because of entrenched patriarchy. Specifically, framing the issues around expansion of palm oil agriculture in Cross River State in terms of gender, deserves better attention.

Regular insights into dynamics of the extractive sector development, in context of facts of human nature and history, benefits the choice of methodology for engagements. This is not the case when it comes to assessing relationships among actors in policy and production systems. Attention has to be given to this. In addition, existing vulnerability of community leaders to manipulation and control by local political elites and corporations in matters that border on their collective economic, social and environmental health, deserve attention. The risk of inaction and what that means for avoiding betrayal of future generations is in part a function of boldness to speak truth to power and refusing to be co-opted in the wrong direction on these issues. This gap needs to be filled, through more participation of groups, including regular analysis by scholars or researchers. Democratization of civil society involvement in the management of the palm oil business in Nigeria with all actors in the policy community making contributions will produce better outcome. In the meantime, the natural resource curse theory seems closest to explaining gaps associated with the entire extractive sector in Nigeria. Civil society

and researchers can provide useful platforms for offering indicators of this theory and suggest actions to deal with it, as with palm oil production.

Conclusions and recommendations

Undeniably, community leaders in places where Wilmar has acquired extensive land for large-scale plantations, have played significant roles in calling the attention of local, national and international community to issues associated with the industry. Professional non-governmental organizations, as well as the academia have also made interesting efforts at undertaking advocacy to the state government and oil companies. The review highlights the key issues with expansion of palm oil plantations by multinational Wilmar International, in the case of Cross River State. Loss of biodiversity, violation of relevant legislations and procedures, as well as loss of livelihoods are critical. Meanwhile, non-governmental leaders and community leaders are struggling to make their voices heard on these issues. Furthermore, it notes the importance of the palm oil expansion programme of government and observes the limited role academics have played when it comes to response by civil society and community-based organizations.

Recommendations for NGOs, CSOs and academics, include the creation of a research coalition with civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations to support for the purpose of advocacy and their boosting capacity for successful engagement of policy actors. There is also a need to organize regular capacity building meetings for analysis and action on issues, and we need to take gender and conflict sensitive positions on issues pertaining to palm oil expansion to reduce inequality between men and women, as well as avoid physical violence in the struggle for best practices in the large-scale agriculture sector.

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