

Beyond the Poverty Alleviation Programmes: Towards a New Framework for Managing Natural Resources in Nigeria

Bello Umar¹, Hamza Kankiya²

¹ Usman Danfodiyo University, Agricultural Economics and Extension, Nigeria

² Bayero University, Kano, Department of Sociology, Nigeria

Abstract

Based on experience from a EU project for rehabilitation of a grazing reserve in Nigeria and the failure of the Nigerian state to establish appropriate programmes for reducing poverty that is prevalent in her rural areas, this paper offers a model for co-management of natural resources that affect the livelihoods of the rural poor in the country. Co-management is a pluralist approach to managing natural resources, incorporating a variety of partners in a variety of roles, generally to the end goals of environmental conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and the equitable sharing of resource-related benefits and responsibilities. This paper assumes that rural poverty could be reduced in Nigeria through co-management of natural resources on which most rural poor depend for livelihood. The paper first reviews the causes, distribution and level of poverty in Nigeria and explains why government programs have not succeeded in reducing poverty in the country particularly in the rural areas. The paper also discusses the vicious cycle that exists between poverty, natural resource degradation and conflicts as a way of justifying why appropriate management of natural resources could prevent destructive conflicts and consequently, reduce rural poverty. The paper then suggests 1) mechanisms for involving all major stakeholders in establishing co-management institutions, 2) roles the stakeholders should play, 3) ways for strengthening and sustaining the co-management institutions if established, and 4) the need for incorporating participatory monitoring and evaluation in the co-management institutions. The paper finally suggests that co-management should be tried as pilot projects before it is applied nation-wide.

Keywords: *Co-management, government, local communities, natural resources, poverty reduction*

2 Introduction

Nigeria has been characterised as a country of "poverty amid plenty". Thus, despite the country's relative oil wealth, poverty is widespread and Nigeria's basic social indicators place her among the 20 poorest countries in the world. Her GNP per capita, at about US\$260 in 2003 is below the US\$370 level attained in 1985. About 66 percent of the population now falls below the poverty line of roughly one U.S. dollar a day compared to 43 percent in 1985 (Tomlinson, 2003). Nigeria's poverty is generally more pronounced in the rural areas and majority of the poor in the country are located in the rural areas (FOS, 1999). Reasons for this include; over population in some rural areas and heavy reliance on declining natural resources (NRs) for livelihoods (World Bank Group, 2002).

While poverty is devastating the Nigerian economy at a terrific speed, progress towards curbing its menace has unfortunately been moving rather too slowly. Even Nigeria's current poverty reduction programme (the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, or "NEEDS"), which is meant to be people-centred, has failed to clearly identify strategies for resuscitating the rural poor and the NRs on which they mainly depend. The strategy is rather focused on what the government describes as "the immediate improvement of infrastructure (water, energy, educational facilities) in the urban and rural areas" (This Day, 2004).

For the rural poor, however, secure access to land, rather than infrastructure, provides the most realistic opportunity to improve livelihoods and develop assets that can reduce vulnerabilities. Secure access to land provides also the most powerful incentive for the sustainable management of NRs (Moore, 2002). Nigeria's poverty reduction programmes have consequently failed to produce desired results probably due to their inability to incorporate natural resources management (NRM) in their mandates. NRM refers to the processes and practices for the equitable allocation and sustainable use of NRs.

2.1 Co-management may be the panacea

Because Nigeria's rural poor depend mainly on NRs for livelihoods (crop and livestock farming, fishing, wood carving, etc.), this paper advocates strongly that rural poverty could be reduced in the country through partnerships for co-management of the vast NRs that the nation has been endowed with. An estimate has put Nigeria's surface area as 91.07 million hectares, 57% of which is believed

to be either under crops, or pastures while the remaining 43% is divided among forests, water bodies and other uses. The country also has several reservoirs, lakes, and major rivers that occupy a total surface area of 12, 339.21 ha (FME, 2001).

The major objective of this paper is to suggest a framework that Nigeria's policy makers, the international donor community and other stakeholders may find useful in formulating policies related to management of Nigeria's NRs and rural poverty reduction. The paper drew its ideas from the vast body of existing NRM literature as well as from experience gained through an EU-assisted research on NRM in Zamfara State, Nigeria (Umar, 2004).

The scenario in Zamfara State, which is similar to that documented on a general note for Nigeria by Gefu and Gills (1990), is presently that of a fast shrinking natural resource base that is causing unhealthy conflicts and competition for land, pasture, water, and related resources. Vast numbers of rural people in the state are currently losing their livelihoods as a consequence of land degradation, demographic pressures, conflicts over land, and the expansion of commercial agriculture (Umar, 2004). The conclusion that could be drawn from all these findings is that state control of NRs is a dismal failure in Nigeria.

2.2 A vicious cycle

Nigeria's co-management should incorporate arbitration of the conflicts that frequently arise in the use of NRs. Conflict management may contribute to poverty reduction in the country since a vicious link has been established between rural poverty, natural resource degradation and violent conflicts in Nigeria. Even the violence that claimed thousands of lives in Plateau state in May 2004 had its origin in competition for land that exists between indigenous farmers and Fulani herders in the state (IRIN, 2004). The feud was fuelled by the rapid shrinking of NRs and the rising poverty brought about by particularly Nigeria's structural adjustment programme.

It is thus, becoming increasingly clear that poverty, food insecurity, and natural resource degradation generally contribute to the initiation or prolongation of instability or conflicts. Poor, food-insecure people may, in desperate circumstances, for instance, perceive no option but to engage in conflicts to secure their access to resources that will assure future well-being. Such conflicts as well breed further food insecurity, poverty, and natural resource degradation (see Moore, 2002).

3 Mechanisms for establishing co-management

Some of the measures that could help in establishing successful NRs co-management in Nigeria may include:

- Using bottom-up, participatory approach
- Providing training and sensitisation to all stakeholders
- Building trust among stakeholders, particularly the Fulani herders
- Using competent and qualified facilitators
- Building on existing popular local organisations such as the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, young farmers' clubs, The Pastoral Resolve, vigilance groups, etc. (Umar, 2004)
- Making the process flexible and adaptable to fit local contexts, complexities, and needs
- Combining conventional and indigenous methods of NRM
- Allowing co-management groups to determine their own boundaries and membership, their management structures and procedures, and their constitutions, bye-laws, rules, sanctions, and NRs management plans (Campbell and Shackleton, 2002)
- Ensuring that local knowledge and authority of local communities are recognised in the partnerships
- Ensuring proper accountability and transparency of co-management organisations
- Involving all stakeholders – governments, traditional rulers, Fulani herders, farmers, wood sellers and carvers, blacksmiths, women, youth, the poor, etc.

4 Role of stakeholders

In establishing co-management in Nigeria several actors also have particular roles to play as suggested below.

4.1 The role of the state

To achieve successful co-management in Nigeria, the state should specifically ensure that:

- the enabling policy and legislation are in place, at all institutional levels
- as much responsibility as possible is devolved to a local level
- co-management systems are flexible and adaptable

- community partners receive real, tangible benefits (that could reduce their poverty and consequently, sustain their participation)
- the development of co-management partnerships is "demand-driven"
- it understands the dynamics of the communities
- objectives, benefits and restrictions are clearly communicated
- the local knowledge and authority of the local community are recognised in the partnership
- it is aware and sensitive to the uneven power balance between the state and the community and, if necessary negotiate through a neutral broker, and
- the community is educated and local structures strengthened through training and capacity building (Willis *et al.*, 1999)
- there is proper clarity around the mandates, status and roles of stakeholders in order to avoid inter-agency schisms and conflicts that are usually associated with decentralisation of NRM (see Campbell and Shackleton, 2002)
- channels for resolving disputes and for reconciling the different interests of various user groups are clearly specified

4.2 The role of local communities

The role of local communities is the most important one. Through their local institutions and regulations, local communities, if assisted in suitable ways and trusted, can ensure the sustainable management of NRs and equitable sharing of costs and benefits that is geared towards improving members' livelihoods. When properly assisted, local communities also are always capable of identifying their own problems and need, analysing and categorising them, and identifying priorities (Farvar, 1997: 4). For community groups to function successfully, however, several conditions must be met:

- (1) The group must address a felt need and a common interest (such as livelihood improvement)
- (2) The benefits of participating in the group for individuals must outweigh the costs.
- (3) The group must be embedded in the existing social organisation
- (4) The group must have the capacity, leadership, knowledge and skills to manage the task; and
- (5) The group must own or enforce its own regulations (Campbell and Shackleton, 2002).

4.3 The role of NGOs

NGOs have a primary role to play in the empowerment of local communities and in bridging the gap between the government and local communities. They can play a role of advocacy on behalf of local communities particularly herders who are socially weaker. They can also help local communities to understand rules, procedures, and laws of government and other outside agencies, and how they can be used to express and defend their legitimate interests.

5 Strengthening and sustaining co-management groups

Important issues to consider in strengthening local organisational capacity are:

- 1) Benefits from management of NRs must accrue quickly, locally, transparently, and as equitably as possible - providing incentives to as many resource users as possible (including the poor). Subsidies, compensation, and legal guarantees for groups with insecure rights of resource use could serve as incentives for creating a desired use of a resource by beneficiaries in a way as to avoid conflicts and reduce poverty.
- 2) Externalities and asymmetric costs and benefits associated with most natural resource management activities means that appropriate financial incentives are required for co-financing entry point projects with local communities - improving the incentives (World Bank, 2002).
- 3) Because many of the costs of design and implementation in co-management are passed on from government to the stakeholders, it becomes a challenge for government to assist local stakeholders in maintaining low transaction (information, collective decision-making, and collective operational) costs (Govan, 2003).
- 4) Units of co-management should be as small as practicable. The best approach therefore, may be starting with demonstration co-management projects, which should be reviewed after a certain period with a view to making them a nationwide project.
- 5) Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) should be incorporated in co-management and information generated through PM&E should be fed directly back into making adjustments to the processes and activities of co-management institutions.

It may, however, be pertinent to mention here that establishing participatory management takes time. Developing competent organisations that are representative of the different actors and sensitive to the

dynamics and power relations in the community is an arduous task, needing at least 2-3 years (Campbell and Shackleton, 2002).

6. Conclusion

Co-management appears to hold much promise in sharing the burden and benefits of sustainable management of NRs between local communities and other state and non-state actors. To successfully achieve this in Nigeria, all stakeholders; from government to the Fulani nomads and the international community should be involved. However, the success of the whole process will principally depend on the strength of government's commitment and her ability to provide enabling policy and legal environments that are required for initiating and sustaining co-management regimes.

References

- CAMPBELL, B. AND S. SHACKLETON (2002). The Organisational Structures for Community-Based Natural Resources Management in Southern Africa. African Studies, University of Florida, USA.
- FARVAR, M.T. (1997). Decentralisation and Natural Resource Mngement: Issues in Rural Development, Technical Consultation on Decentralisation, SDdimensions, Rome: FAO.
- FME (2001). National Action Program to Convert Desertification. Federal Ministry of Environment, Abuja, Nigeria.
- FOS (1999). Poverty Profile for Nigeria: 1980 – 1996, Federal Office of Statistics, Lagos, Nigeria.
- GEFU, J. O. AND J. L. GILLS (1990). Pastoralists, Ranchers and the State in Nigeria and North America: A Comparative Analysis. *Nomadic Peoples*, Nos. 25-27, pp. 34-49.
- GOVAN, H. (2003). Co-management of Natural Resources in Central America: The Road to “Equitable Distribution of the Benefits of Biodiversity” Or another Empty Discourse of the Technical Elite? <http://www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/Publications/TILCEPA/CCA-HGovan.pdf>.
- IRIN (2004). Nigeria: Plateau State Violence Claimed 53,000 Lives – Report. IRINNEWS.ORG, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, October 8.
- MOORE, B.H. (2002). Poverty, Peace and Security and Conflicts over Natural Resources. Presented at Conference on “The Impact of Rural Poverty, Land Reform Policies and Urban Unemployment on Political Stability: Roots of Terrorism”, Washington, DC.
- TOMLINSON, M. (2003). A Speech at a Forum on Nigeria's Poverty Reduction Strategy Process, Abuja, Nigeria.

- THE WORLD BANK GROUP (2002). Nigeria: Environmentally Sustainable Development. <http://www.worldbank.org/afr/ng/essd.htm>.
- THISDAY (2004). NEEDS Launched, Targets 7m Jobs by 2007. ThisDay Newspaper, Lagos, Nigeria, March 16.
- UMAR, B.F. (2004). Management of Pastoral-Agricultural Conflicts in Zamfara State, Nigeria. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Sociology, Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria, pp 204.
- VISWANATHAN, K.K. (undated). Co-management of Natural Resources – Implications for Government. International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM).
- WILLIS, E., C. GARMAN AND S. HAGGARD (1999). The Politics of Decentralisation in Latin America. *Latin American Research Review*, 34 (1), pp 7.