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— **THEME** —

**FORESTRY AND THE CHALLENGES
OF INSECURITY, CLIMATE CHANGE
AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC
IN NIGERIA**

EDITORS

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

8TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE OF FORESTRY AND FOREST PRODUCTS SOCIETY
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FORESTRY AND THE CHALLENGES OF INSECURITY, CLIMATE CHANGE AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA

P. F. ADEOGUN

Introduction

There is no doubt that we are all familiar with the theme of this keynote address particularly in the recent times it has become a daily occurrence that we are faced with the challenges of **insecurity**, the ubiquitous **climate change** phenomena and of course the most dreaded **Covid-19** pandemic which has taken the lives of millions of people around the globe.

Each of these challenges is unique in its own characteristics and possesses devastating effects on the people, forests and fauna (wildlife). Forestry practice in Nigeria in the recent times has become endangered due largely to widespread incidences of attacks, killings, raping and kidnapping for ransom by harmed men who are supposedly foreigners and their local collaborators who have taken over many of our forest estates in Nigeria. This unsavory development has created so much **fear/terror** and has negatively impacted on forestry and allied activities in Nigeria in the recent times.

The Challenge of Insecurity

This is perhaps the only problem that has hitherto defied all strategic solutions in Nigeria. Strangely, it is pathetic that the military formations are equally helpless in effectively tackling and eradicating this particular monstrous challenge. The monopoly of violence is no longer exclusive right of the military but by the non-state actors. There are instances of security breaches too numerous to mentioned. The front pages of newspapers are daily awash with the news of attacks of bandits in Nigeria while television news headlines are often characterized by the same subject. The most perplexing aspect of this security challenges is that bandits, unknown gun-men or insurgents are majorly occupying many of our national forests in all parts of Nigeria from Sambisa forests in Borno State, Falgore in Kano State, many forests in the southern parts of Nigeria e.g. Oyo State and Ondo State forests, while Lagos and Ogun States are not exempted. Forests in the south east and south-south are not by any means equally exempted from the activities of these marauding criminals.

In a report, an intelligent meeting coordinated by the Defense Intelligence Agency DIA after an attack on an Abuja – Kaduna train identified three locations as destination of bandits after most attacks within that axis. The locations identified by DIA as bandit's dens are Rijana, Katari and Kasarami the forest areas frequently visited by these criminals. This of course is a major challenge of forestry in those areas and the ripple (terror) effect is felt all over other Nigeria forests.

According to Aju and Aju (2018) it was stated that since 2013 when the Boko Haram insurgents found a safe haven in the Sambisa forest from where they launch their attacks on the Nigerian State, neither Nigeria nor the forest has known any peace ever since. Unfortunately, the situation has grown from bad to worse and has continue to metastasis

No wonder therefore, the FAO declare Nigeria forests as one of the most threatened on the planet because of high population growth rates, conversion for subsistence, industrial agriculture and illegal logging and unsafe environment.

Forest establishment is therefore directly affected or impeded as a result of the risk associated with planning and carrying out any planting operations in the forest areas. In some cases, farmers have lost their lives to the sporadic shootings of insurgents, bandits or unknown-gun-men in many parts of Nigeria on their farms, highways and villages.

The Koshebe massacre took place on the 28th November 2020 in the village of Koshebe, in Borno, when as many as 110 civilians and peasant farmers were killed and six were wounded as they worked in rice fields in their village. The attack was thought to be carried out by the insurgents, (Koshebe massacre - Wikipedia). This kind of situation has made practice of forestry a serious challenge in Nigeria, even though most of the attacks are in the northern parts but the ripples effects are felt all over the country. There is no doubt that all this would affect the economic growth (foreign exchange earnings) and stability of the country as well.



Rural Urban Drift/IDPs

Traumatic disorders in affected communities have resulted in displacement of people from their homelands. This has led to exodus of people into the more relatively secure towns and cities. Borno Adamawa and Yobe States have the largest number of IDPs with nearly 1 million persons that have been internally displaced as a result of the insurgency with nearly 530,000 displaced persons in Maiduguri alone. We all know that forestry is rural based, hence the prevailing situation in most part of Nigeria rural areas does not favor practice of forestry and agriculture and if care is not taken the downward economic growth will continue and this will not augur well for the wellbeing of the citizenry. As late as of 2020, Nigeria has a total of 143,110 IDP camps out of which 84% are located in Borno State. The 3rd largest in Africa after DRC and Somalia. The full impact of this development is capable of reducing productivity of forest workers in the affected areas. In Vanguard publication of 8th November 2020, it was reported that over 3,000,000 persons were displaced in the North East alone. (<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/11/idps-number-in-nigeria-rises-to-3million-refugees-commissioner/>) The chief of Staff to Benue's Gov. Samuel Ortom says 1.5 million persons are in various Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) camps in the state. He further said that Many of the States' prime farmers are in IDP camps having been rendered homeless by rampaging bandits. (<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/06/1-5m-persons-in-idp-camps-in-benue-official/>) This number does not exclude forest farmers in the State.



The Governor of Bene State, as a result has moved to create a security outfit for his State and said the State would apply to the FG to authorize purchase military grade weapons such as of AK 47 and AK 49 for Benue State Security Community Volunteer Guards to balance the threat capacity from those categories of Non-state-actors. This is in addition to the WSN code named Amotekun in the SW and other forms and kinds of self-help security arrangements in Nigeria have all indicated the seriousness of security deficiency in the country, the effect of which is all encompassing including especially forestry practice and business in the rural areas and highways.

Climate change challenges and forestry development

Climate change in Nigeria is a global phenomenon. It is felt by all and sundry. Nigeria has been experiencing what the rest of the world is experiencing in the area of socio-economic, agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry challenges.

Plantation establishment is a capital intensive operation in forestry but climate change does not help at all in this area. Particularly, in the arid north where seedling survival could be less than 30% due to effect of drought and erratic rainfall distribution the financial implication of this is weighty on the Federal, State or Local Government budget and performance.

The change in climate has affected the durations and intensities of rainfall which has resulted into runoffs and flooding in many places in Nigeria (Enete IC, 2014). Evidently, precipitation variation has to continue to increase. While in the southern states the precipitations have continue to rise while the northern states particularly the front-line states are experiencing intermittent drought. Which has made forest or plantation establishment a real challenge in these vast lands?

Forest fires

The most devastating effect on forest that could ever be is the forest fire. Fire is better not set or allow to enter a plantation than to mitigate it. Its effect is always permanent and costly in a plantation except it is used deliberately as a management prescription, Bergeron, Y., *et al.* (2002). Fires are adverse events with tangible costs for property and human life, Drew Martin (2016). The onus is on the manager of resources to know when to use and not to use fire in a plantation. In Nigeria and around the world fire has kept on making impact on the ecosystems even in the pristine forest of the amazon fire has been the issue, in California and in the middle east regions, including European countries such as Spain and France recently fire has caused great loses to the ecosystem there.

Therefore, fire is a big challenge to our forest either in the south or in the north of Nigeria. There is however, nothing that man can do to stop the fire from playing a role in ecosystem disturbances because fires do occur naturally on its own from the forces of nature such as volcanic eruption and lightning and in some cases due to mischievous tendency of some animals or birds such as the Firehawks. For decades, people in northern Australia have considered firehawks—the black kite (*Milvus migrans*), whistling kite (*Haliastur sphenurus*), and the brown falcon (*Falco berigora*)—part of the natural order. These birds are key to conservation.) According to Waipuldanya Phillip Roberts in *I, the Aboriginal*, a 1964 autobiography of Roberts compiled by Australian journalist Douglas Lockwood, He stated that:

“I have seen a hawk pick up a smoldering stick in its claws and drop it in a fresh patch of dry grass half a mile away, then wait with its mates for the mad exodus of scorched and frightened rodents and reptiles,” “When that area was burnt out, the process was repeated elsewhere.”

Challenges of covid-19 pandemic

By the time the virus spreads to most part of the globe it was almost impossible to contain it and hitherto the virus has caused untold hardship and death to most part of the world without exception.

The virus is unique in its own characteristics in that it was not possible to apply known vaccination technique to tackle it. It took a short while before scientists could break the DNA code and come up with a novel technique of fighting the virus. This in itself was a serious challenge and down the line of forestry and forest resources management the impact has affected all and sundry. The global pandemic due to COVID-19 has brought significant disruption to society and the environment. (Md. Saidur Rahman, *et al.*, 2021).



In Nigeria just like in many other countries, the effects of the incidences of Covid-19 were equally traumatic. The impact of lockdown was felt on both forest and wildlife conservation including the forest dependent people in a country like Bangladesh where detail information was collected. The nationwide lockdown in Nigeria as one would expect has its effect on both forest and non-forest income generation activities of the communities that are living in the forest and fringes of the forests. According to ILO (2020) on the impact of Covid-19 on the forest sector, it was said and I quote:

“The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting public health and causing unprecedented disruptions to economies and labor markets, including for workers and enterprises in the forest sector. The sector provides work for at least 54.2 million women and men worldwide, many in the informal economy. Forests are central to mitigating impacts of climate change, and around 1.5 billion people, many of whom are indigenous and tribal peoples, depend on forests for food, income, jobs, energy and shelter”

If Covid-19 affected this huge number of people in this sector, we can then imagine the significant impact on our economy. Nigeria has a large rural population that is sustaining the country in the areas of food and wood production in the economy. For any successful forest operation, the health of the forester must be guaranteed. In 2020, the global pandemic caused a world-wide uproar in the health sector which reverberated so much in forestry sector.

There was a ban on the movement of people from one place to another. This impacted forestry activities and the like so much. It must be stated that there is no specific sector data on death of forestry workers but the overall death record from National Centre for Disease Control was alarming and inclusive particularly in the epicenter of the pandemic in Nigeria namely Lagos (769 deaths) and Abuja (249 deaths) as at 12/07/22, (NCDC Coronavirus COVID-19 Microsite).

There was a national decree that forced every citizen to stay in-door and where necessary the use of facemask was mandatory. As long as the pandemic continues there was no export or import of goods and services which seriously affected forestry production and export of timber and NTFP. Most countries including Nigeria exempted agri-food systems (including NTFP) from “lockdown” policies introduced to stop the spread of the virus among communities. This has a nation-wide effect on everybody. It caused disruptions to supply chains and falling consumer demand. There was a wider implication of the virus as Federal and State government implemented lockdowns across the country. The first major step taken included closing of all borders and many non-essential businesses which ultimately resulted in severe declining in remittances and export demand and the attendant economic recession.

Conclusion

In conclusion, discussions on forestry and the challenges of insecurity, climate change and covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria is very apt at this particular time in the history of forestry development in Nigeria. There is therefore, the need to strengthen all aspects of our social lives such as: (a) provision of adequate security and defense equipment for our forest guards to protect themselves and our forest estates. (b) mitigating the effects of climate change through the provision and support of mitigation practices and (c) provide health facility and/or health insurance for vulnerable forest workers in case of any event of possible epidemic.

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SUB-THEME 1

SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT AND NATIONAL SECURITY