



Land Grabbing and Its Impacts and Forest Resources in Nigeria

Okezie Kelechukwu*

Department of Environmental and Social Justice, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: Okezie Kelechukwu, Department of Environmental and Social Justice, Nigeria

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Abstract

Land grabbing is a worrisome and rapidly growing phenomenon in Nigeria. Many communities are losing their forests with their rich biodiversity and sustenance, to land grabbers. Agricultural lands are forcefully taken and redistributed by the state governments or transferred to their foreign collaborators under the guise of addressing food insecurity and mechanization. This accounts for the high poverty status of the country and the inequality and power dynamics that affects women negatively. The Land Use Act of 1978 transfers ownership of all lands in the country to the state governments and by this act, state governments under the 'public interest' pretense, take away acres of communal and family lands and share this among themselves and their foreign collaborators. The most impacted and most vulnerable to land grabs are women, especially the small holder farmers who are forced to relinquish their lands and hence livelihood to the state governments without adequate compensation. It is suggested that there is the need for collective resistance to land grabbing, and that all efforts and resources are invested in protecting Nigeria forests and its rich diversity.

Keywords: Agriculture; land grabbing; deforestation; poverty

Introduction

The place of land as the key factor in the production of goods and services in every sector of the economy has subjected it (land) to undue pressure and demand for profitable economic returns. Land includes all the resources found in it, which comprise the renewable and non-renewable resources. Forest resources fall into the category of renewable resources which if efficiently and sustainably managed will last forever into the future; and if not properly managed will get depleted and exhausted; sometimes they become scarce, rare, threatened, or go into extinction. Forests are rich in unique ecosystem, rich in wildlife and other resources. Major forests in Nigeria are situated in the southern area of Nigeria. The Nigerian forests are inhabited by over 7895 species of plants with over 128 endemic [1] (Ajao, 2012); over 1000 species of birds, 53 amphibians, 154 reptiles and 290 mammals. The forest zones are classified into rainforests seen in the Niger Delta region,

the Mangrove found in the marshes of coastal creeks, lagoons, and estuaries of southern Nigeria. The major forests in Nigeria include the Ekuri Reserve Forest, Afi River forest, Akure, Idanre forest, Okomu forest, Akure Ofusu forest, Ngel Nyaki forest reserve and the Oba hills forest, to mention a few [2]. reported that the area of primary forest in Nigeria declined from 326,000ha in 2005 to zero in 2010. Land grab is often at the detriment of the forests and at the center of food insecurity, poverty, and lack of development. Man, and nature are interlinked in an ecosystem that should be mutually beneficial but sad to note that African countries are losing their virgin forests at alarming rate. Forests depletion have more adverse impacts on women and the vulnerable population and therefore efforts should be put in place to secure available forests and even expanding existing forests covers if we are to escape the impending climate crisis.

Land Grabbing

Land grab according to Borras and Franco (2010) [3]. is the power to control large quantities of land and landed resources for capital accumulation in response to food security crisis, biofuels, fiber, short- or long-term climate change impacts and financial exigencies. Also land grab signals loss in access and occurs in productive areas in the communities and where governance is weak. It is often the poorer and marginalized communities that lose lands because they lack power, influence, and voice. It should be noted that often, when African governments trade those lands to their foreign partners, it is more of "Land Gift" as the lands were never purchased at its true value. Often, land grabs involve more than 100 hectares of land changing hands in one single deal [4]. states that Africa's land under acquisition is about 34 million hectares, which is about the size of German. Government often give reason for circumscribing communal or family lands as being "idle" or sparsely populated. Land grab or acquisitions also involves amalgamation of smaller parcels that add up to a significant grab, and which often displace land user. Land grabbing although acknowledged as a global phenomenon is more prevalent in Africa given the continent favorable bio-physical resources and essence of large-scale industrialized agriculture and plantations when compared to other continents [5]. It is sad to note that governments with weak land tenure regulations and the need to balance their budgets meet their economic needs trade the customary rights over land of her citizens to foreign firms and governments for agricultural and other developmental purposes. The greatest impacts of land grabs are felt by the poorest of the poor - those forest dependent farmers and herders. So sad that communities and families whose lands were disposed rarely receive adequate compensation for their loss. Land grabbing issues have been causing conflicts among community members as the traditional livelihoods of those who were mainly based on crop cultivation, farming, fishing, local crafts making, fruits gathering from the forests, and hunting have been threatened by the adverse impacts of land grabs. These effects include loss of farmlands, declined access to resources from the forests, damaged ecosystems, deforestation, poor soil, water scarcity, and lack of alternative ways to maintain food security.

Enablers of land Grabbing

Nigerian Government: One common trend among governments promoting land grabs has been the theme 'development promotion' and touting the benefits of agricultural development, job creation, increased cash crop and livestock production, and infrastructure provision as drivers towards economic development and eventual modernization. The culprits are governments at various levels, foreign agri-business conglomerates, and rich and powerful land speculators. Some examples will suffice.

a) Federal Government:

The issue of Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) Policy establishment in the 36 States of the Federation and FCT to settle the conflicts of the Fulani herdsmen with the sedentary Farmers in Nigeria

would have become another land grabbing agenda, but was resisted by Southern Governors, Nigeria being a multi-ethnic nation. Why favour one ethnic group in their occupation at the detriment of others?

b) State Governments

The impact of land grabbing among the States is most pronounced in Lagos State. The other states are Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Rivers, Cross River, Edo, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Abia, Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Gombe, Taraba, Kwara, Jigawa, Adamawa, Plateau, Ebonyi and FCT, to mention a few. The state Governors under the Land Use Acts (1978 as amended) [6]. forcefully acquire community lands under the notorious 'public interest' provisions. The state governors go out to allocate the lands to themselves, members of their families and political cronies [7]. Ebonyi State Airport, International Olympic Stadium, the State Centenary Secretariat, International Market, the deforestation and conversion of Ohatekwe Forest Reserve to a Housing Estate along Abakaliki Enugu Express Way, and most currently, in August 2022 the deforestation of some parts of Unuhu Agbaja Forest Reserve along Water Works Road, Abakaliki for Eke-Aba Police Station and further deforestation of the reserve for other structures outside the interests of the Forest Law and Regulations (2007)[8], as such structures are not related to the reserve's promotions, especially at this time when more trees are needed to combat global warming and climate change impacts.

Agri-Business Companies

a) Greenfield Agricultural Company in Akampka Akwa-Ibom State. Women and community members complained to have lost their major sources of water for domestic, cooking and drinking purposes because of the activities of Greenfield agricultural companies and this have led to diseases and breakout of epidemics as there is no clean water for use in the area.

b) Willmar 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 industrialized countries. The company acquired 38,000 hectares of communal farmlands in southern part of Nigeria in 2010 which they successful cultivated despite the community opposition. The land lease was secured without community consultation. Willmar built an oil palm refinery which processes & packages 1,000 tons of palm oil per day, equivalent to one fifth of all the palm oil refined daily in Nigeria. Forest lands were destroyed to pave way for the Plantation and without environmental & social impact assessments. The company claimed to be revitalizing the unproductive palm oil plantations & developing new ones to help meet Nigeria palm oil requirement in line with the government's Agricultural Transformation Agenda. In 2015, Willmar PZ went on to expand

the plantation with additional 50,000 hectares of communal Land. Willmar PZ acquired all those large landscape in Lagos, Nigeria.

c) Okomu Oil palm Company PLC,

cover's 15,578 hectares located at the fringes Okomu Forest Reserve, Edo State in Southern Nigeria. Since 2008, the company has drastically commenced expansion & bulldoze 11,000 hectares of communal forest lands for Oil palm expansion. They failed to conduct the mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that is mandatory for gradual or pristine forests before commencement of the expansion drive & till date failed to secure any approval from the Federal Ministry of Environmental (FME). The destruction is causing deforestation and clearance of forests cover in the Local government's areas in Ovia Southwest, Ovia Northeast Uhumwonde and Owan impacted communities, Udo, Odighi, Oke, Odiguetta, Owan, Uhiere, Uzebba, Sabongida ora and several other communities. The produce from large-scale oil palm plantations is hardly for local consumption. It is often to satisfy consumer's demand in International Markets.

d) Dominion Farms

a US agri-business company under the UK funded New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition acquired over 30,000 hectares of land from Gessol community in Taraba State with support of the Taraba State Government which failed to protect the interest of her poor agricultural communities.

e) Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas Ltd.

In 1996, NLNG acquired landed properties in Rivers State spanning over 210 km for use as its pipeline right of way (ROW) and which impacts over 73 communities and over 200 families. The community members have to protest, demanding 84 billion Naira in compensation for forceful acquisition and not entering into any memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the NLNG [9].

f) Lee Group of Companies.

In Kano and Jigawa states a Chinese firm, Lee Group of Companies, in 2015, grabbed over 12,000 hectares of farmlands belonging to 8 different communities in Jigawa and in Makole in Kano. Mr Lee with assistance of the Central Bank of Nigeria under the Anchor Borrowers Scheme, acquired the lands to build an 'experimental' sugar cane farm. The affected farmers whose source of livelihood is farming said that acquiring their lands forcefully is akin to murdering them [10]. A study of the economic impact of land grabbing on rural livelihoods estimates that the total income loss for local commodities is put at \$34 billion worldwide, a number comparable to the \$35 billion loaned out by the World Bank for development and Aid in 2012.

Land Grabbing Laws

It is interesting to note that a few States of the Federation have acknowledged the menace created by the forceful acquisition of

large expanse of lands to curb its associated conflicts. Lagos State under the Property Protection Law 2016 seeks to eliminate land grabbing in all its various forms that include forceful possession of landed properties, encroachment, and others. Ogun State also have the Anti-Land Grabbing Law which regulates the incidents of the actions of land grabbers in the State. Oyo State and Edo State have laws on Land Grabbing.

Forest Resources

The population of Nigeria is put at over 200,000,00 million persons on a land area of 99.3 million hectares, for which only 10% is estimated being conserved under forest cover, compared with the forest conservation areas of other countries such as Ghana, 41%; Liberia, 48%; Senegal, 39%; and Sierra Leone, 26%. Nigeria's forest conservation efforts of 10% is far below the 20-25% Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) global recommendation for Nations, States and Local Governments. It is no wonder that land grabbing effects is telling seriously on the forest resources of the country. Forest resources are those natural assets of the forest lands which include trees, forest crops, fodder for livestock, wildlife habitat, clean water, stable soil, recreational opportunities, biological diversity, and serve as carbon sinks. Forests are among the most diverse and widespread ecosystems on earth. Forests provide cultural values, serve as reservoirs for biodiversity. Deforestation is the purposeful action of cutting down or clearing of a wide area of forested land. Nigeria is listed as one the countries with the worst record of deforestation. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Nigeria has the worlds highest deforestation rate. It is said that between 2000 and 2010, Nigeria lost nearly a third (31% of its forest cover) [11]. Forests we know play important roles in arts, literature, religion and offer materials for scientific study and education. Forests provide resources for food production, enhance economy of nations through commercial production of woods, logs, pulps as well as nuts, fruits, gum, fiber, latex, and palms. Life on earth is forest dependent. Forests help to normalize earth natural systems, contribute to biological diversity, maintain air, water, and soil quality. Forests regulate runoffs, ground water, controls soil erosion influence local climate and ensures that downstream sedimentation and flooding are reduced. Of great note is the 'sink' capacity of forests for carbons that are generated on earth. Forests sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere hence reducing greenhouse effects. Forests are of aesthetic values and has psychosocial effects, calming nerves and rejuvenating streams. They offer recreation for lovers of natures. In Africa, forests are regions of religious veneration, where man, nature and divine unite for the common purposes of healing humanity and earth. Forests provides roots and herbs for medicine and healing of diseases and sicknesses.

Sad enough, mankind has been depleting these rich resources in alarming rate. Deforestation, which is the cutting down of trees, is rising in alarming proportion. In fact, it is said that Nigeria loses between 3% to 5% of its virgin forests annually (Ojo, 1993). Forests are depleted for farming purposes, road construction,

timber, and minerals extraction. As population grows, more forests are depleted to accommodate the rising population and meet human and industrial consumption. Deforestation results in loss of biodiversity, climate change, degradation of watershed and desertification. Depletion of forests has aggravated food insecurity, threaten livelihood through reduced agricultural productivity, exacerbate poverty, reduce cultural diversity and religious sanctity. It is unfortunate that forests landscape has continued to dwindle with government and private agri-business being the major drivers of deforestation. Also, forests have in recent years become most heavily affected by land grabbing, simply said to be the buying, leasing or concession of land use for commercial purposes by governments, local elites, politicians, foreign or local companies, affluent individuals, and organizations; and taking control over large-scale land areas of agricultural lands with the aim of creating higher financial returns and to achieve food security. This is considered worrisome as lands that had previously been used communally by small-scale shareholding community members and lands that had been left in their natural states are presently being affected, with their social, economic, and environmental consequences. The indispensable value of land for commercial mono-crop agriculture, industrial holdings, factory establishments, and other land uses for infrastructure such as Airports, International Olympic Stadia, State and Federal Secretariats, International Markets, Housing estates and Urbanization have all contributed to the present adverse effects on forest resources

Land Grabbing Effects on Forest Resources

The forest ecosystem contains tangible and intangible benefits which include many valuable plant species considered valuable for providing food, shelter, drugs and fiber. As a global phenomenon, land grabbing has significant economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts which often result in conflicts and loss of forest resources. The 2008 spike in food prices triggered a rush in land deals. While these large-scale land deals were supposedly being struck to grow food, the crops grown on the lands rarely fed the people on whose land it was grown; instead, the land is used to grow profitable crops like sugar cane, soya bean, oil palm and others, often for export and financial gains to the industrialists. Foreign investors looking for food and energy play significant role in land grabbing. Land grabbing results in:

- a) Deforestation: The forest vegetation cover will be lost.
- b) Loss of Resources: The wide variety of forest resources in the hitherto natural forests will be lost.
- c) Climate Change: The volume of oxygen released into the atmosphere from forest vegetation cover to counter the carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere will be reduced.
- d) Clearing of fruit trees and culturally valuable trees: Many trees that are of great value to rural community members are often lost to land grabs as the specified land are often clear felled and bulldozed.
- e) Flooding: The riverbanks and watershed fringes of streams and adjoining lands get cleared and run offs from rainfall flow directly from land to the streams which get flooded.
- f) Loss of wildlife natural habitat: The transformations of natural forests to commercial agricultural lands expel the wildlife from their natural habitats.
- g) Extinction of Fauna and Flora: Habitat loss to trees and animals has been experienced due to mono cropping agricultural practices. Some animals and plants are endemic to given localities and environments.
- h) Soil Erosion: Exposed soil surface due to the removal of the land vegetation cover triggers soil erosion.
- i) Loss of livelihoods: The local raw materials from the forests for local crafts such as brooms, hats, native trays, baskets and wood carving products are lost due to the loss of forest resources that serve as local raw materials.
- j) Loss of income: Income from forest resources that have been the means of livelihood of the rural communities will be lost.
- k) Global warming: The alarming rate at which the areas were hitherto under forest vegetation cover is reduced have accounted for the subsistent rise in global temperatures resulting to global warning.
- l) Absence of removed trees replacement: No deliberate effort is made to replace felled trees from the project sites, including rare, threatened, and endangered plant species in the hitherto natural forests.
- m) Absence of EIA Report: A good number of the large-scale projects do not have the mandatory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports required for such projects implementation, in order to determine the likely mitigation and remediation actions to be taken in the process of the projects life cycle, including Environmental Audits.
- n) Water Scarcity: The removal of trees and plant cover around watersheds can lead perennial streams to dry up, and become seasonal due to siltation, which will thereby result to water scarcity.
- o) Corruption: Often, the lands collected from the poor and weak members of the community are shared among the rich and the powerful and those in political power. The land are acquired in violation of human rights; not based on free, prior and informed consent of the affected Land user's, not based on assessment or in disregard of social, economic and environmental impacts, including the way they are gendered, not based on transparent contracts that they specify clear and binding commitments about activities, employments and benefit sharing, not based on effective democratic planning, independent oversight and meaningful participation.

Land Grabbing, Deforestation and Gender Dimension

It is not in doubt that deforestation and climate change impacts both men and women, but women are most vulnerable. This is because, according to National Gender policy in Agriculture, women carry over 80% of agricultural production, 60% of agricultural processing activities and 50% of animal husbandry and related activities. Majority of the small holder farmers in Nigeria are women [12]. Their livelihood depends on the produce from their farms. Their health is also adversely impacted when their sources of livelihood and income are taken away and that predisposes them to practices that often compromises their health and dignity. With crop failures and low yields, their livelihoods and needed nutrition is impeded. Without money for access health facilities, most of them die or fall prey to sexual exploitation. Women and children in most African communities fetches water for domestic use. Some trek over 3 km in search of water which they use for domestic purposes. Water stress and poor personal hygiene affects women who needs water for menstrual hygiene management and other domestic purposes. Because women stay longer under the sun in weeding their farms, harvesting, and sorting agricultural produce, they are exposed more to the ultraviolet radiation from the sun, leading to skin diseases and in some cases cancer.

Conclusion

Urgent and ambitious climate action and the protection and preservation of forests is critical for sustaining all life on earth, including our own. Deforestation is not only causing climate change, but climate change is also contributing to further deforestation and forest degradation, setting in motion a vicious cycle with devastating effects. Despite global commitments to fight climate change and save the world's forests, deforestation and forest degradation continue to take place at alarming rates. The 'Forests for a Just Future' programme of the Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA) aims to ensure that tropical forests and forest landscapes are sustainably and inclusively governed to mitigate and adapt to climate change, fulfil human rights, and safeguard local livelihoods. It is believed that well governed forests provide a large range of services to humans, thereby fulfilling human rights and that well governed forests store carbon, sequester carbon dioxide and provide basic livelihood needs that increase the resilience of indigenous peoples to the effects of climate change. Also, through improved understanding of their rights, strengthening their organisations for collective action and engaging with other actors, local communities will increase their capacity, policies and practices that favour them, and reduces land

grabs and ensure the long-term maintenance of forest landscapes. There is the urgent need to commence an inventory of all the existing forests in Nigeria and their resources. Greater awareness and sensitization are needed in the communities to continue to protect their forests. Communities that have well protected forests should be encouraged through development projects and global recognitions as Ambassadors for sustainable earth. On the strength of the above, there is need for collective resistance to land grabbing by the enablers. Where it becomes most necessary there should be commensurate and adequate compensation. Deforestation is a threat to living and sustenance of life. Legal actions should be used as an instrument of advocacy to ensure that rights of vulnerable and poor citizens are not trampled on. Non-Governmental Organisations should support efforts aimed at carrying out proper environmental audit of the areas under acquisition and should support groups and communities legitimately resisting the clearing of their forest and forests resources. In recognition of the composite values of forests in sustenance of life on earth and regulating climate change, it becomes necessary that all efforts and resources. are invested in their proper protection, for Trees are Life!

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