

**RURAL POVERTY INDICES AND FOREST RESOURCES CONSERVATION IN
NSIT IBOM, AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine poverty indices and forest resources conservation in Nsit Ibom, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of this study, three null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Literature review was carried out on each of the variables of the study as documented by relevant researchers and scholars. The survey research design was adopted for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the four clans in the study area while the simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting two hundred respondents used for the study. A structured questionnaire prepared by the researcher titled "Forest Resources Conservation and Management Questionnaire (FRCMQ)" which was for data collection. It was validated by relevant experts before it was administered to respondents. To test the hypotheses formulated for the study, one-way analysis of variance was the statistical tool used for data analysis. The result of this analysis revealed that there was a significant influence of income level and occupation on forest resources conservation in the study area. Based on these and other findings, it was recommended among others that relevant agencies should ensure that rural dwellers are provided with alternative livelihood options in order to improve their income levels and reduce the level of dependence on forest resources for survival.

Key word: Forest resources, poverty, conservation, rural dwellers.

Background to the study

Poverty has become a global problem. So much that, the United Nations and other International Agencies is making concerted efforts to reduce it globally. According to Adaji (2017), poverty is the lack of basic human needs such as clean water, nutrition, health care, education, clothing, shelter, and other basic needs because of the inability to afford them. Poverty can be described as a situation where a community of people cannot afford the necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter which are necessary for human existence such communities are just in existence but not living a normal human life (UNDP, 2008).

According to the United Nation's Economic and Human Development Index (HDI), any person in a community that is living below two USD dollars a day is assumed to be poor. It is estimated that about 70% of the Nigerian Population are under this situation, in order to support daily existence many people in rural areas (where majority of the poor live) engage in livelihood activities that are mainly extraction of resources from the forest ecosystem, some of these include fetching palm fruit and palm nuts, gathering of fruits, leafy vegetables, legumes, nuts like (kola nuts) fuel wood, berries, spices, medicinal products. Others include chewing sticks, food wrappers, kola nuts, raffia and oil palms fronds, sticks, timber products, foliage, and leaves for livestock like goats, sheep and a wide array of other products too numerous to list (mention) here.

Poverty is usually defined as the inability to meet one's basic economic needs (Tyler-Miller, 2009). But it is ironic that the custodians of the natural wealth of Nations of the world are poor. David Nash, author of a book that Chronicles the lives of indigenous people across developing countries; titled his work "Rich Forest, poor people" and it apply to the indigenous people of Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Madagascar, Ivory Coast, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Australia and other nations that are home to nature's richest biodiversity on planet earth (Nash, 2017).

According to Ukpak (2004) the Poverty associated with rural or indigenous people is the natural circumstantial poverty that is rooted in Geographical locations with natural endowment inhabited by people incapacitated by absence of scientific knowledge to subdue the environment to such people's advantage and the lack of access to Technology or cultural tools to convert their natural wealth into Developmental advantages.

Rural poverty therefore is a combination of societal deficiencies a neglect gaps in development, social inequalities, or neglect of a section of society that is consigned to the lowest rung of the ladder of human existence. The United Nations, the (UN) the World Bank that release yearly indices indicating the study of and rating of poverty among nations, refer to the very poor as those who live below one dollar a day. In this category are mostly countries located in sub-Saharan Africa's geographic block, considered as the last strong hold of hunger, poverty, disease, lack and extreme wants. The UN Development index (UNDI, 2018).

Poverty as a phenomenon is calibrated into categories with the extremely poor at bottom of the cone, here people live marginally, subsisting on the basic of life. Ukpak, (2004) Okojie, (2007)

as cited by Obadan (2017) had provided evidence to establish that masses of the Nigerian people are poor. This poverty in the rural areas engender further poverty by over dependence on the already stressed and Fragile natural environments, which serve as the last hope for the poor who turn to environmental resources for survival. Blackie and Brook Field (2014) put it that "poverty can induce resources degradation that further deepens poverty".

Nigeria is one of the developing Nations that has achieved increase in her GDP as an index of economic growth, but the level of living for most of the people still remains for the most part unchanged. The development: According to the World Bank (2014) fall short of add Redding: Widespread absolute poverty Increasing inequitable income distribution. Rising unemployment

And neglect of rural Communities in terms of infrastructural development and integration into the globalization process. Although many efforts in the past have been made to reduce inequality and poverty, in Nigeria, so far, the result is still nothing to write home about; vast majority of Nigerians still live in absolute poverty. The situation is more severe in areas where the combination of political, economic, and ecological marginality has led to environmental degradation. The poor are responding in two ways: The desperate one's crowd into cities to escape the scourge of rural poverty, while others respond by becoming increasingly dependent on the resources that the environment yields, Ross (2017). This project work is an effort towards assessing the impact of rural poverty on forest resources, conservation, and management in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa of Akwa Ibom State. Nsit Ibom is a semi urban setting in Akwa Ibom that once was home to a thriving Rain and mangrove forest types but is recently at the mercy of various climate change consequence's such as disappearing forests, shrinking water bodies etc. shortage of fuel wood for cooking etc.

Statement of the problem

There is no doubt the significance of forest resources and its supportive role for the existence and continuity of any given society. Humans globally cannot do without the services rendered by ecosystems. They supply the stuff of life such as food, fruits, fiber, medicine, building materials etc. at the micro level, the people of Nsit Ibom depend on forest resources for their food, energy, medicinal and substances needs. But the unsustainable manner that these resources have been harvested Conservation consideration has robbed the people of much of the forest wealth.

However, many programs and initiatives have been put in place to document the cause of ineffective forest resources conservation and management, the fact remain that no serious efforts have been made to halt the degradation of forest resources. This work is another attempt to investigate this problem from the standpoint of rural poverty and its impact on forest resources conservation in Nsit Ibom, Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

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The broad purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of rural poverty on forest resources conservation and management in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to guide this research work:

1. There is no significant influence of income level of rural dwellers on forest resources conservation
2. Educational level of rural dwellers does not significantly influence forest resources conservation.
3. Occupation of rural dwellers does not significantly influence forest resources conservation.

Significance of the study

This research is undertaken to investigate the impact of rural poverty on forest resources conservation in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. It is a strategic study that will benefit Community, environmental educators, rural development experts, Adult Educators and fill a knowledge gap in Environmental research.

To Community environmental educators, they will benefit from the information, logistics and details about Nsit Ibom as a community in terms of how to help the rural people hear about sustainable use of environmental resources.

Rural development experts such Agricultural Extension Workers, NGOs and government agencies responsible for the Development of this sector will find information embodied here useful to their operations. Adult Educators need strategies and logistics from specific areas, and their project will supply same about the area of study.

This study will contribute to knowledge in environmental attitude of rural dwellers towards environmental resources depletion, climate change and other environmental challenges facing the inhabitants of planet Earth.

Review of related literature

Poverty has variously been defined as the inability to meet one's basic economic needs (Tyler-Miller, 2009). According to the author, currently an estimated 1.3 billion people (70% of them women) in developing countries - one of every five people on the planet - have an annual income of less than 370 dollar per year, with many of them living in villages and urban slums. This income of roughly one dollar per day is the World Bank's definition of poverty. Poverty therefore is the combination of the indices of low income, low or no educational attainment which is expressed as lack of basic skills, and the general lack of basics sustenance of life like decent shelter, food, water, housing, and access to sanitation facilities.

Poverty as defined from the economic viewpoint borders on struggling daily to meet one's basic needs. It is a function of the absence of a fixed source of income or low income that can hardly meet one's daily needs. So that the poor are preoccupied with survival activities and ventures. Hector (2012) pinpoints the fact that rural poverty is characterized by a population of people who live in non-urban settings including those who live in non-urban settings including those who live in urban slums and have inadequate access to or unavailability of basic human needs and are forced to turn to nature for daily, constant survival. They have no pipe-borne water so they depend on streams and polluted rivers, can't afford decent accommodation, so to live in makeshift shelters, they grow food enough to feed, pick vegetables, live without electricity, and depend on the mercy of nature (environment) for almost all basic needs.

Philipou, (2010) reported that rural poverty present conditions of susceptibility whereby people become victims living in marginal and fragile environment due to over dependence on the environment for daily survival. A (UN) report in 2016 stated that in this present skill intensive era, the unskilled are the victims of poverty as they have no marketable skills and therefore live low on small incomes that come from doing odd, unattractive and low income jobs, UN report on skills, poverty and incomes in least developed countries (UN 2016). Low-income earners are forced to supplement, their incomes by turning to environmental resources.

A non-governmental organization called *propokus* set up in Peru to help promote sustainable pack services and protect the interest of indigenous federations in the Latin American Nation to protect the forest use various initiatives to accomplish this goal. One highlight of this initiative involves organizing vigilance committees to patrol around the edge of the national park to keep intruders out. Borgo the initiator of this project believe that conservation efforts will succeed if a local community takes an active role in the defence of their native lands. Borgo noted that the major obstacle to all these is poverty and lack of education. - which make the lure of cash so seductive and the need to protect the forest so difficult for many villagers to understand. Wallace, (2013).

The educational level of people is a pertinent factor to how they relate to their environment that is why one of the goals of UNEP is to bring a certain level of environmental literacy to rural and indigenous people to help them function harmoniously with their immediate environment. It is believed that each living person need a certain do&3 of environmental education to enable them to live and develop eco-friendly attitudes toward the natural environment. Arikpo (2014) opine that to effectuate change in the way rural dwellers, (who all need adult education) will change and embrace change, it is necessary to educate people outside the formal channels' individuals or groups for the purpose of raising their consciousness or their social situation and their standard of living and by extension how they relate with their environment.

Illiterate people need to be prepared to embrace some of the innovative track being proposed by conservators such as Agroforestry, Silviculture, selective harvesting of resources, reforestation, selective hunting, conservation of rare and exotic species of plants and animals

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etc. (JUNEP. 2013), without this education, conservation of the World's dwindling non-renewable resources will be a mere dream. Education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability.

UN women (2012) reported that rural people in developing countries continue to play a essential roles in their communities and in national economic life as processors of foods as well as caretakers of their forestry's through a variety of activities most of these activities are not defined as economic active employments (EAE) that can be categorically classified or identified as occupations. Some of the occupations that can be found in rural communities include civil/public servants, farming, business/trading, clergy, artisan- like iron smiths, wood carvers, cane workers, weavers, tailors and seamstress, repair men, wood chewers, hair dressers and litany of others.

According to Ukpong, Ntia, Obi & Usang (2010) Many occupations in rural areas enjoy the proximity to raw materials especially those that emanate or are related to the forest, example carpenters, wood carvers, cane workers have direct access to these materials that can be harvested directly from the forest without restrictions. The forest is their raw materials based and as long as they remain in the occupations, trades and vocations, they will depend on those resources. Considering that some of these trades and craft are passed on to upcoming generations give a picture of how long these resources have been harvested and will be for a long time to come.

Obot and Barker (2009) stated that what may appear to outsiders as a mere craft or hobby, is a lifetime occupation to rural dwellers. Citing hunting for an example, they explain that while game hunting is a hobby to the elite, hunting is a life time occupation that many depend on for incomes for which they use to maintain themselves and use income from the trading of bush meats to train their wards and families in schools or aid them to learn other vocations. They explain that to make these people give up these activities that negatively impact on the forest there must be a deliberate plan to rehabilitate, and provide them concrete and lifelong alternative that are sustainable on the long term.

Research methodology and design

The research design for the study was a survey research design. The design was adopted because it permits descriptions, investigation, validation, and the collection of information on the impact or rural poverty on forest resources conservation and management in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The design is preferred because of the non-manipulation of both the dependent and independent variable by the researcher.

Population of the study

The population of this study consists of all the adult residents of Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The consists of males and females selected from various occupation. The estimated population for the study is 108,611 (NPC, 2018).

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for the study is made up of 200 men and women randomly selected from the four clans. The sample distribution of respondents is shown in Table 1. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select four clans (4) out of the (10) clans that make up Nsit Ibom Local Government Area. This is because the four clans are the ones located within the forested areas. Simple random sampling was used to randomly select men and women from the four clans to constitute the sample population for this study.

Procedure for data collection

Copies of the questionnaire were directly administered to the subject sample for necessary data to be supplied, this was collected back on completion for the final analyses. Explanation on the research purpose was given to respondent before they filled the questionnaire to enhance candid responses. At the end of the exercise two hundred (200) questionnaire administered were all carefully returned for final analysis.

Procedure for data analysis

To test the hypothesis generated to guide the study, the dependent and independent variables as well as the statistical techniques was employed and shown as follows.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant influence of income level on forest resources conservation.

Independent variable: Income

Dependent variable: Forest resource conservation and management.

Statistical technique: One-way analysis of variance

Hypothesis Two

Educational level does not significantly influence forest resources conservation.

Independent variable: educational level

Dependent variable: Forest resource conservation and management.

Statistical technique: One-way analysis of variance

Hypotheses Three

Occupation does not significantly influence forest resources conservation.

Independent variable: Socio-economic status

Dependent variable: Forest resource conservation and management.

Statistical technique: One-way analysis of variance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Presentation of results

This section presents the results obtained from analysis of data and testing of hypotheses in the study as well as their interpretation. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

HO: 1

There is no significant influence of income level on forest resources conservation. The independent variable in this hypothesis is income level while the dependent variable is forest resources conservation. One-way analysis of variance statistical tool was used for data analysis. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: One-way analysis of variance of the influence of income level on forest resources conservation in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State

Income level		N	X	SD		
Low		52	12.0385	2.748		
Medium		88	13.0341	3.024		
High		60	11.9667	2.443		
Source of variance	SS	Df	MS	F-ratio	Sig.	
Between groups	36.401	2	18.200	8.099*	.000	
Within groups	874.754	197	4.440			
Total	911.155	199				

**Significant at 0.05; df= 199; critical F= 3.062*

The result of analysis presented in Table 2 showed that the calculated F-value of 8.099 is higher than the critical F-value of 3.062 at 0.05 level of significance with 2 and 197 degrees of freedom. This implied that the null hypothesis was rejected, therefore, there is a significant influence of income level on forest resources conservation among rural dwellers in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. In order to determine which income level contributed highest to the significant difference, a Fisher's protected t-test was carried out. The result of this test is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Fishers protected t-test of the influence of income level on forest resources conservation in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State

Income level	Joint	Mean difference	Significant
Low	Medium	.00437	.991
	High	-.92821*	.021
Medium	Low	.00437	.991
	High	.93258*	.009
High	Low	.92821	.021
	Medium	.93258*	.009

**Mean difference is significant at 0.05*

Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) was used to further identify where significant difference among the various income levels was highest in terms of mean difference. The result shows that the mean difference between low- and medium-income level was .00437. The mean difference between low- and high-income level was .92821. The mean difference between medium and high-income level was .93252. From the result presented in Table 4, the mean difference is highest between medium and high-income level (.93258) while the least mean difference is between low- and medium-income level groups (.004437).

HO: 2

Educational level does not significantly influence forest resources conservation. The independent variable in this hypothesis is educational level while the dependent variable is forest resources conservation. One way analysis of variance statistical tool was used for data analysis. The result of this analysis is presented in Table3.

Table 3: One-way analysis of variance of the influence of educational level on forest resources conservation in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State

Educational level	N	X	SD
FSLC	12	11.667	1.614
SSCE	84	12.704	2.387
OND/NCE/Diploma	52	12.1500	2.139
B.Sc/B.Ed/HND	58	12.3333	2.141
Masters and above	6	12.2500	2.159

Source of variance	SS	Df	Ms	F	Sig.
Between groups	13.063	4	3.266	1.709	.587
Within groups	898.092	195	4.606		
Total	911.155	199			

Not significant at 0.05; df= 199, critical F= 3.062

The result of analysis presented in Table 5 showed that the calculated F= value of 1.709 is less than the critical F- value of 3.062 at 0.05 level of significance with 2 and 197 degrees of freedom. This implies that the null hypothesis is retained. Therefore, there is no significant influence of educational level on forest resources conservation among rural dwellers in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

HO: 3

There is no significant influence of occupation on forest resources conservation. The independent variable in this hypothesis is occupation of rural dwellers while the dependent

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variable is forest resources conservation. One way analysis of variance statistical tool was used for data analysis. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: One-way analysis of variance of the influence of occupation on forest resources conservation among rural dwellers in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State

Occupation	N	X	SD
Farming	141	12.4730	2.192
Fishing	12	9.7000	1.771
Trading	28	9.462	2.449
Student	19	13.132	3.023

Source of variance	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig-
Between groups	54.484	3	18.161	6.115*	.000
Within groups	874.292	197	4.413		
Total	901.776	199			

*Significant at 0.05; $df= 199$; critical $F= 3.062$

The result of analysis presented in Table 4 showed that the calculated F-value of 6.115 is higher than the critical F-value of 3.062 at 0.05 level of significance with 2 and 197 degrees of freedom. This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant influence of occupation on forest resources conservation among rural dwellers in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. In order to determine which occupation contributed highest to the significant difference, a Fisher's protected t-test was carried out. The result of this test is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Fisher's protected t-test of the influence of occupation on forest resources conservation among rural dwellers in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State

Occupation	Joint	Mean Difference	Significant
Farming	Fishing	.77297	.040
	Trading	1.47297	.168
	Student	-2.52703*	.019
Fishing	Farming	-.77297	.040
	Trading	.700000	.526
	Student	-3.300000*	.003
Trading	Farming	-1.4727	.168
	Fishing	-.70000	.526
	Student	-4.00000*	.008
Student	Farming	2.52703	.019
	Fishing	3.3000	.003
	Trading	4.00000*	.008

*Mean difference is significant at 0.05

Fisher's least significant Difference (LSD) was used to further identify where significant difference among the various occupations was highest in terms of mean difference. The result shows that the mean difference between farming and fishing was .77297. The mean difference between farming and trading was 1.47297. The mean difference between farming and student was 2.52703. The mean difference between fishing and trading was .700000. The mean difference between fishing and student was 3.30000 while the mean difference between trading and student was 4.00000. From the result presented in Table 7, the mean difference is highest between trading and students (4.00000) while the least mean difference is between fishing and trading groups (.700000) respectively.

Discussion of findings

This section is concerned with the discussion of findings that emerges from the results of the analysis. The discussion is presented according to the hypotheses that are directing the study. It is discussed hypothesis by hypothesis.

Income level and forest resources conservation

The finding obtained from analysis and testing of hypothesis one revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that there is a significant influence of income level on forest resources conservation among rural dwellers in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. This finding is attributed largely to the high level of poverty among rural dwellers in the study area. This has increased the pressure on available forest resources leading to their depletion and in some cases, extinction of certain species.

This finding agrees with that of Hector (2012) who reported that rural poverty is characterized by a population of people who live in non-urban settings including those who live in non-urban settings including those who live in urban slums and have inadequate access to or unavailability of basic human needs and are forced to turn to nature for daily, constant survival. They have no pipe-borne water so they depend on streams and polluted rivers, can't afford decent accommodation, so to live in makeshift shelters, they grow food enough to feed, pick vegetables, live without electricity, and depend on the mercy of nature (environment) for almost all basic needs.

The finding of this study also supported that of Philipou (2010) who reported that rural poverty present conditions of susceptibility whereby people become victims living in marginal and fragile environment due to over dependence on the environment for daily survival. A (UN) report in 2016 stated that in this present skill intensive era, the unskilled are the victims of poverty as they have no marketable skills and therefore live low on small incomes that come from doing odd, unattractive and low-income jobs. UN report on skills, poverty and incomes in least developed countries. (UN 2016) Low-income earners are forced to supplement their incomes by turning to environmental resources.

Educational level and forest resources conservation

The finding obtained from analysis and testing of hypothesis two revealed that the null hypothesis was accepted. This implied that there is no significant influence of educational level

on forest resources conservation among rural dwellers in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. This finding could be attributed to the fact that what makes the difference in people's perception and attitude is awareness level and not necessarily educational level. As a result, the respondents' educational level did not significantly influence their conservation of forest resources in the study area.

This finding is contrary to that of UNEP (2013) who reported that illiterate people need to be prepared to embrace some of the innovative tracts being proposed by conservators such as Agroforestry, Silviculture, selective harvesting of resources, reforestation, selective hunting, conservation of rare and exotic species of plants and animals etc. Without this education, conservation of the world's dwindling non-renewable resources will be a mere dream. Education is an essential tool for achieving sustainability.

The finding of this study also contradicted that of Wallace (2013) who revealed that the major obstacle to all these is poverty and lack of educational which make the lure of cash so seductive and the need to protect the forest so difficult for many villagers to understand. The educational level of people is a pertinent factor to how they relate to their environment that is why one of the goals of UNEP is to bring a certain level of environmental literacy to rural and indigenous people to help them function harmoniously with their immediate environment. It is believed that each living person needs a certain dose of environmental education to enable them live and develop eco-friendly attitudes toward the natural environment.

Occupation and forest resources conservation

The finding obtained from analysis and testing of hypothesis three revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that there is a significant influence of occupation on forest resources conservation among rural dwellers in Nsit Ibom Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. This finding could be associated with the observation that people from various occupation use forest resources differently due to the demands of the occupation. This accounted for the influence of occupation on forest resources conservation in the study area.

This finding agrees with that of Ukpong, Ntia, Obi and Usang (2010) who reported that many occupations in rural areas enjoy the proximity to raw materials especially those that emanate or are related to the forest, example carpenters, wood carvers, cane workers have direct access to these materials that can be harvested directly from the forest without restrictions. The forest is their raw material based and if they remain in the occupations, trades and vocations, they will depend on those resources. Considering that some of these trades and craft are passed on to upcoming generations give a picture of how long these resources have been harvested and will be for a long time to come.

The finding of this study also supported that of Obot and Barker (2009) who stated that what may appear to outsiders as a mere craft or hobby is a lifetime occupation to rural dwellers. Citing hunting for an example, they explain that while game hunting is a hobby to the elite, hunting is a lifetime occupation that many depend on for incomes for which they use to maintain themselves and use income from the trading of bush meats to train their wards and families in schools or aid them to learn other vocations. They explain that to make these people

give up these activities that negatively impact on the forest there must be a deliberate plan to rehabilitate and provide them concrete and lifelong alternative that are sustainable in the long term.

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