

Timber Dealers' Perception of their Knowledge of the Forest Law in Uyo Senatorial District of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (Pp. 125-135)

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Abstract

This study investigated timber dealers' knowledge of the forest law and regulations in Uyo Senatorial District. Five timber markets were selected through two-stage sampling. Data were collected from 238 traders in the selected markets using structured questionnaires and subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics. Results showed that over 90% of the respondents knew and understood the forest law and penalties for violation. Thus, forest offences were not committed out of ignorance, but for undue profits. Knowledge and understanding of the law were independent of respondents' Local Government Areas (LGAs), but knowledge of penalties for forest offences significantly varied with LGA ($p = 0.05$). Recommendations for improved compliance with the law and its enforcement strategies include employment of more forest policemen, provision of vehicles for patrol and evacuation of illegal forest produce, adequate penalties on culprits, and adequate political will and earnest tackling of corruption by government.

Key words: Timber dealers, Knowledge, Forest Law, Uyo Senatorial District, Nigeria.

Introduction

A law is a body of rules made and enforced by a government to regulate human conduct within a society (Balogun *et al*, 1996). In general, laws are rules of conduct that have been approved by the government, are in force over a certain territory, and must be obeyed by all persons on that territory, a violation of which attracts sanctions such as imprisonment or fine by the government. A law helps to give a degree of order to a society by protecting individuals' rights and privileges, while at the same time limiting those rights within the boundary of the common good of the society as a whole (Balogun *et al*, 1996). Therefore, for effective control and management of the forest resources in any country, it is necessary to have a forest law, and forest owners and users should know and understand the provisions of the law and adhere to them.

The Eastern Nigeria Forest Law and Regulations of 1956, Cap 55, is still used in Akwa Ibom State as the legal instrument that gives backing to the State Forestry Directorate in its management and control of forest resources in the State. Sections 35, 37 and 38 of the law respectively spell out guidelines for the prevention of forest offences, seizure of illegally obtained forest produce, and arrest of offenders, while Sections 41, 42, 44 and 45 list the offences and penalties (Udo, 1997). In compliance with the provisions of Section 33 of the Principal Law, specific sections of the Forest Regulations spell out various forest offences such as illegal taking and/or possession of forest produce, destruction of forest, farming, fishing, hunting, use of fire at unauthorized times and places or without adequate steps to prevent it from spreading, and unauthorized residence in forest reserves, as well as the stipulated penalty in Section 39 (Udo, 1997).

Many people indulge in illegal forest acts due to ignorance, lack of alternative sources of livelihood, the seemingly lucrative nature of illegal acts as a result of the profits made on illegally obtained forest produce without adverse consequences, low ethical standards in the society, and inadequate penalties on offenders (Adeyoju, 1975, 1986; Udo, 1997; Ozo-Eson, 2001). Forest offences contribute to forest degradation and destruction, as well as revenue losses by government (Ajayi, 1991; Udo, 1997), and so are at variance with the aims of sustained yield management of forests.

According to Hummel (1984), forest laws are primarily associated with preventing the misuse of the forest and protecting the rights of individuals

and the general public in matters of access, but should also serve as an agent for development and as an incentive for good forest management. Thus, forest resources must be protected from illegal activities that are not compatible with forest sustainability (Halley, 1998). However, timber dealers in Nigeria still commit illegal forest acts (Ajayi, 1991; Udo, 1997). Although ignorance of the law is not an excuse for breaking the law, knowledge of the law enlightens people, thus, helping to check offences. This study, therefore, investigated timber dealers' perception of their knowledge and understanding of the forest law and regulations operating in Akwa Ibom State and made recommendations for improving on their compliance, and on the strategies for enforcing the law.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Uyo Senatorial District, which is one of the three senatorial Districts in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria (Fig. 1). The Senatorial District lies between latitudes 4°49' and 5°22'N and longitudes 7°48' and 8°14'E, and covers approximately 2,045,109 km², with a population of 784,736, being respectively 28.2 per cent and 33.3 per cent of the State's total land area and population (Akwa Ibom State, 2002). It houses

Uyo, the State capital, where there is a lot of on-going housing and road construction projects which require enormous volumes of timber. Five of the nine Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Uyo Senatorial District were randomly selected for the study. These were Uyo, Uruan, Itu, Etinan and Ibiono Ibom. Thereafter, a market was purposively selected from each of the five LGAs based on the concentration of timber dealers. Data were collected from all the timber dealers in each of the selected markets using 238 structured questionnaires, subjected to descriptive statistics (frequency distribution and percentages), and the following hypotheses formulated and tested using chi-square statistic at $p = 0.05$:

- (i) Timber dealers in Akwa Ibom State have no knowledge of the Forest Law and the lack of knowledge is independent of the sample LGA.
- (ii) Timber dealers in Akwa Ibom State have no understanding of the Forest Law and this lack of understanding is independent of the sample LGA.
- (iii) Timber dealers in the State have no knowledge of the stipulated penalties for forest offences and this lack of knowledge is independent of the sample LGA.

- (iv) Timber dealers in Akwa Ibom State do not normally obtain permits before procuring timber, and the attitude is independent of the sample LGA.
- (v) Timber dealers' perception of the forest law in the State is that it is ineffective and irrelevant, and this perception is independent of the sample LGA.

Results and Discussion

89.5% of the respondents were within 20 to 50 years of age, which was the active and productive age range. This observation corroborated earlier observations of 85% (Udo, 2004) and 90% (Tee *et al*, 2002). The least educated timber dealers (27.7%) had primary education, while 27.3% had the first degree or diploma, and 42.9%, secondary education. According to 89.9% of the respondents, the timber trade was a profitable trade. Although the profitability of sawmilling with portable chainsaws was about 36% (Udo (1994/95), which was less than the range of 38 to 78% for small saw mills (FAO (1979), the trade was profitable even at that level of mechanization of operations.

Over 90% of the respondents indicated that they knew and understood the forest law and regulations operating in Akwa Ibom State (Tables 1 and 2), while about 93% claimed that they were aware of the penalties stipulated by law for forest offences (Table 3).

Despite the fact that over 90% of the respondents knew and understood the forest law and the penalties for forest offences, 14.3% of them had at one time or the other been prosecuted for violating the provisions of the forest law (Table 4). This implied that some of them did not commit such offences because of ignorance, but because of other reasons. Such reasons could have arisen from the urge to profiteer through corrupt practices in view of the low ethical standards of the society, and inadequate penalties on offenders (Adeyoju, 1975, 1986; Udo, 1997; Ozo-Eson, 2001).

Table 5 shows that about 81% of the respondents normally obtained forest permits for the procurement of all the timber they sold, while about 19% did not normally comply with that provision of the law. In the light of Table 4, the fact that about 14% of the respondents had at one time or the other been prosecuted for forest offences implied that at least 5% of the offenders had been committing the offences undetected. This figure was the short fall

between the percentage of respondents who were not normally obtaining permits before procuring timber (Table 5) and those who had sometime been prosecuted for contravening the forest law and regulations (Table 4).

Table 6 shows that 89.5% of the respondents viewed the forest law and regulations in the State as relevant and effective in checking forest offences, while only 10.5% saw the law and regulations as irrelevant and ineffective. However, the fact that some cases were undetected or unpunished suggested that there were some lapses in the strategies put in place for enforcing the law and regulations. Such lapses included large forest beats assigned to uniformed staff due to inadequate staffing, poor staff inducements such as non-payment of out-of pocket expenses and allowances by government, lack of vehicles for patrols and evacuation of illegal forest produce, non-commensurate penalties for offences, and corruption (Adeyoju, 1975 ; Udo, 1997 ; FAO, 2001). According to FAO (2001), some illegal activities are due to the inability of government to enforce the law, but in many other cases, they are due to corruption. It may be practically impossible to physically detect all forest offences committed, but if corruption is eliminated and people exhibit high ethical standards in their transactions, illegal forest acts could be drastically reduced, if not completely eliminated.

Results of chi-square tests of the four hypotheses at $p = 0.05$ (Table 10) showed that:

- (i) There were no significant differences between the numbers of respondents in the different LGAs who knew the forest law. Therefore, their knowledge of the forest law and regulations were independent of the LGA.
- (ii) There were no significant differences in the number of respondents in the different LGAs who understood the forest law. Thus, respondents' understanding of the law and regulations were independent of the LGA.
- (iii) There were significant differences in the number of respondents in the different LGAs who knew the penalties stipulated by law for forest offences. Therefore, the proportion of those who knew the penalties for forest offences varied with the LGA. This could imply that the strategies for enforcing the forest law and regulations were more effective in some LGAs than others; hence timber dealers in the more effective LGAs were more conversant with the penalties than the others.

- (iv) There were no significant differences between numbers of respondents in the sample LGAs who normally received permits for timber procurement. Hence, the proportion of respondents who normally received permits for timber procurement was independent of the LGAs.
- (v) There were significant differences between the sample LGAs concerning respondents' perceptions that the forest law and regulations in the state were relevant and efficient. Thus, their perceptions about the relevance and effectiveness of the forest law and regulations varied with the sample LGAs.

Conclusion

In order to improve on timber dealers' compliance with the forest law and regulations, and on the effectiveness of the strategies for combating forest offences, more uniformed field staff should be employed to reduce the sizes of beats they patrol for more efficiency. The staff should be induced with improved financial rewards, not only to work hard, but also to exhibit higher ethical standards, while those with questionable characters should be shown the way out. It is also necessary for government to provide the staff with essential materials such as vehicles for patrol and evacuation of illegal forest produce. To make the law and regulations more effective and relevant, adequate penalties must be imposed on culprits to act as a deterrent by reducing the undue profits they often make from such illegal forest activities. Finally, since most of the offences are not committed out of ignorance, but in order to make undue profits through corrupt practices, corruption must not be tackled as a problem that is peculiar to the forestry sector, but as a general societal problem. In a nutshell, the solutions to illegal forest activities include improved monitoring systems, ensuring strict compliance to the law and regulations, increased reward for integrity, and increased penalties (FAO, 2001). For these suggestions to yield fruits, government must show sufficient political will to implement them.

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Fig. 1: Akwa Ibom State showing study area

Table 1: Knowledge of Forest Law and Regulations by Respondents

Sample LGA	RESPONSES					
	Yes		No		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Uyo	48	22.2	2	9.0	50	21.0
Uruan	47	21.8	3	13.6	50	21.0
Itu	40	18.5	9	40.9	49	20.6
Etinan	45	20.8	8	36.4	53	22.3
Ibiono	36	16.7	0	0.0	36	15.1
Total	216	100.0	22	99.9	238	100.0
%	90.8		9.2		100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2003

Table 2: Knowledge of Penalties for Forest Offences stipulated by Law

Sample LGA	RESPONSES					
	Yes		No		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Uyo	47	21.2	3	18.8	50	21.0
Uruan	48	21.6	2	12.5	50	21.0
Itu	45	20.3	4	25.0	49	20.6
Etinan	47	21.2	6	37.5	53	22.3
Ibiono	35	15.8	1	6.3	36	15.1
Total	220	100.1	16	100.1	238	100.0
%	92.4		6.7		100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2003

Table 3: Respondents had sometime been prosecuted for violating the Forest Law

Sample LGA	RESPONSES					
	Yes		No		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Uyo	14	41.2	36	17.6	50	21.0
Uruan	5	14.7	45	22.1	50	21.0
Itu	5	14.7	44	21.6	49	20.6
Etinan	5	14.7	48	23.5	53	22.3
Ibiono	5	14.7	31	15.2	36	15.1
Total	34	100.0	204	100.0	238	100.0
%	14.3		85.7		100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2003

Table 4: Respondents normally obtained Licences before procurement of Timber

Sample LGA	RESPONSES					
	Yes		No		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Uyo	44	22.9	6	13.0	50	21.0
Uruan	42	21.9	8	17.4	50	21.0
Itu	44	22.9	5	10.9	49	20.6
Etinan	31	16.1	22	47.8	53	22.3
Ibiono	31	16.1	5	10.9	36	15.1
Total %	192 80.7	99.9	46 19.3	100.0	238 100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2003

Table 5: Perception of Relevance and Effectiveness of the Forest Law in the State

Sample LGA	RESPONSES					
	Relevant and effective		Irrelevant and ineffective		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Uyo	46	21.6	4	16.0	50	21.0
Uruan	47	22.1	3	12.0	50	21.0
Itu	42	19.7	7	28.0	49	20.6
Etinan	46	21.6	7	28.0	53	22.3
Ibiono	32	15.0	4	16.0	36	15.1
Total %	213 89.5	100.0	25 10.5	100.0	238 100.0	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2003

Table 6: Results of Tests of Hypotheses (df = 4 ; p = 0.05 ; $\chi^2 = 9.488$)

Hypotheses Significance Decision	χ^2_{cal}	
(i) Knowledge of Forest Law is independent of LGA Reject H_0	12.957	NS
(ii) Understanding of Forest Law is independent of LGA Reject H_0	12.759	NS
(iii) Knowledge of the penalties is independent of LGA Accept H_0	3.475	S
(iv) Obtaining permits before procurement of timber is independent of LGA Reject H_0	22.101	NS
(v) Respondent's opinion on effectiveness and relevance of forest law is independent of LGA Accept H_0	2.584	S

Source: Field Survey, 2003.