
Indigenous Strategies for Communal Resource Management in Oku, North West Region of Cameroon

Cordelia Givechek Kometa, Livinus VERNYUY Wirnkar

Department of Topography and Real Estate Management, Higher Technical Teachers' Training College, University of Buea, Kumba, Cameroon

Email address:

ckgiven@yahoo.com (C. G. Kometa)

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Abstract: The exploitation of common property resources has often witnessed rapid degradation due to indiscriminate exploitation for selfish reasons. The Oku Community Forest is a replica of this type of forest that has been under human influence since time immemorial. Taking into consideration the fact that institutions have failed to meet up with sustainable management strategies, the management of these forest resources depends unavoidably on the holistic approach which requires local communities and institutions to make use of indigenous technology in resource management. This study focuses on the indigenous strategies in communal resource management in the Oku Community Forest. Data for the study were collected using both primary and secondary sources with much emphasis on the administration of questionnaires. The data were analysed in both qualitative and quantitative terms. The relationship between population increase, communal resource exploitation and the impact on the environment was correlated through the use of the chi square. From field evidence, there is a relationship between population increase, the over exploitation of communal resources and communal resource degradation. The study therefore recommends the community based resource management as a panacea for sustainable community forest resources in the Oku Community Forest. This will help to limit over exploitation and thus could enhance a sustainable management of the communal forest resources.

Keywords: Indigenous Strategies, Communal Resources, Management, Oku Community Forest

1. Introduction

Forests cover almost one third of the world land area and nearly all are inhabited by indigenous and rural communities who have customary rights to their forests and have developed ways of life and traditional knowledge that are attuned to their natural environment [1]. Furthermore, forests constitute the world's largest reservoir of biodiversity which includes all species of plants, animals, microorganisms and ecosystems as well as ecological processes [2]. They make up one of the planet's largest and most important terrestrial ecosystems with a profound influence on the structure and the functioning of human habitat [3]. Man's sustenance on the landscape depends on the forest through the exploitation of forest resources for various uses. It serves as a source of material for construction, food, fuel wood energy for cooking and the heating of homes amongst others. According to the study [4], the forest provides both environmental and

material services to man. In a community which is purely agrarian, the inhabitants completely depend on the natural resources as a means of survival as it is the case with the populace of Oku whose forests have been a relieving tool to the entire community. The forest does not only provide natural resources to man but also add to the aesthetic value of the region and also of spiritual importance. The traditional knowledge acquired by the people is that of the forest being the "home of the spirits" or the "last vestiges of the gods" which often control their relationship with it. The forest is seen as an extension of their temporal and spiritual lives as most of their traditional shrines are found in these forests.

A study [5] posits that the world's forest covers about 31% of the total land area. Primary forests account for 36% of forest area, but have decreased by more than 40 million hectares since 2000. The study [3] confirms that in the past,

the forest covered about 60% of the earth's surface but this is no longer the case today as the forest cover has been greatly reduced as a result of the various human activities. In the tropics, the natural tropical forest was reduced from approximately 1937 million hectares to less than 1800 million in 1990, a loss of over 100 million hectares. This resulted from deforestation especially for agricultural activities and settlement [6]. The Oku Community Forest has been subjected to such degradation for a long time as a result of excessive exploitation. Most of the communal resources exploited from the community forests are dominantly non-timber forest products (NTFP) [7]. Some of these communal resources include fuel wood, herbs for medicine like (*Pittosporum veridiflorum* (mannii) and *Agauria salicifolia*), *Prunus africana*, rodents, wood for carving, alpine bamboo used locally for construction, additives (colourings, preservatives and flavourings), and also mushrooms and honey. Because of this degradation, the community has resorted to indigenous strategies of managing these forests.

In view of community rights to natural resource management, a study [8] posit that communities and indigenous groups own or manage an estimated 11% of the world's wide forest. In the developing countries, it is about 22% of the total forest area versus 3% in the developed countries. The proportion is much higher in some countries than in others. In Mexico and Papua New Guinea, for example, community groups own about 80% and 90% of the forest respectively [9]. For sustainability of these forests to be achieved, the governments of the countries with the traditional authorities and the local communities have to be involved in the management of the forest. It is against this background that a study [10] opined that the local people should be involved in such management projects especially during the project design and the follow-up phase rather than in its implementation phase. This strategy therefore brought to light community-based forest management projects or the concept of community forestry. This is because the rural communities living in close proximity to these forests depend largely on them for their livelihoods. Their exploitation of the forest resources is most often done unsustainably so much so that these forest resources are degraded at a very fast rate. According to a study [11], the anxieties about forest decline are significant because forest provide a complex array of ecological, social and economic goods to mankind. This situation makes sustainable forest management multi-dimensional as it involves balancing between environmental sustainability, social and economic sustainability [2]. From an environmental-economic perspective, a community forest enterprise (CFE) management plan should seek to increase the levels of capital through the accumulation of machinery, equipment, and infrastructure, while also increasing the value of the natural resource base. It has been noted that education and technical training are forms of investments in human and social capital, with the objective of improving the long term productive capacity. They further see the cost of time and effort in creating an organization as an investment in social capital.

Community forest in Cameroon is often viewed as a way of redirecting some benefits of timber exploitation towards community development. This generated interest in community forestry especially in the southern part of Cameroon with a high potential for income generation through timber exploitation [12]. In Cameroon, the revisions of the Forestry Law in 1994 have enabled community associations and cooperatives to acquire the exclusive rights to manage and exploit up to 5000ha of customary forest under a 25 year contract renewable every 5 years. This contract resulted in the creation of 147 new community forests covering a total area of 637000ha of humid forest [13]. The Kilum-Ijim Community Forest in the Bamenda Highlands of Cameroon does not contain valuable timber to interest logging companies but it is an important centre of endemism in flora and fauna especially Bannerman turrac. The local population is very much interested in the more direct benefits derived from the forest such as fuel wood, medicine and honey. This justifies the much needed effort by the population of Oku to engage in indigenous strategies in the management of this community forest.

Moreover, before the promulgation of the new Forestry Law in 1994, the management of forests in Cameroon was the responsibility of the government regardless of community participation. This law brought to the limelight the participation of these communities and enabled them to be fully involved in every stage of the community forest management with the state acting as a supervisory body and also other stakeholders involved in the management of these community forests. The Oku Community Forest was initiated in 1987 by the then International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) now Birdlife International. After several attempts to conserve this forest in 1931 by the conservator of forest for the Bamenda Division which succeeded in delimiting only part of the forest, the forest lost about 50% of the size it had in 1963 [12] resulting from human activities within and around the forest such as grazing and agriculture. Before 1995, the Oku Community Forest was divided in to the Kilum and Ijim Forest Projects and were administered separately. In 1995, they were merged into the Kilum-Ijim Forest Project managed by Birdlife International. The project rounded up in 2004 and the management of the Kilum-Ijim Forest was transferred to the local community. The management of this community forests is now in the hands of the administration, traditional authorities and the local communities.

The Oku Community Forest has over the years been witnessing a significant reduction in its areal extent and forest cover. This is an indication that it is under serious threat resulting from population pressure and an increased demand for communal resources and the activities of the local population within and around the forest. These activities include; unsustainable hunting methods, the felling of trees, the grazing of animals within the community forest, the unsustainable exploitation of *Prunus africana* barks for commercial purposes and the extensive clearing of the forest for agricultural activities by the local inhabitants. The

unsustainable use of the forest has created a scenario whereby the forest is exploited in the most profitable but least sustainable way. This is being compounded by the fact that the management of the Oku Community Forest is in the hands of various stakeholders who do not cooperate with the indigenous community. Activities are carried out separately without involving the rest of the community thus, creating an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion amongst them. This is a major setback for the proper management of the community forest as its conservation is seen by some members of the community as a means of relieving them of what is rightfully theirs.

The unequal representation of the forest user groups and the local population such as the women and the youths within the various forest management committees with regards to decision-making and resource exploitation is also a serious issue. This makes some communities to feel cheated when it comes to decisions towards the management of these resources. They go against these management decisions, thus, making implementation difficult. There is equally the lack of follow up in the implementation of various indigenous strategies. This makes it difficult for the communities to actually evaluate the effectiveness of these different strategies. In addition, the funds provided by the local community for various activities like the payment of patrol teams in the forest are insufficient and the little available is sometimes being embezzled. These problems have created a tough time in implementing the various indigenous strategies for the management Oku community forest resources. Because of the importance of this forest to the local inhabitants, there has been the need for community participation in forest management over the years especially through indigenous strategies although much still has to be done in order to ensure a sustainable communal resource management within the Oku Community Forest.

2. Methodology

The study made use of extensive primary data collection through the administration of questionnaires using the random sampling technique. The population was grouped according to the different activities carried out in and around the Oku Community Forest. These groups of respondents provided data on some of the indigenous strategies put in place by the local population towards the management of the resources. 100 questionnaires were administered in six villages selected from each of the six compartments that make up the Oku Community Forest. These compartments include Emveh-Mii which is the largest compartment in terms of the surface area, Kedjim Mawes, Upper Shinga, Ijim, Nchij and Mbai or Ngoksebeh Forest Management Institutions. Over 20 questionnaires were administered in Elak which is found in the Emveh-Mii Forest Management Institution. A total of 16 questionnaires each were administered at Kesotin found in the KedjimMawes Forest Management Institution, Nguikui I found in the Upper Shinga Forest Management Institution, Jikijim found in the

Ijim Forest Management Institution, Simonkoh in the Nchij Forest Management Institution and Kelang in the Mbai or Ngoksebeh Forest Management Institution. Forest users were randomly sampled from between hunters, traditional herbalists, wood exploiters, bee farmers, and wood carvers as well as farmers carrying out agricultural activities around the community forest. The administration of questionnaires provided data on the communal resources and their exploitation in the Oku Community Forest, indigenous strategies for communal resources management and the extent of implementation of the indigenous strategies. Interviews with forest users, personnel of the Forest Management Institutions and the Association of Oku Forest Management Institutions (ASSOFOMI) and the traditional authorities like the Kwifon within the forest provided data on the methods of exploitation, activities of the forest management institutions and the indigenous strategies implemented to enhance the sustainable management of communal resources and the challenges faced in carrying out these activities respectively. More so, published and unpublished documents from varied sources, text books, journals and the internet were equally consulted. The data were analysed in both qualitative and quantitative terms through the use of inferential and non-inferential statistics.

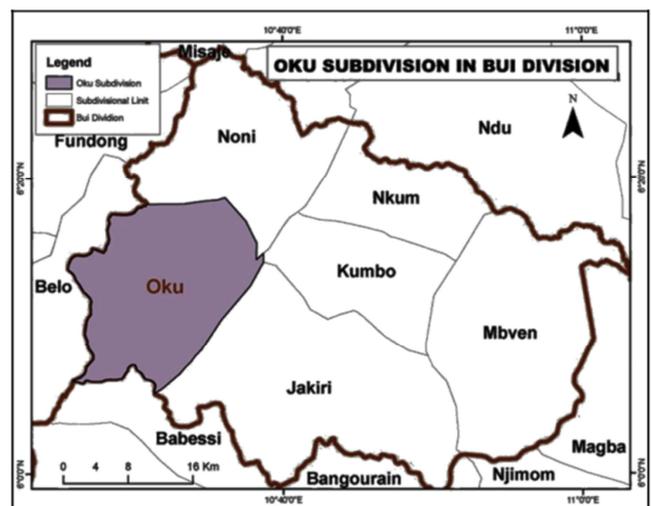


Figure 1. The Location of Oku Sub-Division in Bui Division.

Source: National Institute of Cartography Yaounde, Administrative units of Cameroon, 2011.

This study was carried out in Oku Sub-Division in Bui Division in the Bamenda Highlands, North West Region of Cameroon. The study area falls between latitude $6^{\circ}5'$ to $6^{\circ}15'$ North of the equator and longitude $10^{\circ}20'$ to $10^{\circ}40'$ East of the Greenwich Meridian. It stretches on 232 km^2 made up of 36 villages [14]. This area is principally a highland that culminates on the Mount Oku. It is bounded to the North by Noni and Kumbo Central Sub-Divisions, to the west by Fundong, south by Ngoketunja Division and to the east by Jakiri Sub-Division (Figure 1). Oku is situated on the slopes of Mount Oku with a very rugged and mountainous relief. The second highest mountain in Cameroon is in this

area with an altitude of 3011m above sea level [14]. The southern slopes are known as the Ejim Mountain or the Ijem ridge while the northern slopes are the Kilum Mountain. The Oku Community Forest is blessed with a lot of communal resources thanks to the existence of the Kilum-Ijem Mountain Forest.

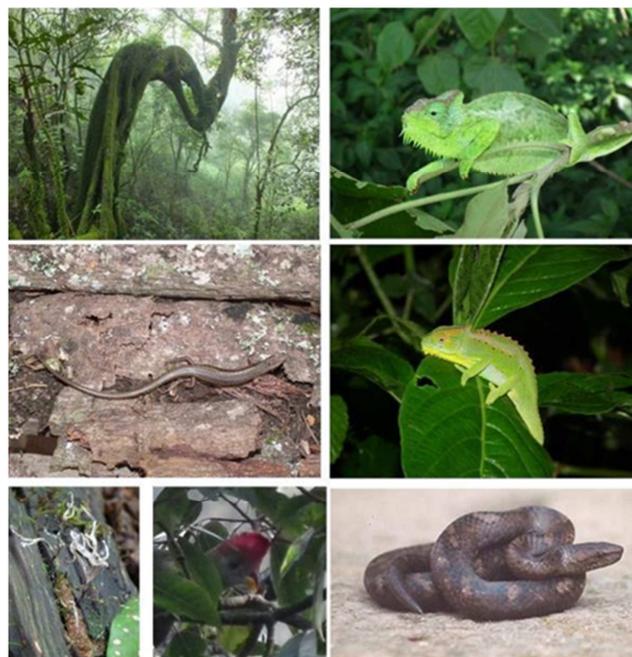
3. Communal Resources in the Oku Community Forest

The Oku Community Forest is blessed with a host of communal resources, a majority of which are exploited, extracted or tapped from the forest. The forest is montane in nature perpetuated by patches of grassland, rich in bird diversity as well as other fauna and flora. The forest equally hosts the watershed on which the local population depends. These resources have attracted the attention of the indigenes and non-indigenes who are the main exploiters of the forest resources for their livelihoods. This forest also constitutes a research ground for local, national and international researchers as well as touristic attractions for many visitors especially with the strategic location of the Lake Oku.

The Oku Community Forest is excellent in its high level of endemism in flora and fauna. It supports many endemic birds and plants species and some other taxa such as amphibians, small mammals and reptiles. But indiscriminate hunting in the past has played a great role in the loss of mega fauna. Presently, the largest mammals in the forest include the Olive baboon (*Papioanubis*), Preussgruenon (*Cercopithecuspreussi*), and Green monkey (*C. athiostantalus*). The population of small mammal species is higher amongst its endemic species such as the Mount Oku mouse, Golden mole and the Zebra mice which are highly hunted or trapped by the local population especially the Mount Oku Mouse. More so, the forest equally supports about 31 recorded bird species with two of the bird species being endemic to the Western Highlands of Cameroon which are the Tauraco bannermani (Bannerman's tauraco) and *Platysteiralaticincta* (Banded wattle eye). The Oku Community Forest is the last strong hold for these two bird species. The forest equally supports endemics in other faunal taxa including two amphibians which are the Oku clawed toad (*Xenopus*) and *Crotaphatremalamoltei* (Figure 2).

RESOURCE EXPLOITATION IN THE OKU COMMUNITY FOREST

The Oku Community Forest rich in diverse communal resources have attracted the attention of the natives who act as the main exploiters of the forest. This forest equally serves as a research ground and touristic site both at the national and international levels. Over exploitation of these resources has been the main reason for their degradation.



Source: CAMGEW, 2013

Figure 2. Some Endemic Plant and Animal Species in the Oku Community Forest. Ranging from *Prunus Africana*, Carmelion, Agama Lizard, Weaver Birds to Rattle Snake.

4. The Exploitation of Flora and Fauna Communal Resources

The local population is involved in the exploitation of the various flora and fauna communal resources found within the Oku Community Forest especially the non-timber forest products. Field work reveals that the population involved in the exploitation from the six selected villages varies as per the resources being exploited (Table 1).

Table 1. Exploitation of communal resources within the Oku Community Forest.

Communal Resources	Frequency	Percentage
Fuel wood and building materials	20	20
Honey production	18	18
Animal rearing	10	10
Traditional medicine	4	4
Calving wood and materials for weaving	7	7
Food	15	15
Hunting and trapping	5	5
Watershed	13	13
<i>Prunus africana</i> exploitation	3	3
Ecotourism and research	5	5
Total	100	100

Source: Field Work, 2016

Fuel wood harvesting constitutes one of the most essential activities in the Oku Community Forest. From field evidence, 20% of the sampled population cut down the forests for fuel wood harvesting and building materials making it the highest communal resource that is being exploited from the forest. Over 18% of the sampled population from the six villages

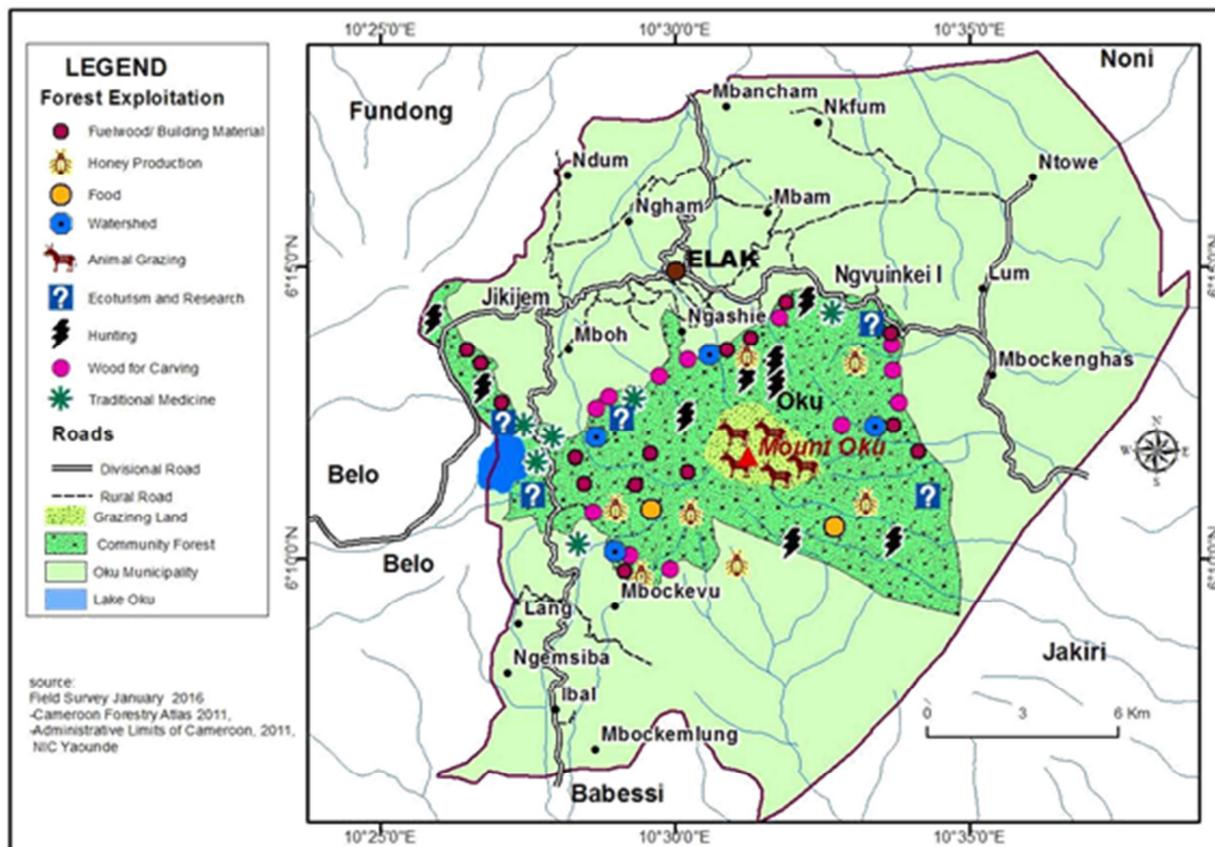
was involved in honey production which makes it the second highest activity of the population in the region after fuel wood and building materials. The Oku Community Forest is a typical source of food as well as rural alternative food supplements for the inhabitants of Oku and the neighbouring villages. About 15% of the sampled population identified the community forest as an important source of food. Watershed exploitation covers 13% as a multitude of springs within this forest have been harnessed by the adjacent villages to supply community drinking water. Exploitation for animal grazing constitutes 10%, exploitation of wood for carving and weaving material 7%, hunting and trapping 5%, ecotourism and research activities 5%, exploitation of medicinal plants 4%, and *Prunus africana* 3%. An interview conducted with a member of the Association of Oku Forest Management Institutions shows that, the exploitation of *Prunus Africana* barks is restricted and only Forest Management Institutions are authorized to exploit this resource. The spatial distribution of communal resource exploitation in the Oku Community Forest is presented in Figure 3.

5. Environmental Degradation of Forest Resources

The Oku Community Forest is viewed by most members of the community as a common property resource which is collectively owned by the community. Because of this

collective right over the community forest, each member of the community in the drive to derive maximum satisfaction from the exploitation of the communal resources within this forest do so without any thought on whether the resources are being depleted or not. As a result, this Oku community has been greatly affected by the tragedy of the commons whereby individuals acting independently and rationally according to their self-interest behave contrary to the best interests of the whole group thereby depleting some common resource [15]. Man's alteration of this natural forest is evident through environmental degradation. Figure 4 presents man's impact on the environment and natural resource degradation.

From Figure 3, activities such as fuel wood harvesting, grazing, slash and burn agriculture and the harvesting of non-timber forest products as well as medicinal plants have contributed greatly in the degradation of the forest on a large scale. This concept points to the fact that the exploitation of the communal resources by each individual in the community has a great impact on the community forest. This notion is very important in the management of commonly owned properties like the Oku Community Forest wherein each individual, tries to exploit as he can at the detriment of the resources or the environment. This enables the local population to see reasons in respecting the various rules that have been put in place for the management of the community resources in the Oku Community Forest.



Source: Cameroon Forestry Atlas, Administrative Limits of Cameroon, 2011, INC Yaounde.

Figure 3. The Spatial Distribution of Communal Resources and Exploitation in the Oku Community Forest.

6. Indigenous Management Strategies for Communal Resource Management

With respect to increased rate of forest degradation, the indigenous communities assumed the responsibility of

managing the forest through indigenous strategies. This responsibility is shared between the traditional authorities and the local population involved in communal resource exploitation and management.

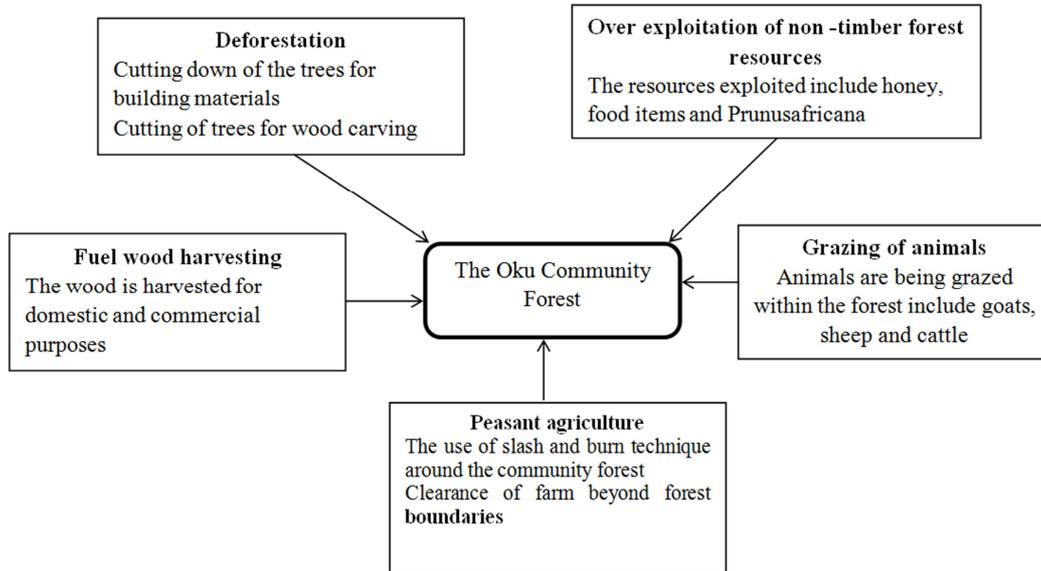


Figure 4. Human activities within the Oku Community Forest Source: (Field work (2016).

The traditional authorities through the traditional justice system organizes the forest exploiters into user groups such as bee keepers, calvers, hunters and the forest graziers to ease administration. These exploiters are instructed on the quota to exploit and the management options available. Besides, the traditional authorities of Oku have also put in place a traditional mechanism in which each of the villages are expected to implement in order to regulate, manage and control common resources exploitation. They include the institution of shrines in the community forest, the institution of traditional non-harvesting days and injunctions. Over 35% of the sampled population attests that some portions of the community forest have been designated as shrines where rituals and sacrifices are made to the gods by the traditional authorities. The exploitation in these areas is not allowed as they are considered as the vestiges of the gods. These shrines are designated using injunctions and peace plants. They aid in the regulation of communal resource exploitation within the Oku Community Forest as the local populations have great respect for their cultural values. The traditional non-harvesting days (35%) are traditional days respected by every member of the community. It is believed that neither farm work nor any form of exploitation is done on these days in the entire village. About 30% of the population indicated that injunction order has equally been an effective management option. Injunction order is placed in an area in cases of over exploitation. Once this is placed in an area, exploitation comes to a standstill until it is removed by the traditional authorities. These mechanisms instituted by the traditional authorities were able to curb down over exploitation of these

resources, hence, conservation. The indigenous strategies by the traditional authorities for communal resource management occupied a central place in the traditional and cultural practices of the Oku people. These indigenous strategies are deeply rooted and reflected in the culture and tradition of the Oku people till date and have been very instrumental in the management of this community forest (Figure 5).

Figure 5 reveals that the institution of shrines in the community forest and the institution of traditional non-harvesting days occupy 35% each making them more effective indigenous strategies in the management of communal resources in the Oku Community Forest. This is opposed to the use of injunction orders with 30% according to the sampled population.

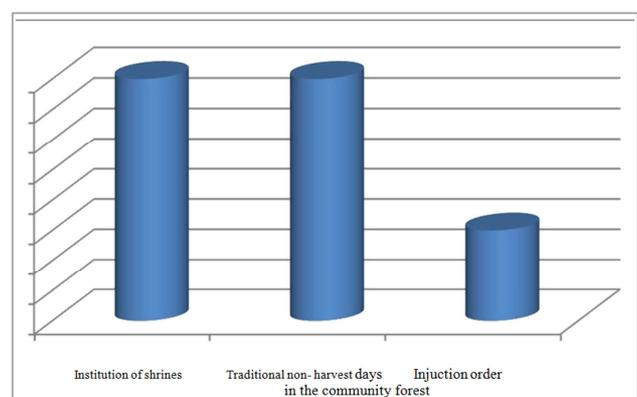


Figure 5. Traditional Authorities and Indigenous Communal Resource Management Oku Source: (Field work, 2016).

The indigenous community has also been instrumental in the management of communal resources through the implementation of indigenous technologies. They constitute the primary managers since their livelihoods depend on these resources for sustenance. Their activities have been a relieving factor for resource degradation in the region. To achieve this goal, different forest management institutions were established comprising members from all spheres of the community such as the Common Initiative Groups (CIG), Forest user groups like wood carvers and bee keepers who are also part of the management committees. These forest management institutions ensure that resources are equitably distributed, check unwanted exploitation, ensure the effective management of the finances of the management institutions especially towards community development projects, as well as accountability and transparency in the management of

resources. The forest patrol teams and forest guards are also part of the management committee charged with ensuring the safety of the forest. All the forest management institutions came together to form the Association of Forest Management Institutions (ASSOFOMI) with its headquarters in Elak-Oku that regulates and controls the activities of all the Forest Management Institutions. These institutions have as objectives to conserve and improve the state of the forest, supervision, coordination and follow up of activities carried out within and around the community forest, check forest crimes, prevent and fight forest fires as well as maintain good stakeholder relationship. These objectives therefore serve as guide lines for the various activities in which they are involved. These different indigenous strategies are presented in Figure 6.

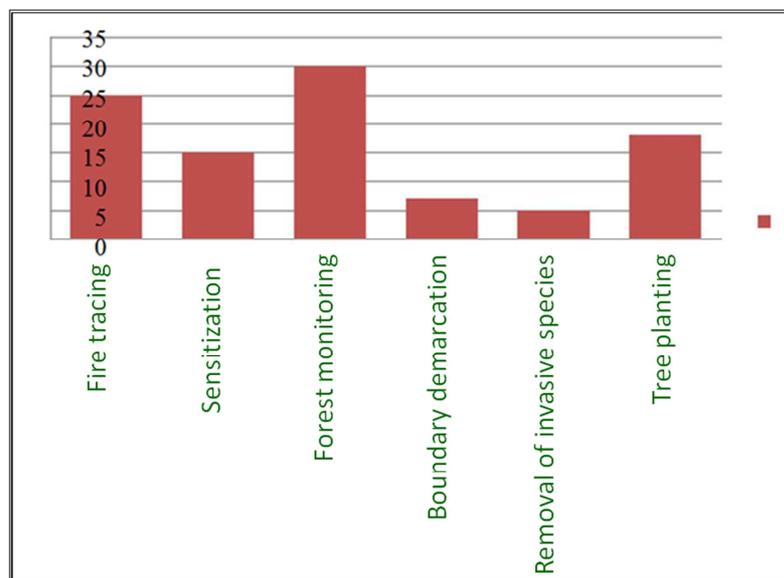


Figure 6. The various indigenous strategies for the management of the Oku Community Forest (Field Work, 2016).

According to Figure 6, forests monitoring (30%) and fire tracing (25%) are the most effective indigenous strategies that have been put in place by the forest management institutions. This is opposed to demarcating of forest boundaries and fencing with 7% and the removal of invasive species with 5%. The spontaneous action reflected in the different indigenous strategies is an indication that the community has recognised the importance of these resources as the only source of livelihood and also acknowledged their high levels of degradation. The Driving Force – Pressure – State – Impact – Response in Figure 7 clearly justifies this assertion. This is a strategy that takes into account the factors that necessitates resources degradation, the impact of this degradation on the environment and what response can be initiated to enhance resource development and sustainability.

The driving forces for the exploitation of communal resources in Oku are sectorial. The sectors include energy, agriculture, settlement and economic activities carried out by the local population. These activities exert pressure on the natural resources through over exploitation, deforestation,

fuel wood harvesting and the spread of forest fires. These pressures alter the state of observable resources through changes in the resource base. These changes occur through a reduction in the quantity and quality of the communal resources within the forest and the impact is felt through the depletion and degradation of communal resources. This degradation sets the pace for a quick response through the formulation of the Forest Management Institutions, the traditional non-harvesting days, injunction orders and demarcation (Figure 6). These four categories of interaction are the basic components of the DPSIR framework [16].

7. Challenges in Communal Resources Management in the Oku Community Forest

The indigenous management of communal resources in the Oku Community Forest has been confronted by a lot of challenges. These difficulties result from the fact that

some members of the local population do not respect these strategies while some of them perceive indigenous management strategies as a means of trying to restrict

them from what is rightfully theirs for the benefit of a few members of the traditional authority and the forest management institutions (Table 2).

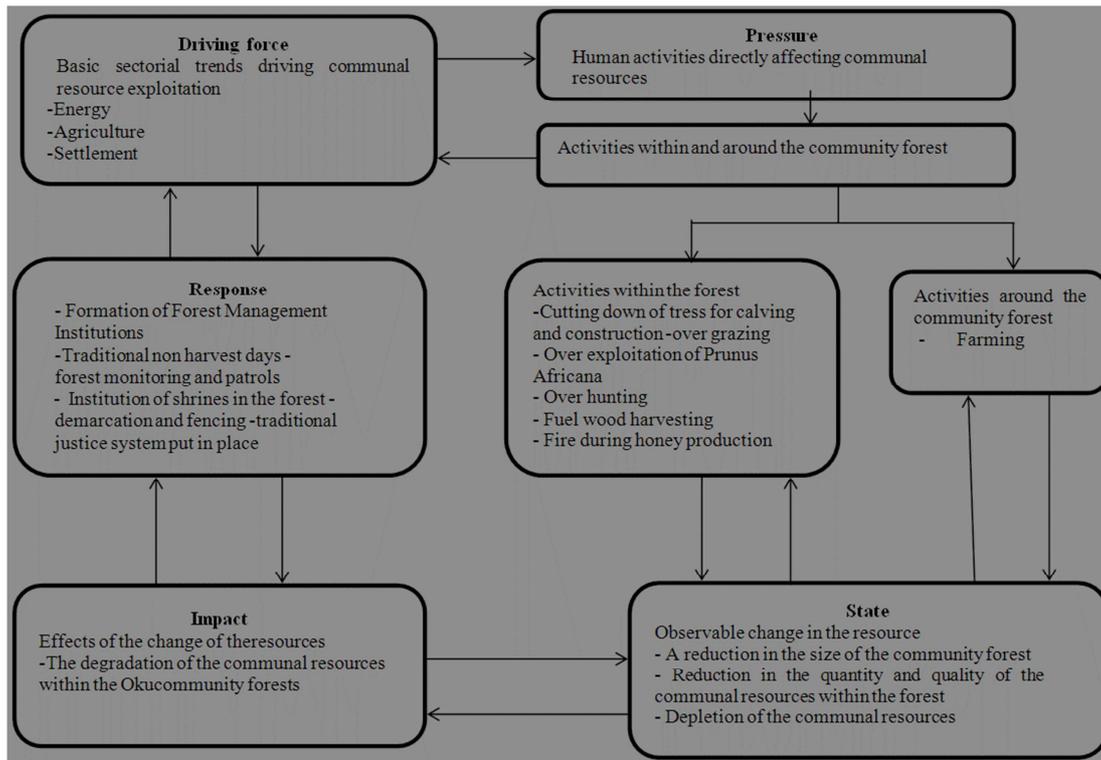


Figure 7. The Driving – Force – Pressure – State – Impact – Response Framework.

Table 2. Challenges in the management of communal forest resources.

Problem	Frequency	Percentage
Fires	20	20
Illegal grazing	19	19
Illegal exploitation of <i>Prunus africana</i>	10	10
Harvesting of fresh wood	25	25
Illegal poaching	8	8
Conflict amongst interest groups	11	11
Increase in non-indigenous population	7	7
Total	100	100

Source: Field Work, (2016)

From Table 2, the harvesting of fresh wood from the forest is the most challenging problem with 25%, bush fires, 20%, illegal grazing 19%, conflict amongst interest group 11%, illegal exploitation of *Prunus africana* 10%, illegal poaching and increase in non-indigenous population 8% and 7% respectively. The uncontrolled grazing, over exploitation and bush fires in the forest tend to foster the savanisation of the forest and tree regeneration very difficult. These activities have frustrated some of the indigenous management strategies instituted for the management of communal resources in the Oku Community Forest.

The Traditional Authorities and the Forest Management Institutions in the course of executing their roles have equally encountered challenges of different magnitudes ranging from power tussle between the traditional authorities and forest management institutions, internal conflicts like the

embezzlement of the management committee funds coupled with inadequate funds to execute projects and illegal exploitation of *Prunus africana* by some members of the management. This reduces their effectiveness of managing the forests. These situations do not only create managerial difficulties within the management institutions but they also extend to the community. From field studies, most people have the impression that the management institutions are there to make their fortune and not for the management or sustainability of the Oku Community Forest. They see the various indigenous strategies as a means of taking them off what rightfully belongs to them. This makes it difficult for them to implement the rules set by the forest management authorities in the management of these forest resources. It was equally observed that most Forest Management Institutions lack the services of qualified and trained administrative staff since most of those employed have little or no knowledge in community forest management. This makes it difficult for the implementation of the indigenous forest management strategies (Table 2).

8. Conclusion

The exploitation of communal resources for economic, traditional, domestic, medicinal and other purposes is an indication that the community forest occupies a central position in the lives of the local population of the Oku Sub-Division. This is the major reason for the indigenous

management systems to ensure the sustainability of the communal resources in the Oku Community Forest. In spite of the fact that various indigenous strategies have been put in place for the management of these communal resources, the implementation is confronted with a number of problems. For the successful implementation of these indigenous strategies for sustainable communal resources and the community forest in Oku at large, there is a need for total cooperation and participation of the local population, traditional authorities, Forest Management Institutions and other stakeholders involved in the management of the Oku Community Forest. This synergy is needed for the sustainable management of the communal resources in the Oku Community Forests.

9. Recommendations

Community resource management has evolved as a way of maximizing benefits derived from natural resources whilst enhancing their status. It has been argued that the status of the resources and how they are used are inseparably linked and as such, there is a dynamic equilibrium between renewal and utilization. As a result, the development of community resource management plans, (CRMPs) has evolved as an attempt to establish, monitor and manage this equilibrium. The CRMPs are implemented through adaptive management to cope with the risk and to cater for unpredictable and sometimes-unknown responses of resources and variation of other conditions. The study recommends the community based natural resource management (CBNRM) as a tool for the sustainable management of the Oku-Community Forest Resources. The involvement of the local communities and securing the rights of the poor and marginalized groups in sustainable management of natural resources is a central theme in international development assistance. The concept of CBNRM is related to a variety of terms, including participatory, community, community-based, collaborative, joint and popular natural resource management. These concepts are often used interchangeably, but may also be used with the intention to emphasize specific characteristics of related approaches. Thus, the concept of CBNRM tends to be associated with approaches where the focal unit for joint natural resource management is the local community. Sometimes, it has also been applied to designate approaches where local communities play a central but not exclusive role in natural resource management. In practice however, CBNRM is mostly about ways in which the state can share rights and responsibilities regarding natural resources with local communities. If the stakeholders that be could incorporate the local communities of Oku into the forest management programme, it will greatly enhance sustainable forest management. By being part of the management body and also considering the fact that their livelihoods depend solely on the forest is an impetus for effective community forest management. This CBNRM for poverty reduction, resource conservation, and good governance can therefore be

considered as a management strategy for the Oku Community Forest with the aim of reducing poverty, conserving natural resources and promoting good governance and decentralization, in a single process (Figure 8).

The close link between the three objectives of poverty reduction, resource conservation, and good governance is increasingly acknowledged by various international and national actors, including development practitioners as well as conservationists, and this is reflected in many countries' development strategies. The objective of poverty reduction is closely linked with natural resource conservation, because poor people in developing countries depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. It is therefore important to ensure sustainable management of these resources so as to enhance poverty alleviation and improved living standards. Effective and equitable natural resource management and conservation, on the other hand, require genuine involvement by the social actors who depend on the resource. Involvement of poor people in natural resource management is often best achieved through decentralization of authority over the resources, and this cannot be approached in isolation from the need to promote good governance. In simple terms, governance means the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented.

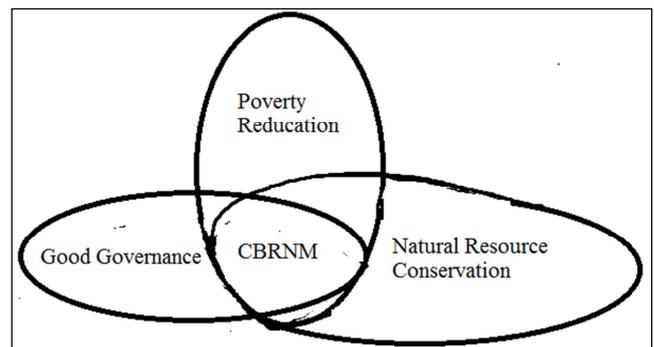


Figure 8. Community Based Natural Resource Management and its linkages to the overall development objectives in the Oku Community Forest.

Decentralization is often seen as an important means to foster and nurture the important elements of good governance in developing countries. Policy-makers and researchers recommend decentralized natural resource management because the local people are likely to identify and prioritize their environmental problems more accurately than centralized organizations. Resource allocation is more efficient and transaction costs lower when decisions are taken locally, so that state expenditure on management can be reduced, while resource conservation is improved. At the same time, the local groups are more likely to respect decisions that they have participated in taking, the monitoring of resource use is improved, while marginalized groups gain greater influence on local policy. It is therefore evident that proper conservation of the Oku Community Resource as a common resource can only be enhanced through the Community Based Natural Resource Management approach.

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