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Review

Contribution of forests to achieving the millennium development goals

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The United Nation's millennium development goals (MDGs) are common objectives that provide a framework to meet the basic needs and rights of millions of people in the developing world. Eight goals with 18 targets and over 40 indicators will help to monitor and meet up with these goals. A target date of 2015 had been set for the world leaders to work towards. Forest management and conservation is central to the achievement of most of these goals. Forest reserves provide food and income, forest also play critical roles in sustaining the health of the environment by mitigating climate change, conserving biological diversity, maintaining clean and reliable water resources, controlling erosion, protecting agricultural soils, sustaining and changing land productivity, protecting coastal and marine resources, providing low cost and renewable energy, and enhancing the urban environment. The paper pointed out the need for forest development to be included in national budget in order to support the achievement of the MDGs. The need to extend the knowledge of forest reserves management and involve energy stakeholders in forest resources management were emphasized.

Key words: Contribution, forests, achievement, millennium development goals, poverty, hunger, gender equality and women, material health.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of human existence, ways are fathomed to ensure that the factors needed for the survival of man on this planet called earth are sustained. In keeping with the aforementioned principle, the United Nations Organization came up with global development agenda. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (2005), the development agenda, shifted emphasis after the millennium summit in September 2000. Subsequent consolidation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which are based on goals agreed upon in world summit and global conferences in 1990s. It is worthy of observation that sustainable development efforts are now tenaciously focused on poverty reduction and the MDGs are highly reclined upon as the guiding frame for international development assistance.

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Presently, there are eight MDGs with their quantitative targets expected to be achieved in the year 2015. The UN MDGs include:

1. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achievement of universal primary education.
3. Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.
4. Reduction of child mortality.
5. Improvement of maternal health.
6. Combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other deceases.
7. Ensured environmental sustainability.
8. Development of a global partnership for development.

Having set the aforementioned development goals, the world needs to look inward to fathom or fashion out ways through which they could be achieved. This paper is therefore written to suggest ways by which forest may contribute to achievement of the MDGs.

CONTRIBUTION OF FOREST TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Goal 1

If forest resources are sustainably harnessed, they will make the most direct contribution to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. It is a common knowledge that forests provide food for the teeming population and the fuel wood with which the food is cooked.

Vegetables such as *Piper umbelation, Ocimum gratissimum, crassocephalumereidoides, Vitex doniana, vernonia amygdaelina* are useful food supplements; fruits like *Gambaya albids*, *Syncephalumdulcificum, Artocarpus artilus and Irvingia gabonensis*, to mention a few, serve as food. There are also tuberous roots that are found in the forests that are useful as foods, not to talk of game meats and fishes.

The forests are genetic banks from where genetic materials are extracted or exploited and used to improve the yield, disease and pest resistance, and gestation periods of food crops and livestock. Jimoh and Haruna (2007) stated that households consume non timber forest products (NTFPs) as food daily. Carney (1998), Bryon and Arnold (1999) averred that rural people rely on NTFPs for sustainable livelihood and that majority of households in developing countries and a proportion of urban households depend on plant and animal products for part of their nutritional needs.

It had been reported that rural people receive an average of more than 20% of their income from collection, processing and selling of semi domesticated plants and animals (Olagoke and Adekunde, 2008). The income made from the sale of forest products (wood and non-wood) are used by households to meet their nutritional and other needs. Rural households make a lot of income from NTFPs and Timber Forest Products (TFPs) (Kuponiyi, 2007). The craft inputs that are used to produce craft items such as baskets, fans, roots, chairs, etc are extracted from the forest. These are made into the above mentioned and other items to create income for rural households. This fact is congruent with Angelsen and Wunder (2003) who opined that tens of millions of people depend on forests to supplement their livelihoods. Forest according to FAO (2003), can provide safety nets, keeping many poor rural people from sinking deeper into poverty or serving as a lifeline in times of emergency. It was estimated that 12.9 million people are employed in the industrial sector as saw millers and loggers (FAO, 2005). Twice that much (particularly from the poorer sectors of the society) may be involved in the informal sector, for example in the collection and sale of fuel wood and non-wood forest products (Lebedys, 2004).

Considering the above facts, it can be conveniently said that forests have the potential to catapult people out of hunger and poverty by supplying the most basic needs of man. Forest related activities, according to Olagoke and Adekunle (2008), can be harnessed to achieve the first of the MDGs through:

1. Forest tenure reform,
2. Providing financial market and technical services for forest-based activities, and
3. Eliminating forestry regulations that discriminate against poor people, and focusing conservation efforts on plant and animal species which poor people rely on.

Goal 2

Different households in the forest area communities derive income from the sale of forest products. The income so derived is channeled by rural families to cater for the educational needs of their children. Rural families extract timber and non-timber products from their forest for sale. Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) constitute important capital for rural families and a crucial source of livelihood which is used to augment income from other sources apart from those who depend on it solely for livelihood (Kuponiyi, 2007). Loggers derive income from the forests. Such income enables loggers to send their children to primary school. This is confirmed by FAO (2005) that states that forest derived income helps rural families to send their children to primary school. But Borrow et al. (2005) states that forest resources can either be an assets, a cost or a combination of both to education. Non-attendance at school due, for example, to fuelwood collection or livestock herding, herding reduces the chances of completing primary education (Olagoke and Adekunle, 2008).

Goal 3

Various programmes that are gender sensitive are organisized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental agencies regularly around the world. These programmes help to empower women and improve their access to forest derived benefits (FAO, 2005). In many developing countries of the world, women are saddled with most of the household domestic responsibilities. These responsibilities include collection, sale, and processing of fuel wood, and gathering of non timber forest products, as well as food for the family and fodder for livestock (Thies and Pfiel, 2000). These tasks are tedious and time consuming and by that, restrict women's opportunities to engage in other community activities. Evidence given by Thies and Pfeil (2007) had shown that adoption of such forest management practices that allow the planting of indigenous tree species close to the community has the potential of reducing time spent on fuelwood collection by 80%. The report of Barrow et al. (2007) likewise revealed that restoration of woodland around the community has

reduced the time taken to collect fuelwood by up to four hours and thus the potential to free up time for them to engage in other productive activities that can improve gender empowerment.

Goals 4 and 5

The forest is a bank of various medicinal herbs, barks and roots of plants. These have been applied to successfully treat and cure various ailments. Today alternative medicines are in vogue and they are derived from forests. There are many among them that are used to prevent and treat ailments in order to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health, especially when orthodox health care systems are far away and costly to access (Meyer, 2003). According FAO (2005), forests help to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health through their contribution to food security and by providing natural medicines. Some two billion people rely on medicinal plants and animals as their primary sources of medicine (Kaimowitz, 2007).

Goals 6 and 7

Forests play critical roles in sustaining the health of the environment by mitigating climate change, conserving biological diversity, maintaining clean and reliable water resources, controlling erosion, protecting agricultural soils, sustaining and enhancing land productivity, protecting coastal and marine resources, providing low cost and renewable energy and enhancing the urban environment (FAO, 2005). The forest contributes to environmental stability by purification of the air, by absorbing excess Co_2 and controlling wind and water erosion (Olagoke and Adekunle, 2008). Every year, about eight million tones of carbon are released into the atmosphere, contributing to global warming and climate change (Tewari et al., 2008). It is estimated that about ¼ of this is due to deforestation. Conservation of forests is therefore an important strategy for dealing with climatic change (Tawari et al., 2008). The role of forest in environmental stability cannot be over looked as forest will help to create the needed environmental stability, especially now that the whole world is experiencing climate change. The world's water sheds play an important role in assuring the quality and quantity of water available for human, wildlife and plant use (Bonnell et al., 2007). This calls for the protection of forests for sustainable biological resources to cater for future generations.

Goal 8

There exists the establishment of forest partnership between developing and developed countries of the world (Thies and Pfeil, 2007). Goal 8 will be met with the aid of these initiatives through building a framework for joint action towards the sustainable use and management of the various forests of the world. This kind of initiative can also be made between the government and forest communities. The association of governments and forests communities all over the world may have international association of partnership between the various world governments and various communities of the world. Participation of the forest communities in this kind of initiatives leads to success of such moves.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusively, forests are an embodiment of most of the main ways through which the millennium development goals can be achieved. There is the needs to recognize the value of sustainable forest management. It is a known fact that the value of forests is grossly undermined in national statistics and budgeting. It is therefore of great necessity for foresters in collaboration with extension services to create awareness and extend the knowledge to the other primary stakeholders concerned with child morality, education, and health and gender equality of the potentials of the forests in achieving the millennium development goals.

To make a good mark towards the millennium development goals, every one need to be active actors in forest protection all over the world. This will promote sustainable use of the forests of the world.

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