



DEFORESTATION IN IGBO LAND: THE IMPLICATIONS

Ann C. Onyekelu Ph.D.

Department of Igbo, African and Communication Studies

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

ac.onyekelu@unizik.edu.ng

0803-660-1208

&

Elizabeth Nwadiogwa Onuora

Department of Igbo, African and Communication Studies

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

lizzyonuora4jesus@gmail.com

0803-535-8292

Abstract: *Deforestation is the permanent destruction of forests in order to utilize the land and the trees. From the creation of the world, plants and trees are known to be very useful to man in various ways. These plants and trees are used as herbs for traditional medicine and as objects of traditional worship in shrines. They are economic trees and their roots control erosions and protect people's houses and farmlands from being washed away by flood. The trees themselves serve as wind breakers and provide shades in the traditional Igbo homes and village part ways. This study seeks to find out the causes and implications of deforestation in Igbo land and suggests how to remedy the situation. The researchers based the research on survey method, then information from the internet, relevant written materials, and trips to Anambra State Ministry of Environment, Anambra State Ministry of Agriculture and the Federal Ministry of Environment for oral interviews. Some of the findings are that; due to deforestation, the useful plants and trees are destroyed without being replaced and mankind has been exposed to a lot of dangerous consequences and untold hardships which invariably are not favorable to the Igbo cultural heritage. The deforestation has caused so much harms to the Igbo people, such as: disease, climate imbalance and climate change, loss of plants and wild life species, flooding/erosion, and food insecurity. The researchers then suggest that people should desist from felling trees so as to stabilize the climate, save wildlife species and protect the well-being of the people.*



Introduction

Forests are very important to the mother earth. This is because the trees in the forests convert carbon dioxide to oxygen when they manufacture their foods during photosynthesis and by so doing purify the air. They filter our water and their roots prevent the soil from being washed away by flood that causes erosion. They act as buffer against climate change. Forests also offer a home to plant and animal species and provide the Earth with natural resources like herbs for our traditional medicine, food for plants and animals, timber and fuel from woods. The loss of these trees and other vegetation through deforestation can cause a lot of harm like climate change, desertification, soil erosion, fewer crops, flooding, increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and a host of other problems for the indigenous people.

Deforestation in Igbo land has left much to be desired. It has caused a lot of harm to Ndi Igbo. These harms deforestation has caused to Ndi Igbo include:

- Diseases
- Climate imbalance and climate change
- Loss of species – plants and wild life
- Flooding and erosion
- Food insecurity
- Destruction of shrines and places of traditional worship
- Destruction of traditional medicinal herbs

This study will seek ways of redressing deforestation in Igbo land for the benefit of Ndi Igbo under these headlines:

1. Disease control
2. Ways of creating climate balance
3. Restoration of plants and wild life species
4. Control of flooding and erosion
5. Increased farming for food security
6. Preservation/Safeguarding shrines and places of traditional worship
7. Protection of Igbo traditional herbs



The researchers used information from the internet, relevant written materials, trips to Anambra State Ministry of Environment, Anambra State Ministry of Agriculture and the Federal Ministry of Environment for oral interviews.

Literature Review

Deforestation is the permanent destruction of forests in order to make use of the land and the trees. Typically, deforestation means clearing a lot of trees without the intention of planting new ones to establish future growth.

When these forests are destroyed without the intention to replace them by planting new trees, definitely, there are untold negative implications just as Karen (1990:15) states that:

Workers in European Alps reported that deforestation, the cutting down of trees, was causing floods that washed away the soil. In Venezuela, Von Humboldt concluded that the level of Lake Valencia in 1800 was lower than it had been and that human activities such as deforestation and agriculture were among the things that were causing the lake to dry up.

Having seen the devastating effects of deforestation, it is then clear that the untold hardships or disadvantages should not have occurred if the forests were protected.

It is then worthy of note that deforestation is not the same things as harvesting, forest fires and insect infestation because the affected areas eventually grow back. Sources have it that in some areas like America and Canada, all areas harvested must be reforested either by replanting or through natural regeneration.

Karen (1990:5) further notes that:

The most important early study of the effect of humans on the environment was Man and Nature by Vermonter George Perkins Marsh, published in 1964. More than a third of the book is concerned with the damage done to freshwater systems by deforestation.

Karen's example simply points that apart from man-made causes, nature had also contributed to deforestation which did not have its negative effect on the land only but



also on the fresh-water systems. If man-made causes could be eliminated, some writers had it that the vegetation would wear a new face and recuperate. Anyadike (2002:81) asserts that:

Were man's influence to be eliminated from or minimized in this belt, much of the area would revert to rain forest... if such an occasion were to occur, the large trees such as the *Ceiba Chlorophora* etc, open growing here and there would look more like their Southern neighbours. Also, a more hydrophilic like elephant grass (*pennisetum*) would prevail over currently dominant grass species.

This was a confirmation that apart from natural disasters, man had contributed immensely to deforestation.

The researchers adopted the theory of Ecocriticism which led the researchers to ask a lot of questions about nature and how it has affected deforestation in relation to man-made and natural disasters. Ecocriticism is also known as Eco poetics. A lot of scholars have explained this theory in various ways. Glotfelty (1996), explains Ecocriticism as a study of the relationship between literature and human environment. In his explanation he states that this theory includes the consideration that alters the reader's understanding about his environment and his duties in reducing environmental degradation. He also explains that using this theory in research requires asking a lot of questions on how nature is portrayed in literature and the functions of nature in literature.

This theory was propounded between 1960 and 1970 but it started being in use in 1990. The major proponents, according to Dobie (2012), were Chetyll Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell. According to Tosie (2006), their supporters include: Simon Estok, Harold Fromm, William Howarth, William Ruekert, Suellen Campbell, Michael P., Branch, Green Love and others.

In many parts of the Igbo land, woodland and forests are cleared for the purpose of cultivation. Sometimes, they are removed for firewood and animals' fodder leaving these areas plain and bare. When this happens, that area is prone to a lot of environmental hazards which ranges from flooding to erosion, loss of wildlife and more. Wright (2008:223) postulates that:



In many regions in developing countries, woodlands and forests are cleared for agriculture or removed for firewood and animal fodder forcing the gatherers to travel farther and farther from their homes and leaving the soil susceptible to erosion.

Wright did not stop at this. He further exposes the dangers of using forests for agriculture and so adds that those who cultivate such places create highly diverse ecosystems as their cleared lands support only a few years of crops and there would be gradual shifts into agroforestry.

Anyadike (2002:81), in his own vision of what afforestation in Igbo land should be emphasizes that:

This belt occupies the bulk of the southern half of Igboland. Most of this zone has been reduced by human activity to a secondary plant cover and large parts of the rain forest zone, especially the area around Ngwaland, may be termed an oil palm bush from the ubiquitousness of oil palms. Areas of true rain forest are characterized by an abundance of plant species, sometimes exceeding 150 different species per hectare.

This has shown that a palm plantation yet, is not a forest because according to him, a forest should be made up of a good number of different species of plants per hectare. This equally shows that Igbo land is also a victim of deforestation which is mostly man-made and that plantations are not forests and cannot take the place of afforestation.

Primary Causes of Deforestation

The primary causes of deforestation are as follows:

Agriculture – In recent times in Igbo land, due to mechanized system of agriculture and the promotion of mass farming for the jobless youths, vast areas of land were cleared to embark on mechanized cultivation of our local foods like rice, cassava, yam, potatoes and the rest of them.

This type of agriculture did not favour the existence of forests but encouraged deforestation. Hence, Karen (1990:28) notes that:



Clearing natural vegetation particularly forest, to produce farmlands, has numerous environmental effects, including altering the climate, producing a widespread shortage of fuel, and causing floods and water shortage.

This confirms the claim that agriculture was one of the primary causes of deforestation.

Livestock Ranching – In places like Igbariam, Ugbenu, Ugbene, Ifite-Ogwari all in Anambra State, and in parts of Ebonyi and Enugu States, it was found out that there were farms for herds and birds in large quantities which form ranches including grains and tubers as agro-farms. All these agricultural expansions discourage afforestation and encourage deforestation. Suffice it to say that man's influence endangers the forests in Igbo land. Botkin Eikeller says "Human and domestic animals use about 4% of the net primary production of the world's land area and 2% of that of the oceans. Cultivated lands produce less than naturally vegetated areas".

Human beings truly contribute to deforestation as well as livestock.

Illegal Logging – People storm forests and fell trees for timber illegally, extraction for furniture, papers, fuel and the rest. This, definitely, had not favoured the forests. These trees they removed were never replaced leaving these forests bare and porous to suffer the devastating consequences of deforestation in the Igbo land. By this illegal logging, some communities were affected because most of their sacred trees and shrines were destroyed and communication with their ancestors truncated leaving their religious worship jeopardized. They were left to their fate to suffer the untold consequences of excommunication with the ancestral spirits because, they were not consulted before felling those trees.

Urbanization – A large number of people migrated to urban areas for better life. They went in search of jobs, education, and for other reasons. They added to the already existing population of the people living in these urban areas and to accommodate this influx, new houses, factories, industries and offices were built in remote areas where were once forests and agro-forests leaving these former forests with new structures and few or no trees at all.

Desertification – Hurricanes, Tornadoes and floods washed away the earth's surface living it without flora and fauna but as a desert land. Hurricanes and Tornadoes might not be rampant in Igbo land but serious flooding and erosion had been the order of the



day especially during the raining seasons. These washed away and gulped the land and trees in Igbo land.

Mining – The popular Enugu coal camp had remained a relic till date. This was because the Enugu coal mine took a vast area of land which invariably discouraged the growth of trees but encouraged deforestation. This mining, on its own, could cause soil erosion, landslides and flooding due to the porosity of the soil as an after effect of the mining and the underground routes and tunnels created in the process.

Forest Fires – Some localities in Igbo land developed the habit of hunting bush rats especially during the dry seasons, most especially during the harmattan. In a bid to trap their games, they set the bushes and forests on fire. With their inability to control these fires in the dry/harmattan season, these bushes and forests were destroyed.

Paper – The quest for paper materials has pushed people to cut a lot of trees in the forests and these papers were never recycled to economize the use and frequent felling of trees which had resulted in deforestation in Igbo land.

Over-population – Families grew in Igbo land. Many men who were victims of polygamy found out that they had more male children than they could provide plots of land for. To accommodate these large numbers of male children, they extended their ancestral territories to their otherwise, forests and farmlands where these male children were allotted their own plots of land as their inheritance. They developed these farmlands and forests by erecting some new structures and there were no places again for these trees and forests. One can hardly see some thick forests presently in Igbo land due to this over-population.

In summary, man-made and natural factors had greatly hampered and disturbed the forests in Igbo land.

Analysis of the data

Deforestation had caused a lot of harm in Igbo land. It had caused a lot of life threatening diseases such as malaria and dengue fever:



Insect Born and Other Diseases

Deforestation had caused some insect-born and other infectious diseases that afflict Ndị Igbo. Vittor (2006) says, “As agriculture replaces forests, regrowth of low lying vegetation provides a much more suitable environment for the mosquitoes that carry the malaria parasite”.

Deforestation did not only cause insect borne diseases but the species of snails that could better adapt to warm open areas that occurred after a forest were cut down were better hosts for parasites called flatworms, some of which caused schistosomiasis, a disease which damages human organs. It had been confirmed by researchers who stated that once a disease could leave afforested region, it could travel in human beings, crossing the world in a matter of hours by airplane before the person even showed symptoms. Vittor (2006) confirms this assertion when he adds:

... one malaria-carrying mosquito species, *anopheles darlingi* in deforested area in Peru was radically different than its cousins in intact forests; the *anopheles darlingi* in deforested areas bit 278 times more frequently than in an intact forest according to a study published in the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*.

Climate Imbalance

This was not the only implication of deforestation especially in Igbo land. It was found out that there were climate imbalance and climate change. Definitely, deforestation adversely, had affected the state of climate in Igbo land. In the olden days, our forefathers had that advantage of taking refuge under big and shady trees in village squares, and shrines and even in their farmlands. They really lived close to nature and did not feel the devastating effects of the direct sunshine. With this deforestation and rampant felling of trees by man to erect modern residential structures industries, places of worship and the like, the natural cool atmosphere was distorted and there was climate change and imbalance. To confirm this assertion, Daniel Edward (1977: 94) states that: “Human and domestic animals use about 4% of the net primary production of the world’s land area and 2% of that of the oceans. Cultivated lands produce less than naturally vegetated areas”.

It was not only that man was actively involved in causing this climate imbalance but animals and agriculture and water areas contributed negatively to the survival of the environment because they did not favour afforestation.



Loss of Plants and Wildlife Species

During the process of deforestation, a lot of plants were destroyed without being replaced. When these plants were destroyed, the wildlife was equally destroyed because these forests were the habitat of these plants and animals. These animals/wildlife like the lions, elephants, monkeys, tortoises, and others go into extinction because their base were destroyed. This means that some of these animals that were totems in Igbo land like the monkeys and the tortoises leave these destroyed forests and very often go into extinction. It is still necessary to note that the implication is that the idols and shrines that had these totems were starved of their sacred animals which our forefathers had hallowed over the years and this seriously and negatively affects our traditional worship. Even the snails, which some parts of Igbo land cherish and baptize “Congo meat” and used to prepare some delicious meals like the onugbu, and ora soups were no more. If seen at all, they became too expensive. This was because, their homes; the forests were destroyed.

Flooding and Erosion--Karen (1990: 28) in the same vein says that;

Clearing natural vegetation, particularly forests, to produce farmlands, has numerous environmental effects, including altering the climate, producing a widespread shortage of fuel, and causing floods and water shortages.

Karen had just elaborated on the implications of deforestation apart from the loss of species of plants and wildlife. Invariably, the clearing of our natural vegetation resulted in flooding. Our local streams that were left unprotected would be flooded causing shortage of water for domestic purposes. Serious and unchecked flooding could cause erosion. In places like Nanka in Orumba North Local Government Area and Agulu in Anaocha Local Government Area and some other parts in Anambra State, the people have witnessed, over the years, devastating effects of erosion due to unchecked flooding.

Food Insecurity

The land was washed away by flooding. The nutrients of the soil was also washed away. The land became unfertile and could not produce food. Apart from that, the erosion caused by flooding had devastated the land surface and the farmlands were in some irregular patches which did not favour cultivation and so, agriculture did not



thrive in such pitiable areas where the people's homes were even sinking in the bedeviled erosion sites and people abandoned their ancestral homes and farmlands and ran for their dear lives.

Destruction of Shrines and Places of Traditional Worship

The traditional religion of Ndi Igbo is at stake. The big trees that were objects of worship are felled during the deforestation and there were no points or centers for their shrines for their ancestral worship. This jeopardized their communion with the dead which had been the culture of the people which was handed down by their forefathers. This implied that, there were no shrines where they prayed to their ancestors, give thanks to the benevolent spirits and appease the malevolent spirits which could endanger their existence on earth according to their beliefs.

Destruction of Medicinal Herbs

The Igbo traditional society had its main stay of treating their ailments with local herbs. When these forests were destroyed, these herbs were also destroyed. The traditional medicine men could no longer lay hands on herbs for the treatment of their patients. This could cause them to charge exorbitant prices in the treatment of cases that would have been otherwise treated at cheaper rates because of the scarcity of the herbs. Those patients who were not able to afford the cost of treatment died in their numbers.

According to sources, forests still covered about 30 percent of the world's land area, but they were disappearing at an alarming rate. Between 1990 and 2016, the world lost 502,000 square miles (1.3 million square kilometers) of forest, according to the World Bank – an area larger than South Africa. Since humans started cutting down trees, 46 percent of trees had been felled according to a 2015 study in the *Journal Nature*.

It was also pertinent to note that trees were needed for a variety of reasons because they absorbed the carbon dioxide that people exhale and the heat-trapping greenhouse gases that human activities emit. Global warming increased as those gases were emitted into the atmosphere.

Deforestation affected the people and animals where trees were cut, as well as the wider world. Some 250 million people living in forest and savannah areas depended on them for subsistence and income and many of them are among the world's rural



poor. Eighty percent of Earth's land animals and plants lived in forests and deforestation threatened species including the orangutan, sanatran tiger and many species of birds.

When these trees are removed, the forest is deprived of its portions of canopy which block the rays of the sun in the day time and retain heat during the night. This disruption leads to more intense temperature changes that can be very harmful to plants and animals.

Remedy to Deforestation/Gains

There could be some possible strategies on how to remedy deforestation.

Plant a Tree: If Ndi Igbo can start and form the habit of planting a tree a day today in their compounds and in their farmlands, this would go a long way to resuscitate the forests.

- When these forests were restored, shrines would be protected and maintained. This would favour the Igbo traditional religion and veneration of their ancestors.
- The traditional local herbs would also be restored and local treatment of ailments cheaper and faster and lives would be saved.
- Apart from these, the economy is boosted because these economic trees like the palms, oil bean and the like, would be allowed to grow and mature, harvested and marketed for financial gains and domestic uses.
- Planting trees could reduce the climate imbalance and climate change. A balance would be struck when trees were planted because they would absorb the gas emitted by the activities of man and offer protection to the environment, thereby, protecting human health and that of animal species. The mosquitoes that caused diseases when they left these forests would go back to their base and man became free of insect bites and the accompanying diseases.

Recycle Paper and Cardboard: Papers and cardboards should be recycled to economize the use of wood which often caused felling of trees. People should also patronize these recycled products to encourage the producers and manufactures.

Raise Awareness: Awareness should be created on the dangers of deforestation. By so doing, Ndi Igbo would protect their forests to reap the fabulous gains of the advantages.



Join a Community of Forestry Project: These were people who were forestry-friendly. This would enhance creation of more vegetation and forests to resuscitate the environment, human health and those of plants and species.

Finally, the government had a major role to play in assisting all efforts for afforestation by groups and individuals due to the immense benefits of these forests to the traditional Igbo society. The government should regulate the use of wood products, ban clear-cut of forests. It must enforce incentives to support legal and sustainable afforestation.

To correct the negative influence of agricultural activities on the forests, trees and agricultural crops could be cultivated in intimate combination with one another and this had been an ancient practice which farmers were using. Agroforestry could be viewed as a societal response primarily born out of a need to fulfill immediate basic needs of food, fuel, fodder, shelter and protection.

Livestock ranching could also be done under the canopy of garden-like forests where these animals remained and fed in their normal homes and live alongside the trees which form their food.

According to the illegal logging portal, the implementation of this legislation had delivered some positive results. Firstly, in assuring consumers that products they bought were legally sourced. Secondly, by closing down a large market for illegal loggers and therefore restricting their chances of making profit.

Factories and industries should be sited in rural areas to create employment opportunities for the rural dwellers and curb the attraction to migrate to major cities for greener pastures. Schools, medical facilities and other social amenities should be provided for the rural dwellers so that they will not migrate to the urban centers and cause over population which adversely affected the forests which were destroyed in a bid to accommodate them.

The government should take responsibility and check flooding erosion, tornadoes and hurricanes to prevent desertification. Individuals or even NGO's can also help to check the above natural phenomena to save lives and the forests in Igbo land.



The government should control and regulate mining to avert the unpleasant consequences. Tunnels should be fortified to avoid collapse. Forest fires are avoidable if the rural dwellers resort to setting ordinary traps to catch their animals instead of burning a whole forest.

Papers and cardboards should be recycled for future use. They could use on both sides for printing. Children should be guided on the use of paper to avoid wastages and people should be encouraged to patronize products of paper-recycled materials. Through these, the forests in Igbo land will be restored and the benefits enjoyed.

Summary

To conserve wildlife and defend the rights of forest communities, a stop or an end had to be put to deforestation which was one of the quickest and cheapest means of mitigating global warming. To maintain this, there would be a campaign to have future free of deforestation so that Igbo land would be free of the implications of deforestation.

It was important to aspire to end deforestation and forest degradation and as well help to restore lost forests to solve the climate emergency. Wildlife should be protected and the rights of the Igbo indigenous traditional communities defended and respected to secure more forests in the future.

Conclusion

Trees help to regulate the climate, filter water through their root system, capture dust particles and pollutants from the air and stabilize soils against erosion. They perform these vital services equally for everyone without taking into account country boundaries or traditional community demarcations or the size of one's income.

Every day, we use resources that forests provide to us, such as timber, firewood, medicinal and edible plants, yet, if we continue to lose our forests at the current rate, in eighty years from now, there would be no forests left on our green planet.

Deforestation is happening everywhere on the planet for many different reasons that vary from region to region. Vast areas of rainforests in a number of tropical countries, including Igbo land in Nigeria, to be precise, have been destroyed to make way for palm oil, plantain and banana plantations and cattle ranches.



Incessant global demand for wood products, for paper, furniture or fuel, has endangered the forests around the globe especially in Igbo land. Ending deforestation is best to stabilize the climate, save wildlife species and protect the well-being of the people. The death of the forest is the death of the people. The death of the forest is the end of the human life.

References

Ad.www.rolex.org/rolex/awards. Retrieved on 20th June, 2021

Anyadike, R.N.C. (2002), "Climate and Vegetation". In Ofomata G.E.K.(Ed.). *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*. Ibadan: Africana First Publishers.

Botkini, Daniel B., Edward A. Keller (1997), *Environmental Science, Earth as a Living Planet*, USA: Shaw and Wetherill Inc., Hoffman Press,.

Greennewsales.com Retrieved on 27th June 2012

[Https://vocal.medi/futurism/deforestation-causes-effects-and-solutions](https://vocal.medi/futurism/deforestation-causes-effects-and-solutions), Retrieved on 5th April 2021, 1.55pm.

<https://e.360.yale.edu> Retrieved on 27th June 2021

<https://earthedipse.com> Retrieved on 27th June, 2021.

<https://greentumble.com> Retrieved on 20th June, 2021 3pm

<https://kerrcenter.com> Retrieved on 20th June, 2021

<https://link.springer.com> Retrieved on 27th June, 2021

<https://vocal.media/futurism/deforestation> Retrieved on 5th April, 2021

<https://voical.media/futurism/deforestation-causes-effects-and-solutions>. Retrieved on 5th April, 2021



<https://www.ajol.info> Retrieved on 20th June, 2021

<https://www.conserve-energy-future.com> Retrieved on 27th June, 2021.

<https://www.conserve-energy-future.com/causes-effect-solutions-of-deforestation.php>
Retrieved on 5th April, 2012 1.55pm

<https://www.fs.usda.gov> Retrieved on 20th June, 2021

<https://www.greenpeace.org> Retrieved on 27th June, 2021.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com> Retrieved on 27th June, 2021.

<https://www.pachamama.org> Retrieved on 27th June, 2021.

<https://youmatter.world> Retrieved on 27th June, 2021.

Karen, A. (1990), *Environmental Science*. Philadelphia: Saunders College Publishing,.

Wright, R. I. (2008), "Environmental Gordon College", *Science Toward A Sustainable Future*, New Delhi: PHI Learning Private

Sewatechnigeria.com Retrieved on 27th June, 2021.