



An Overview of British Colonial Forest Conservation in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examines the evolution of British colonial forest conservation in Northern Nigeria with particular reference to Katsina Emirate. The paper argues that the British beliefs about Northern Nigerian forest utilization and local resources management practices were ideologically driven which were never substantiated in empirical terms. The paper further makes a historical assessment of the attempts by the British colonial authorities to introduce forest policies and administration into Northern Nigeria. Of particular relevance was the establishment of the Forestry Department responsible for implementing forest conservation policies. Examination of these policies shows among other things a shift from conservation to exploitation and vice versa under colonial rule. It finally demonstrates that the entire colonial forest conservation in Northern Nigeria was characterized by the colonial degradation narrative that was mostly ideologically driven to justify direct government involvement in forest management and conservation.

Keywords: Colonial Rule, forest conservation, Northern Nigeria, British administration

Introduction

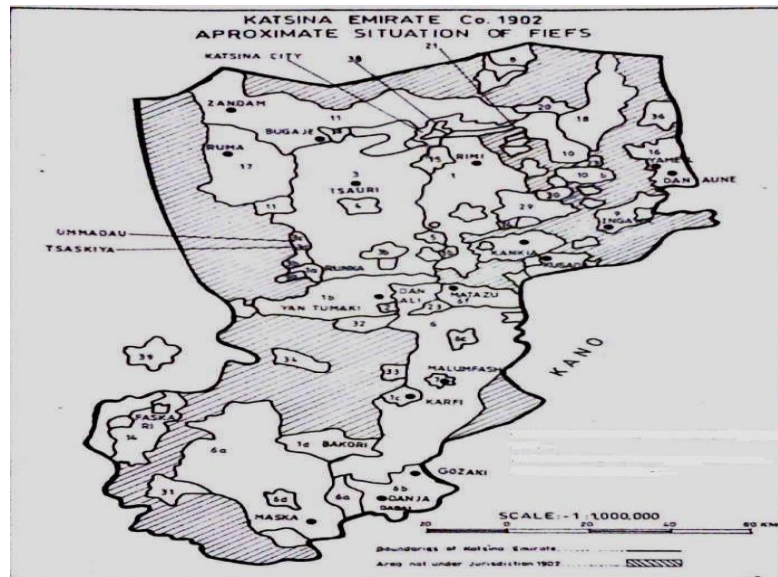
The British administration in Northern Nigeria began in 1900 with the establishment of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and its headquarters at Zungeru. This was followed by the appointment of Colonel Frederick Lugard as its first High Commissioner.¹ Prior to this period, early European penetration in Northern Nigeria was sporadic. Yet in the last two decades of the nineteenth century after the Berlin Conference of 1884, the motivations for European activities were governed by the desire to colonize the whole region. Within three years, the whole of Northern Nigeria, which largely constituted the former Sokoto Caliphate, was conquered and brought under British rule.²

¹ For more discussions on the conquest of Northern Nigeria, see I.F. Nicholson, *Administration of Nigeria 1900-1960*, (Oxford, 1969), Chapter 1 and VI

²Jamilu Shehu, "A Social and Political History of Katsina Metropolis 1960-2007", PhD Thesis, UsmanDanfodio University Sokoto, p, 45.

Katsina Emirate was among the few emirates in the Caliphate that submitted peacefully to the British in 1903.³ After the conquest, the British created a system of administration through the indigenous authorities and institutions popularly known as the Indirect Rule System. The central idea behind the system was for the British to rule through traditional rulers whose conduct and actions would nevertheless be subjected to close guidance and advice of colonial officials.⁴ Under this system, the colonial administration would not deal directly with the people, rather, the colonial officers channelled their wishes and orders through the Emirs from whom such orders were to be seen to emanate. This system was geared towards bringing the territory and the conquered people into the colonial economy without many political and administrative hiccups.

Map 3: Katsina Emirate: Showing the Territories in 1901



Sources: Adopted from Richard Hull.⁵

³ Richard W. Hull, "The Development of Administration in Katsina Emirate Northern Nigeria 1887-1944" PhD Thesis, University Columbia, 1968, p.34.

⁴ See Frederick Lugard's *Political Memoranda: Revision of Instructions to Political Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative 1913-1918*, (London: Frenk Cass and Co Ltd, 1970), pp.305-317.

⁵ Richard Hull, "The Development Colonial Administration in Katsina Emirate" *op cit.*, p.xxxiii.

Map 4: Katsina Emirate: Reorganized Districts in the 1930s

Sources: Adopted from Richard Hull.⁶

In Katsina Emirate, colonial rule brought about tremendous changes in the environmental structures.⁷ This is evident considering the fact that the British were from the onset very clear about their intention to transform and change the local forestland tenure and conservation systems to align with the principles of the indirect rule system. This is not surprising because, as Roderick Neumann argued, securing bureaucratic control of forestlands constituted a critical ingredient in the mix of political and economic forces of the colonial powers.⁸ Central to the above was the assumption that the Emirate's forest landscape needed active care and protection. In order to achieve their objective, they used a comprehensive and persevering degradation narrative, which emphasized the destructiveness and deterioration of forest resources as a result of misuse and dreadful practices by the local people. The narrative emphasized the need to urgently take measures that would save these

⁶*Ibid*, p. xxxvi

⁷Tukur Bello Ingawa, "Study of Major Cotton Producing Areas", p.49.

⁸Roderick Neumann, "Forest Rights, Privileges and Prohibitions: Contextualizing State Forestry Policy in Colonial Tanganyika", *Environment and History*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (February 1997), p.46.



resources from extinction. This narrative and the remedy adopted by the British to address the perceived environmental problems contrasted with the realities of the local environment.

The Development of Colonial Conservation Narratives

When discussing the development of colonial conservation narratives in Northern Nigeria, many questions came to mind about the extent to which these narratives accurately portrayed what was actually happening on the ground. Equally important was the question of why particular narratives emphasizing the degradation of forest landscapes as a result of local perceptions and practices took a central place during the period under discussion. While addressing these questions, one must consider the global and historical milieu in which forest conservation discourse originated and operated both in policy and implementation. Within the rapidly growing literature on environmental history, there exist different discourses about the evolution of modern forest conservation ideas.⁹ However, in consideration of the historical antecedents of colonial forest conservation policies in West Africa, one could concur with the arguments put forward by Richard Grove¹⁰ and William Adam¹¹ among others. These scholars attributed the rise of modern conservation ideas to the seventeenth-century Europeans' expeditions abroad which brought them in contact with the oceanic islands, most especially the Canary and Madeira Islands. According to William Adams, 'the impetus to conserve nature began when colonial authorities became alarmed at the speed of environmental degradation and desiccation in colonized lands'.¹²

This brought to light, in Richard Grove's argument, the understanding of the limits of nature's unbounded vastness as Europeans had hitherto generally believed. He postulated that these tropical islands presented themselves to the early European colonizers as macrocosms in which they could see forest resources depletion all over the colonized world.¹³ There were two reasons for the above conclusions in Grove's view. First, it was in these island colonies that scientists first came to the realization of the extraordinary speed at which European exploitation of forest resources transformed and destroyed the colonies' natural environment. Second, the colonial context also stimulated a dramatic growth in scientific interest in the desiccation discourse.¹⁴ According to

⁹ For example, see J. M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism*. (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1998); M. Gadgil and R. Guha, *This Fissured Land: an ecological history of India*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Beinart, W and Coates, P *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa*. (Routledge, 1995); Griffiths, T and Robin, L (eds) *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*. (Keele University Press, 1997).

¹⁰ Richard Grove, *Ecology, Climate and Empire: Colonialism and Global Environmental History, 1400-1940* (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 1997).

¹¹ William M. Adam, "Nature and the Colonial Mind" in William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan (eds), *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-colonial Era*, (London: Earth Publications Ltd, 2003).

¹² *Ibid*, p. 5.

¹³ Richard H. Grove, *Ecology, Climate and Empire*, op cit., p. 19.

¹⁴ For more on the early development of environmentalism see William M. Adam, "Nature and the Colonial Mind" in William M. Adams and Martin Mulligan (eds), *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies*



Yusufu Lawi, it was this awareness, which first presented itself as a scientific lobby in the early colonial dominions which contributed to the rise of modern conservation ideas and constituted the roots of modern environmentalism as applied to the colonies including those in Africa.¹⁵ Furthermore, these early conservation ideas were founded on assumptions and perspectives akin to those of the degradation narrative constructed in the context of the colonies.

The desiccation narrative was further articulated with the development of a complex colonial infrastructure under the British in the mid-eighteenth century. The creation of Pax Britannica¹⁶ provided the basis for forming information networks needed to collate and disseminate the above ideas on a global scale. These information networks were based primarily on the botanical gardens of both Europe and the colonies.¹⁷ However, as argued by Richard Grove, these desiccation ideas might have remained within the academic walls had it not been for the efforts of some members of the Society of Arts who were also members of parliament.¹⁸ It was these members that influenced the members of parliament to accept conservation ideas. As a result of this, when the Isles of St. Vincent, St Lucia, Grenada and Tobago were ceded to Britain, the parliament made a provision for the gazetting of a large forest area as a forest reserve.¹⁹ This tradition of forest conservation continued to be the focal point of the conservation policy of the British up to the 20th century.²⁰

In Africa, degradation narratives were first articulated through the involvement of a cadre of professional foresters and botanists nurtured in the medical schools of the Scottish Universities and the botanical gardens of Paris and Edinburgh, as well as the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in London. Some of the central figures propagandizing these ideas were Joseph Dalton Hooker, who was a Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens for several decades, and, John Croumbie Brown.²¹ Brown, in particular, wrote a book in which the idea of desiccation was refined and made into an environmental article of faith in Africa.²²

for *Conservation in a Post-colonial Era*, (London:Earth Publications Ltd, 2003), p.5; Richard H. Grove, *Ecology, Climate and Empire colonialism and global environmental history, 1400-1940*, pp. 6-15.

¹⁵Yusufu Q. Lawi, “May the Spider Blind Witches and Wild Animals: Local Knowledge and the Political Ecology of Natural Resource Use in the Iraqwland, Tanzania, 1900-1985” PhD Dissertation, Boston University, 2000, p.212.

¹⁶This refers to a period during which the British Empire become the hegemonic power and adopted the role of a global police.

¹⁷ Richard H. Grove, *Ecology, Climate and Empire colonialism and global environmental history, 1400-1940*, p.6

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁹ This was the first forest reserve ever to be established with the view to preventing climate change.

²⁰ Richard Grove and ToyinFalola, “Chiefs, Boundaries, and Sacred Woodlands: Early Nationalism and the Defeat of Colonial Conservationism in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, 1870-1916” *African Economic History*, No. 24, (1996), p. 11.

²¹ Brown published a stream of works on forest conservation many of which caught the attention of the colonial authorities in the Cape, Natal and elsewhere. The two most important of these works were *A Hydrology of South Africa* published in 1875 and *Forests and Moisture* published in 1877.

²² Richard Grove, *Ecology, Climate and Empire*, p.26.



The activities of these two colonial scientists compelled the British Colonial Office to demand the colonial administrators collect information on the production and consumption of timber in their respective colonies. In addition, they were also required to provide answers to a long list of questions, including rates of deforestation and the threat of climatic change in their respective colonies. While many colonies such as the Cape Colony, Natal and Mauritius promptly responded to the circular, in West Africa only Gambia responded and the response came late.²³ This was because in the eyes of colonial officials the rich West African forests appeared not very much affected by deforestation. Imposing these desiccation ideas and conservation policies would remove the region's commercial potential.²⁴

A fuller response from West African colonies had to await the appearance of a book written by Alfred Maloney, Governor of Lagos Colony entitled *Sketch of the Forestry of West Africa*. In this book, first published in 1887, Alfred Maloney used his vast experiences in the region to highlight the large scale of deforestation taking place all over West Africa. He used examples mostly from the coast of Mozambique and the dry and treeless reaches of Accra plains to warn against the danger of desiccation and called for a shift in colonial forest policy.²⁵ This warning was taken so seriously by the British that many scholars such as ToyinFalola and Richard Grove believed it was this book that formed the basis and the main stimulant for the introduction of colonial conservation policy in the region.²⁶

In the same vain many of the scientists who came to work in West Africa at the start of the colonial period were already strongly influenced by the desiccationist ideas. For instance, just like Alfred Maloney in British West Africa, Auguste Chevalier in French West Africa quoted a lot from Poivre's eighteenth-century assertion that deforestation was leading to desiccation in Mauritius. More significantly, most early British foresters in West Africa had been schooled in the forest departments of India and Burma which, as Grove had demonstrated had become central to inquiry into the orthodoxy about the impact of deforestation on climate in the nineteenth century.²⁷ For example, H. N. Thompson, the first trained forester in the Nigerian Forest Department, had earlier worked in India and Burma. Thompson was then employed to detail Ghana's forests in 1908 whereby he drew up outlines for forest service and legislation in Ghana which was based on Nigerian and Indian legislations. In addition, he also helped appoint the Indian-trained McLeod who worked with him in Nigeria to head the Ghanaian Forest Service.²⁸

The case of Northern Nigeria presented a different scenario from the rest of the British colonies in West Africa because of the existence of a pre-colonial forestry system. Besides, the larger portion of the region lies within the Savannah vegetation zone known to be lacking in economically viable timber and rubber resources. However, even with these exceptional features, the region did not

²³ Richard Grove and ToyinFalola, "Chiefs, Boundaries, and Sacred Woodlands", *op cit.*, p.6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Alfred Maloney, *The Sketches of Forestry*, *op cit.*, p. 90.

²⁶ Richard Grove and ToyinFalola, *op cit.*, p.6.

²⁷ Richard Grove, *Ecology, Climate and Empire*, *op cit.*, pp. 5-36.

²⁸ James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, "Desiccation and Domination: Science and Struggles Over Environment and Development in Colonial Guinea" *Journal of African History*, No. 41, (2000), p. 37.



escape the degradation narrative. Here the narrative took a different dimension from other British possessions in West Africa. In this region, the narrative was centred on desertification, which is a narrative about how poor management and utilization of forest resources by the local people resulted in apparently progressive drying up of large areas, which led to a presumed extension of the Sahara. This narrative was much at play in the Katsina Emirate where the British occupation in 1903 coincided with years of poor rainfall.²⁹ In fact, throughout the colonial period, the Emirate was portrayed as an area susceptible to desertification, a perception which continues today.³⁰ No surprise, therefore, that the Emirate was one of the epicentres of colonial forestry interventions.

Archival records have revealed how Frederick Lugard, the region's first High Commissioner used this narrative in the formulation of the forest conservation policy even before the whole region was brought under British rule.³¹ In one of his correspondences with the Colonial Office in 1902, he justified the necessity of forest conservation to save rubber trees from total destruction. He claimed that 'rubber collectors were destroying rubber plants due to their ignorance of the proper methods of rubber tapping'.³²

In fact, looking at the entire colonial conservation project in Northern Nigeria, one can easily see that it was clearly underpinned by the beliefs about the eminent crisis. The colonial officials and their agents believed that only the colonial state was capable of both appreciating the full extent and benefits of forest resources and of planning effectively for their conservation. In their eyes, the local populations were both ignorant of and apathetic towards environmentally sustainable forest conservation practices.³³ In the words of Lugard, 'colonial forestry was in the truest and best interest of the country, and aimed to protect an ignorant people against themselves'.³⁴

Further evidence of the use of the desertification narrative in Northern Nigeria can be seen from the attitudes of other colonial officials such as Mr. W.R. Elliott, the first Forest Officer of the region, who in 1904 wrote a report showing how forest resources were being destroyed by the local people. According to him, although the region had a limited forest cover, it contained valuable timber and rubber-yielding tree species, which if not protected would be destroyed by the local people within a short period of time.³⁵

The desertification discourse became more explicit in Northern Nigeria in the 1930s, after the visit of E.P. Stebbing, a prominent retired Indian forester and a Professor of Forestry at the University of

²⁹ Reginald Cline-Cole, "Redefining Forestry Space", *op cit.*, p.38.

³⁰ Michael Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, (London: University of California Press, 1983), p.xxi.

³¹ Edmund O. Egbah, *Forestry Policy of Nigeria*, *op cit.*, p.19.

³² NAK/SNP 53/1902 Frederick Lugard to Colonial Office, 1902

³³ Reginald Cline-Cole, Knowledge Claims, Landscape, and the Fuelwood Degradation Nexus in Dryland Nigeria, p.123.

³⁴ Frederick Lugard, *Political Memoranda: Revision of Instructions to Political Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative, 1913-1919*, Edited by A.H.M. Kirk-Green, (London: Frank Cass, 1970), p. 434.

³⁵ E.O. Egbah, *Forestry Policy of Nigeria*, *op cit.*, p.20.



Edinburgh.³⁶ In 1934, he visited Northern Nigeria, including Katsina Emirate where he stayed for a few weeks, after which, he proceeded northward into the Saharan desert. At the end of the trip, he produced a book and several long articles, which summarized his perceptions of the dry season in Northern Nigeria and the southern French Niger forest landscapes. One of such writings was titled 'The Encroaching Sahara; the Threat to the West African Colonies'.³⁷ This paper presented a feverish warning on what he saw as the dangers of desiccation. The fact that the paper was presented at the Royal Geographical Society which consisted of both British and French colonial officers shows the link between these perceptions and the formation of the Anglo-French Forestry Commission in 1934.³⁸ Although this commission found Stebbings' claims and warnings largely unfounded, the damage had nevertheless been done because more and more writers already echoed Stebbing's alarms. One of such voices came from the book written by Jacks and Whyte entitled *The Rape of the Earth; A World Survey of Soil Erosion*³⁹. This book set the scene for the post-war British colonial obsession with soil erosion up to the end of colonialism in 1960.

As a consequence of these narratives, in 1937 an Anti-Desiccation Campaign was launched by the British colonial Office in Northern Nigeria; and a year after, a new Forestry Ordinance was proposed with specific provisions for protected forests. Sanctions were also imposed on bush burning with the formation of the Burning of Bush Order, which initially restricted to only forest reserves. Later on, the Order was extended to unreserved areas in 1940 thereby depriving peasants of a popular method of hunting and farm clearing.⁴⁰ The fear of deforestation continued to have a strong impact on colonial conservation. With large and integrated development schemes, even the Native Administrations began to recite the degradation narrative, adding some new empirical references to elaborate it and re-emphasize the need for conservation.

In addition to the hitherto established narratives as explained, the period after the war also witnessed the incorporation of fuelwood degradation discourse into the overall degradation setting. In a memo from the Emir of Katsina to the Northern Protectorate Conservator of Forest in 1949, it was stressed that fuel wood chopping had eaten deep into the forest all over the Emirate in a frightening way resulting in more deforestation.⁴¹

Colonial Forest Resources Conservation in the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria

Travel accounts from various Europeans that visited Katsina in the nineteenth and twentieth century show how impressed they were with the sophisticated forest management strategy of the people. Both Hugh Clapperton and Heinrich Barth described some of the management systems including

³⁶ Jeremy Swift, "Desertification Narratives, Winners and Losers" in *Lie of the Land, op cit.*, p.74.

³⁷ E.P. Stebbing, "The Encroaching Sahara: The Threat to the West Africa Colonies", *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 85, No.6 (1935).

³⁸ Abdul Raufu Mustapha (2003): *Colonialism and environmental perception in Northern Nigeria*, Oxford Development Studies, Vol. 31, No. 4, p. 418.

³⁹ *Ibid*

⁴⁰ KANPROF 2137 - Anti-Desiccation Campaign.

⁴¹ NAK/Katprof/1054 Katsina Emirate Correspondences, 1949, p. 78.



the planting and protection of farm trees, and their selective and rotational exploitation.⁴² Occasional references to the positive aspects of forest management in Katsina and Northern Nigeria, in general, continued to surface occasionally in the early days of the British colonial period.⁴³

However, as shown above, the intention and the gist of the colonial discourse on the Northern Nigerian forest painted a different picture. It emphasized the widespread and unabated degradation of forests, attributing this tendency primarily to inappropriate use by the local people. Especially starting from the 1930s, foresters, government officials and non-official narratives were dominated by the threat of an impending crisis. Official discourses put emphasis on the threat of desiccation and the moving sand dunes. In line with the general orientation of the degradation discourse, everything about pre-colonial forest management and conservation was challenged; even those practices which were praised by the European explorers.

One of the most heavily blamed practices in Northern Nigeria was the rotational bush fallow system and bush burning. Under the bush fallow system, the local farmers normally allowed a piece of land that was used for ten to fifteen years to be overgrown with grasses and woody plants. This system became more pronounced from the mid-nineteenth century because of the peace and security which followed the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate. Through this practice, forest wilderness conservation was achieved.⁴⁴

After the British conquest of the region, Fredrick Lugard made good use of this local practice while convincing the Colonial Office to allow for the creation of a forest department in Northern Nigeria. In one of his letters to the Colonial Office, he argued that the destruction which threatens the forests of Southern Nigeria as a result of shifting cultivation equally constituted a threat to Northern Nigerian forests.⁴⁵

Another local practice blamed for forest depletion in the north was the annual bush fires. These were occasional fires brought about by either farmers or hunters. Traditionally, burning was used by the farmers either to clear farmland before harvesting, to reduce the labour to be employed in removing undergrowth or to drive away game that may damage their crops. Bush fires were also set by hunters to drive game out of their nests and hideouts. Fulani herdsmen also set bush fires in order to induce the growth of fresh grass for their cattle. These practices were perceived by the Europeans as harmful to the forest. In their view, apart from killing most of the young trees and injuring others, bush fires destroyed seeds and seedlings making it difficult for the forest to regenerate naturally.⁴⁶

The Colonialists also blamed Africans for grazing their cattle in the forests. The Fulani were blamed for grazing their animals indiscriminately through the forest thereby causing immense damage to

⁴² Hugh Clapperton, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa, in the years 1822, 1823, and 1824*, 2 Vols. (London: John Murray, 1826), 2:237-38 and 274-75; Heinrich Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa*, 5 Vols (London: Longman, 1857), 2:93, 5:368.

⁴³ Edmund D. Morel, *Nigeria, Its Peoples and Problems* (London, England: Frank Cass, 1968), pp. 234, 235.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ NAK/SNP 53/1902 Frederick Lugard to Colonial Office, 22 July 1902.

⁴⁶ "There is Forestry", *Farm and Forest*, IV, No.2 (1943), p.55



large forest areas.⁴⁷ A good example of this scepticism was demonstrated in the 1934 E.P Stebbing's writings after he had toured Northern Nigeria. He blamed local people's practices including grazing in the forest area.⁴⁸ Another local people's practice blamed for forest loss was the collection of fuel wood from forest areas. Even though in the context of the early colonial period this threat was relatively less powerful than that from shifting cultivation or bush fires, it was still considered a threat. Thus, to control the perceived threats from these practices and management systems, the Colonial Government in Northern Nigeria took steps to formulate a forest conservation policy. The main principle of this policy was to stop local practices considered dangerous to the conservation of forests such as bush fire, uncontrolled grazing and bush fallow within the concept of forest reservation.⁴⁹

Development of the Forestry Department

The development of the Forest Department in Nigeria owes its origin to the desiccation narrative promoted by the book authored by Alfred Maloney, the Governor of Lagos Colony, and the anxiety it generated in the minds of colonial officers and traders about the destructive exploitation of forest resources.⁵⁰ According to Olufemi Omosini, various accounts of Colonial Officials of the time painted a gloomy picture of wasteful exploitation and massive destruction of rubber and timber trees in both Lagos Colony and the Southern Protectorate.⁵¹ By the 1890s the 'destruction was so acute' at least in the eyes and mind of the Europeans that the Acting Governor of Lagos Colony, George Denton, had to put up a proposal for the establishment of a forest department, whose main duty was to ensure the protection of the existing forests and draw up plans for the re-forestation of denuded areas. In 1897 Cyril Punch was appointed as the Superintendent of Forest to the Colony of Lagos, his task was to ensure proper take-off of the new department. Similarly, Peter Hitchens was assigned similar responsibilities in the Niger Coast Protectorate with his headquarters situated in Calabar city. However, due to the high cost of running the two departments, they were merged in 1905. Mr. H.N Thompson, then Head of Southern Nigeria, became the head of the newly combined department.⁵²

One important aspect that becomes clear in the literature was the role played by economic considerations in the development of the Southern Nigeria forest department. This region was one of the major producers of timber and rubber in British West Africa. Conserving and protecting the forest seemed natural to British colonialists because of the role the two products played in the British metropolitan economy. However, if economic consideration was a vital point in the establishment of the forest department in Southern Nigeria, the circumstances surrounding the establishment of such a department in Northern Nigeria were heavily influenced by the political agenda of Frederick

⁴⁷ H.N. Thompson, "History of the Forest Department of Nigeria" *Farm and Forest*, X (1950), p.59.

⁴⁸ E.P. Stebbing, *The Forests of West Africa and the Sahara*, (London, 1937), pp.24-26.

⁴⁹ NAK/SNP 10, Northern Nigeria Forest Policy.

⁵⁰ R.G. Lowe, "Forestry and Forest Conservation in Nigeria", *The Commonwealth Forestry Review Journal*, Vol.63, No.2, (June 1984), p. 132.

⁵¹ Olufemi Omosini, "Alfred Moloney and His Strategies for Economic Development in Lagos Colony and Hinterland, 1886-1891" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (June 1975), p.50.

⁵² See "100 Year of Forestry Development in Nigeria", Published by the Forestry Association of Nigeria, 1989, p.2.



Lugard. This claim is justified by the correspondence between Frederick Lugard and the colonial office. In these correspondences, he justified the creation of a forest department as imperative to the overall development of the Northern region. To fully augment his points he drew extensively on prevailing elements of colonial environmental discourse which emphasized ecological benefits rather than economic. He backed up this argument by citing a series of incidences of poor rainfall suffered in the region during the early years of the British administration.⁵³

Initially, the colonial Office showed some sympathy with Lugard's views but at the same time was unwilling to commit funds for the venture. This was because throughout the British colonial empire economic benefits were the motivating factor behind the creation of forest departments.⁵⁴ It was expected that each Protectorate should be able to shoulder its departmental expenses in order not to be an economic burden to the British Government. However, in the case of the Northern Protectorate, the establishment of such a department would increase the burden of the Imperial Exchequer because the Protectorate was largely a savannah country that was not so rich in either timber or rubber trees as to attract any meaningful trading activities as in Southern Nigeria.⁵⁵ Besides economic considerations, the Colonial Office was suspicious of Lugard's intention of setting up a separate forest department in Northern Nigeria. They suspected that he only wanted the department to keep pace with the rival Southern Protectorate.⁵⁶

Despite the above in 1903 W.R. Elliott, a West Indian planter of long and varied experience, was appointed as a temporary forest officer to head the department. Thus, the work of the Forest Department in Northern Nigeria started in 1904. One of the earliest tasks of Mr. Elliott on arrival in Northern Nigeria was the establishment of a botanical garden at Zungero the then headquarters of the Northern protectorate. Secondly, he surveyed forest resources of the region.⁵⁷ In his many reports to the Colonial Office, he confirmed the existence of forests mostly in the provinces situated south of the Benue and Niger Rivers. These include Ilorin, Kabba and Bassa Provinces, and in Nasarawa Province north of the Benue, as well as on the banks of the major rivers such as Benue, Niger and Gurara.⁵⁸ According to his report, these forests contained a number of timber and rubber trees which needed to be protected from human depredation.⁵⁹ However, one observation about the reports is that Mr. Elliott, concentrating as he did on rubber and timber, failed to reflect on the complex nature of forest resource distribution and use in Northern Nigeria as a whole. In particular, the areas outside the southern march of the Northern Provinces were not properly reflected.⁶⁰ Large areas of northern forests were only described in some detail in 1916, following the visit of the Senior

⁵³ Cline-Cole, 2000, pp.122-123.

⁵⁴ Bilyaminu I. Kadandani, *Microeconomic Enterprises, Deforestation and Land Degradation in Katsina State of Nigeria* (Zaria: Gaskia Corporation Ltd, 2010), p. 31.

⁵⁵ Colonial Office to Lugard, 13th February 1903.

⁵⁶ Colonial Office to Lugard, 13th February 1903.

⁵⁷ E. O. Egboh, *Forestry Policy in Nigeria, op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁵⁸ This Report is contained as an appendix in the Northern Region Annual Reports, 1900-1910, File No. NAI/CSO/AR4/1.

⁵⁹ NAI/CSO/AR4/1 Northern Region Annual Reports, 1900-1910, pp. 127-135.

⁶⁰ MinAgric, 14449 Vol. II - Forest Development and Forest Policy in Northern Provinces.



Conservator of Forests to Katsina, Sokoto and Borno.⁶¹ Notwithstanding this shortcoming, eventually, Elliott succeeded in persuading the Colonial Office to confirm his appointment.⁶² This confirmation marked the beginning of the Northern Nigeria Forest Department, with Elliott as the first forest officer. The department like in Southern Nigeria also incorporated agricultural and botanical departments.⁶³

At the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, Frederick Lugard, who was the father of Northern Nigerian forestry, returned as the Governor General of Nigeria, and things began to change for the better. In January 1915, he accepted a recommendation made by H.N. Thompson to unite the two forest departments, and the forestry union was effected. Also, the subordination of forestry to agriculture in Northern Nigeria came to an end. Like the 1914 amalgamation, the 1915 forestry union was a loose one. The country was divided into two large zones, the Northern and Southern Provinces. Each had its own forest department under a senior conservator of forests. The head of the Southern Nigerian forest department was not directly the head of the Northern Nigeria department, his role being that of an advisor. Such advice was transmitted through the Governor General to the Lieutenant Governors of the Northern and Southern Provinces.⁶⁴ It was however the responsibility of the adviser to submit to the Governor General a joint annual estimate for the two departments. He was also responsible for preparing the annual report on the work of the two departments. It was as well his duty to exercise general control over matters relating to forestry legislation and the constitution of forest reserves.⁶⁵

The Evolution of Forest Policies in Northern Nigeria 1901-45

There was no formal forest policy in place in Nigeria during the first two decades of the colonial period. There is, however, sufficient evidence to suggest that exploitation of rich forest resources from the Southern Nigerian forests was at the core of the unwritten official policy pursued by the colonial administration.⁶⁶ This emanated from the urgent need to finance the newly established colony of Lagos and was also partly due to the development of an alternative exportable product of rubber and timber and palm produce that dominated European trade before then. Therefore, when the rubber and timber trade developed in Lagos in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a significant portion of trees in relevant forests were cut down, logged and the products exported.⁶⁷ The fact that the colonial administration did not raise any objection until toward

⁶¹ See, The Annual Report of the Forest Administration of the Northern and Southern Provinces.

⁶² Reginald Cline-Cole, "Manufacturing Forests and Farming Trees in Nigeria" in Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns (eds), *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment*, (London: James Currey Ltd, 1996), p. 138.

⁶³ Edmund O. Egbob, *Forestry Policy of Nigeria, op cit.*, p.20.

⁶⁴ "100 Year of Forestry Development in Nigeria", Published by the Forestry Association of Nigeria, 1989, p.2.

⁶⁵ E.P Thompson, "History of the Forestry Department of Nigeria", *Farm and Forest*, IX, No. 1, (1948), p. 18.

⁶⁶ Alfred Maloney, "Sketch of the Forest of West Africa" and A.H. Urwin "Forest and Forest Conservation in Nigeria".

⁶⁷ See A.H. Urwin, "The Forests and Forest Department of Nigeria" *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 18, No. 69 (Oct., 1918), p.10.



the tail end of the century implies that the actual forest policy centred on extraction for immediate economic use of forest resources. The extraction was done by commercial companies while the government benefitted from the revenue accrued through export taxes.⁶⁸

In Northern Nigeria, the case was completely different because the conquest of the region which began in 1900 and coincided with the emergence of the environmental crisis narratives in the British Empire eventually shifted the goal of the British colonial forest policy from exploitation to conservation.⁶⁹ As early as 1901 the Colonial Government began to make policy statements about forest conservation in the country. The earliest statement of the Nigerian Forest Policy was contained in the 'Rules of Procedure and Forest Organization' of 1901. The policy stated the creation of forest reserves as the major aim of conservation, encompassing the protection of wildlife, watershed and endangered species.⁷⁰

To ensure the implementation of this policy, forestry proclamations, bills and legislations followed one another in rapid succession. These early legislations were based on those of the Burma forest service of 1898 but were modified to suit the local requirements of the region.⁷¹ These included the 1902 Proclamation and the 1906 and 1916 Ordinances. For instance, the central idea of the 1916 Ordinance was that 25% of the land of Nigeria ought to be reserved. Besides, the 1916 Ordinance was the first to be applied to the whole of Nigeria, which laid the foundation for forest conservation in Northern Nigeria. Frederick Lugard, as Omosini puts it, "seized the opportunity of the World War One emergency to assume radical powers for compulsory constitution of forest reserves".⁷²

For instance, the Ordinances empowered the Governor to 'designate any area into a forest reserve if in his opinion the conservation of such an area was necessary for the protection of the forest resources. Other relevant conservation provisions contained in these ordinances were the procedures to be followed when constituting these forest reserves. These included the publication of a notice in the *Gazette* of Government's intention to constitute a reserve. In the publication, issues pertaining to the boundary and purpose for which the reserve was to be constituted would be clearly stated. The ordinances also provided for the appointment of the Reserve Settlement Officer who would inquire into the nature and extent of rights claimed by any person or community in or over such lands before reservation.⁷³

In Northern Nigeria, despite attempts by the colonial administrators to implement the above-mentioned policy, its impact was up till 1906 felt only in those Provinces covered by W.R. Elliott's initial survey of 1904. As discussed earlier in this paper the survey considered only the provinces

⁶⁸Edmund O. Egbah, "British Colonial Administration and the Legal Control of the Forests of Lagos Colony and Protectorate 1897-1902: An Example of Economic Control under Colonial Rule" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 9, No. 3, (December 1978), p. 78.

⁶⁹Richard Grove, *Ecology, Climate and Empire*, *op cit.*, p. 122.

⁷⁰ Forest Administration Plan of Nigeria, 1946-55: Under a Ten-Year Plan of Development for Nigeria, 1946, p.5.

⁷¹ S.K Adeyoju, *Forestry and Nigerian Economy*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975), p.20.

⁷²Ambrose Omosini, "Background to the Forestry Legislation in Lagos Colony and Protectorate, 1897-1902", p. 69.

⁷³ S.K Adeyoju, *Forestry and Nigerian Economy*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1975), p.20.



with rich timber or rubber resources, such as Kabba, Bussa, Lokoja and Nasarawa. In the rest of the provinces, the policy was only implemented in areas surrounding army cantonments and British officials' residential areas which were directly under British authority.⁷⁴ Part of the reasons for this selective implementation was the reluctance of the colonial government to make a full commitment to forest conservation due to the lack of economic viability of the forests in the majority of the parts of the region.

Also, there was an anti-conservation attitude on the part of the Northern Protectorate Governor, Hesketh Bell, who saw agriculture, not forestry, as the principal area for economic development and exploitation of Northern Nigeria. His lack of interest was further demonstrated when he downgraded the forest department to a unit under the Agricultural Department and made no provision for a forest officer to take charge of forest responsibilities in the reorganized department. As a result, the region's Forest Department which was supposed to implement the conservation policy was struggling with staffing and lack of expertise throughout the period.⁷⁵

Added to the above reasons was the increased demand for more forest produce created by the opening up of the country by railways and roads. By 1918 the damage done to forest resources was so great that the then Conservator of Forest for Zaria Circle had to make a written complaint to the Lieutenant Governor about the level of forest damage by railway workers in the Circle.⁷⁶ Directly related to railways was the expansion of groundnut production, which the Governor promoted over forest resources.⁷⁷ According to Reginald Cline-Cole, the arrival of railway service from Lagos in 1912 to Kano and later Funtua town in Katsina Emirate in 1922 led to an enormous expansion in groundnut production, resulting in rapid and widespread deforestation.⁷⁸ This damage was further exacerbated by the monetization of taxation. For the people to generate more income to pay taxes, there was an intensified and increased tree felling for commercial fuelwood production.⁷⁹ From the above obstacles one can easily see why the forest reservation policy in Northern Nigeria was a total failure up until the second coming of Frederick Lugard to the country; this time as Governor General from 1912 to 1918.

In an attempt to address all the above problems and expand forest conservation to all parts of Northern Nigeria, Frederick Lugard in 1918 consulted the Director of Forests and drew up a valuable memorandum on the forest policy.⁸⁰ As far as Northern Nigeria was concerned this memorandum is the first full policy statement on forest conservation in the region. A close look at it shows that it was formulated to address conservation problems in Northern Nigeria than the forestry problems in the South. The memorandum dwelt much in portraying the importance of forest conservation as the basis

⁷⁴ Edmund O. Egboh, *Forestry Policy of Nigeria*, *op cit.*, p.23.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.21.

⁷⁶ Annual Report on the Forest Administration of Northern Nigeria 1917, p.6.

⁷⁷ Tukur B. Ingawa, "A Study of the Rural Economic History of the Najor Cotton Producing Areas", *op cit.*, p. 211.

⁷⁸ Reginald Cline-Cole, "The Political Economy of Fuelwood Relations", *op cit.*, p.74.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*

⁸⁰ Frederick Lugard, *Political Memoranda: Revision of Instructions to Political Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative, 1913-1919*, Edited by A.H.M. Kirk-Green, (London: Frank Cass, 1970), p.432.



of the policy. Lugard's *Political Memorandum* emphatically stated that 'the only effective method of conserving forests is by the creation of Forest Reserves.'⁸¹ This he claimed was not difficult in the Northern Provinces because the land was vested in the hand of the Governor as a trustee for the people.

As a result of this policy large tracts of forests were carved for conservation all over the Northern Protectorate. In Katsina Emirate for example, from 1918 when the policy was formulated, to 1945 when a new policy came into being, no less than twenty-five forest reserves were created.⁸² Among these were two of the largest forest reserves in the Emirate, the Ruma-KukarJangarai and Kogo Forest Reserves. The fact that these two reserves with an area of more than 500 square miles exist to date with only minor modifications in terms of boundaries is a clear testimony to the early success of these forest policies in Northern Nigeria. Despite these successes, after just two decades the colonial government was back at the drawing board to come up with a new forest policy that would cater for the realities of the post-Second World War era.

The 1945 Forest Policy

Although in principle no policy change was effected before 1945, in reality, the focus of the official forest policy had changed from conservation to exploitation since 1939 in Northern Nigeria. This was the time when the British were preparing for the Second World War, under which situation many forest conservation plans were abandoned.⁸³ The events of the Second World War which resulted in the increased demand for forest resources led to the realization by the colonial administration that forest products were an important input to the war effort and wartime colonial and metropolitan economy. As argued by Reginald Cline-Cole, this gave West African colonies, especially Nigeria a new economic role and heightened the region's importance as a major source of manpower and raw materials for the southern Atlantic operations and the supply routes to the Middle East.⁸⁴

A nationwide survey of forests in Nigeria has revealed that as a result of the war, the majority of the forest department expatriate staff had been recalled to participate in the war. Their absence created a vacuum which resulted in massive encroachments into forest reserves.⁸⁵ For example, a total of 479 square miles of reserves were discovered to have been lost to agriculture, out of which 336 was by the Government and 143 by Native Administrations in the country.⁸⁶ These problems necessitated calls for a new and more comprehensive and elaborate forest policy to point a new direction for the utilization, management and control of forest resources.

⁸¹ Frederick Lugard, *Political Memoranda: Revision of Instructions to Political Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative, 1913-1919*, Edited by A.H.M. Kirk-Green, (London: Frank Cass, 1970), p.433.

⁸² NAK/MinAgric/14449 Vol. II Forest Development and Forest Policy in Northern Province, p.39.

⁸³ Reginald Cline-Cole, "Redefining Forestry Space and Threatening Livelihoods un Colonial Northern Nigeria" in Reginald Cline-Cole and Clare Madge (eds), *Contesting Forestry in West Africa* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2000), p.46

⁸⁴ Reginald Cline-Cole, "Redefining Forestry Space", p.59.

⁸⁵ Annual Report on the Forestry Department, 1945, 1/44/45, p.2.

⁸⁶ Annual Report on the Forest Administration in Nigeria, 1945, p.2.



In February 1945 a new Forest Policy was approved by the Governor of Nigeria, Hugh Clifford. This policy was the first comprehensive forest policy statement in Nigeria.⁸⁷ While the policy provided for the conservation of forest vegetation to avoid damage from rainwater run-off in land or waterways, the majority of what the policy subscribed to and focused on was resource exploitation. This was demonstrated in the first section of the policy which stated that the main objective of the policy was: ‘the production of the maximum benefit to the greater number from the minimum amount of forest which is essential for the general well-being of the country’.⁸⁸ If section one is a general statement, subsequent sections of the policy made it categorically clear what the intention of the policy was. For instance, in the second clause, two principles of exploitation were stated. The first was that the policy was principally meant to preserve the physical and climatic condition of the country through the control and maintenance of the forest. The second was to ensure in perpetuity the supply of all forms of forest produce. The policy further stated that once these two primary principles were in place, then agriculture must take priority over forestry, while satisfaction of the needs of the people at the lowest possible rates must also take precedence over revenue generation.⁸⁹

From the above is apparent that the 1945 forest policy prioritized exploitation over conservation. This was for instance demonstrated by the second clause of the policy which says that since only the coastal strip of Nigeria supported continued heavy timber forest no more attention than is justified would be devoted to it anymore. The greatest stress would from then on be laid upon the control, management and development of the savannah woodlands and high forest patches which were contributing largely to the supply of the everyday needs of the people in the greater part of Nigeria.⁹⁰ The policy also changed the management objective as well. In the fourth clause of the policy, it was stated that forests should be managed primarily for the benefit of the locality in which they grow.

Likewise, all revenue from the sales of forest resources should be used for the benefit of the local communities which had sacrificed land for its production. It further provided that wherever the competence and the will to undertake it exists, the control and management of forest reserves shall be devolved on Native Administration, who shall receive all revenue, subject to such control by Government as will ensure that management is in accordance with the Government’s policy. The policy shall be to encourage the acceptance of responsibility by Native Administrations.⁹¹

Even though the 1945 policy continued to be the official forest policy for Nigeria, the political developments of the 1950s meant a variation in the forestry policy. The new constitution in vogue by 1955 was the Macpherson constitution which brought about changes not only in the management structure of the forest departments but also in the policy objectives as well. For instance, in Western

⁸⁷Edmund O. Egboh, *Forestry Policy in Nigeria, op cit.*, p. 41.

⁸⁸Ebenezer IbukunArifalo, *Understanding Forest Policy*, (Yola: Paracelete Publishers, 2005), p. 146.

⁸⁹ “The 1945 Forest Policy of Nigeria” as contained in the Annual Report on the Forest Administration of Nigeria, 1944-45, p. 45.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹ “The 1945 Forest Policy of Nigeria” as contained in the Annual Report on the Forest Administration of Nigeria, 1944-45, p. 46.



and Mid-Western regions the objectives were centred on the production with special reference to local needs, while in the Eastern Region emphasis was on multiple land use planning, provision of recreation and maintenance of good public relations. It also stressed government participation in the development of wood processing such as pulp, paper, particle board and chipboard.⁹²

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show how colonialism in Northern Nigeria changed the nature and foundation of forest resources management and conservation. The period witnessed the adoption and elevation of the so-called western scientific conservation methods in place of the indigenous conservation methods and Caliphate rules and regulations. In this region of British dominion, as in the case of the rest of the British colonial empire, the backbone of forest conservation was a set of widely perceived but often unfounded ideas about deforestation and desertification, generally termed the degradation narratives. Particularly, the paper pays attention to the origins of the narratives and their justifications and goals.

Also, the paper shows how colonial administrators involved in forest policy formulation were swayed by the various discourses under the dominant degradation narratives. It seems from the discussions that a great deal of the colonial narratives about Katsina people's forest management and utilization were ideologically driven. It is apparent that what colonialists perceived as the right way of managing and conserving forests was often built on personal misconceptions than determined by verifiable scientific explanations. By highlighting the new developments that took shape in the colonial period the paper demonstrates how colonialism as a specific socio-economic and political system brought notable changes in forest conservation perspectives and practices. It also clearly shows the role played by colonial agents such as governors, forestry directors and officials and colonial scientists in bringing about the said changes in forest conservation ideas, practices and justifications.

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