

The Relevance and Impact of Professional Counselling on Land Use and Management for Environmental Sustainability: The Benue Experience in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper would report the relevance and impact of professional counseling on development and land use in Nigeria. In Benue State, urban and rural dwellers numbering 520 were provided with structured questionnaire. Indices used in the study included mode of development and land use, educational level, settlement and age of respondents. The analytical study reveals that 29% rural participants and 22% are urban dwellers believed in professional planning before land could be used and developed. These participants in the study believed in professional counselling to avoid land misuse.

The effect of counseling or planning by professional on development and land use is still not felt. This because there still exists arable farming that is done indiscriminately close to road pavements. In addition, there is misplacement of priority on land use especially where mineral resources exist. Owners of land based on the current land-tenure system prefer using them for arable farming. Relevant agencies are not involved in decision making over land use. Turning land that is viable for mineral resource development to an arable farming land as presently being practiced requires professional counseling to change the trend. Its either professional counsellors are not enough or they have not made themselves available for consultation.

Keywords: Professional counseling, mineral resources, agricultural yield, land use, management, land development, Land use planning, sustainable development.

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Introduction

Professional counseling or land use planning to achieve development and sustainable land use in Nigeria has become essential because of the abnormalities so far recorded and observed on development and land use in Benue State, Nigeria (Denga, 1989., Fresco et al, 1992). Land is a section of the surface of the earth comprising all physicochemical and biological attributes that influence resource use.

This refers to soil, spatial variability of landscape, climate, hydrology, vegetation and fauna (Demeke, 2001). Enhancement in land management inclusive drainage and mechanical activities. Land use means the utilization of the land for agricultural and forestry, settlements, industrial sites, construction, horticultural, exploration and several anthropogenic activities (Hes and van Lier, 1999).

Sustainable land use is the ability to achieve the spatial spreading of the different uses to secure biodiversity ecological-balance of the entire system (De Wrachien, 2001). Land use sustainability associates technology, policies and activities aimed at integrating socio-economic principles with environmental concerns (Fleischhauer and Efer, 1998).

Therefore, planners of land use or professional counsellors involved in land use sustainable planning needs to recognize this as a process aimed at integrating environmental, socio-economic, political and ethical principles in land management, for productivity and generational equity. Development and land use sustainable planning requires an understanding of the criteria for apportioning land for a use inclusive construction and utilization of renewable and non-renewable resources (Davidson,1980).

To achieve this, regulatory policies should be based on realities at local level and community-based management of natural resources (Scarascia, 1999). The environmental, social and economic effect of such regulatory policies should be examined before implementation. Professional planners of land use would require this knowledge for land use advise that is well articulated.

Land use planning involves the methodical examination of land and water bodies, based on economic and social considerations (Izakovicova, 2012). This is aimed at selecting option and adopting the use of land that is best options. It is aimed at putting into practice land uses that will best reflect the desires of the people while safeguarding resources for the future (van Lier, 1996).

The guiding principle behind professional counsellors or land planners should be the need for change, the need for improved management and different pattern of land use engineered by changing circumstances (Lindgren, 1985). This means that land use planning is a continuous process, aimed at making the best use of land resources. Professional counselling or planning is necessary because of the hazards that could accompany improper development and land use.

These include a. desertification viz land clearing, b. erosion engineered by interventions, c. air pollution caused by gas flaring and burning of grasses during dry season, d. contamination of ground water caused by the application of fertilizer on

arable lands e. failure of soil caused by foundation of buildings [Hamdy and De Wrachien, 1999] Some of these land use irregularities observed in Benue State Nigeria.

The building foundation failure observe at some sections of Igumale town and Benue Polytechnic engineering complex are evidences of land development without proper professional counselling. in Nigeria. Previous author stated that one task required in the management of land is the integration of data on land resources with information on social economic and human resources development (Adesina and Amamoo, 1992).

In this regard, professional counsellors could provide the following: training needs required in land use forecasting and administration; advance formal and informal practical training programs via extension services to skills and support land users' proficiencies; improve the competences of decision makers at all stages, involved in the planning of land use programs (Wolde-Giorgis,1999).

Information on proper land use could be obtained through soil characterization viz the use of air photos, topographical and geological maps (Yokoi, 2000). Classification of soil into various fractions is then carried out (Egirani and Otor, 2001). Formulation and implementation of strategic policies on planning for the use of land entails collection, processing and dissemination of reliable information. Also, it involves utilization of modern land investigation technologies, aimed at creating sound scientific understanding for appropriate decision making. The creation of an effective collaborative system can enhance collection process and information exchange to reduce overlap.

The aim and scope of the present investigation is to provide the public perception of the relevance of professional planning on the development and use of land in Benue State, Nigeria. This was limited to a structured questionnaire administered on 520 urban and rural respondents in Benue State of Nigeria. This is because of the pattern of the development and use of land, its implication on the socio-economic and mineral resource development in Nigeria.

The objectives include determination of respondent in support of land use before professional counseling; respondents in support of land development after professional counseling; respondents in support of development and land use after professional counseling and respondents not in support of professional counseling before development and land use (Figures 1 and2).

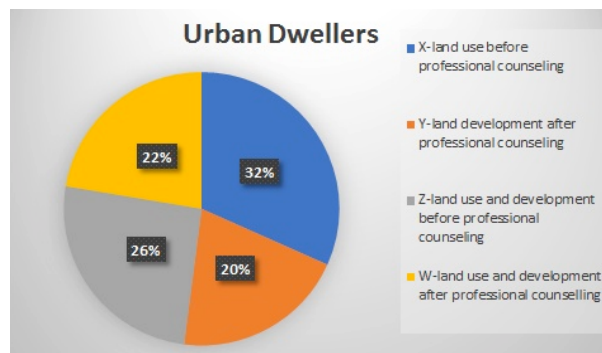


Figure 1: % respondents of Urban Dwellers on land use and development in Benue State, Nigeria

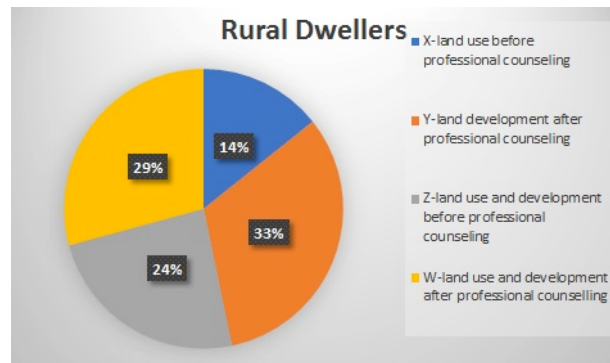


Figure 2: % respondents of Rural Dwellers on land use and development in Benue State, Nigeria.

Conclusion

Available results show that 29% of rural respondents and 22% urban dwellers are opposed to the idea of professional planning before development and land use. They believed that government should be directly involved in development and land use viz motivations by government in the form of good services, policy formulation. This could result in the funding of mineral resource, agricultural research and land development projects. However, it should be noted that some of the participants in this study believed in the participation of individuals and private organization in effective development and land use in Nigeria.

About 32% of urban respondents and 14% rural dwellers believed that professional counseling is necessary before land use but not necessarily before development. This value is different from the 20% of urban dwellers and 33% of rural dwellers who are in support of development and land use only after professional counseling. This may be linked to the high cost of land development projects when compared with the less financial input required in peasant farming. However, professional planners are liable to project durability. About 26% urban respondents and 24% rural respondents believed that planning by professionals is necessary before development and land use. However, these respondents believed that professional planning is not recognized by government. For this reason, its exercise is not appropriate and effective.

If planning for land use is not common, it is either because professional planners are not sufficient or the participation of planners in development and land use is not encouraged by government. This could also mean that the services of professional planners have not been made known to the public. Statistically, correlations that are positively imperfect exist between urban and rural correspondents on development and land use after professional counseling. This is because urban respondents blame too long bureaucracy by government a source of low level of development and land use. Rural respondents blame the cheap use of land for arable farming as the bane for the current level of development of land using professional counseling. The claim that 90% of the survey participants believe in professional counseling before development and land use is not statistically legitimate. This is because at level of significance of 1%, the statistical value of 5.0 as against 2.33 is highly significant.

Therefore, most the Benue people have recognized the relevance of professional counseling on development and land use. However, it is true that professional counseling has not created any impact on development and land use.

This may be assigned to the fact that there may not be sufficient professional counselors that their activities are recognized by government. Therefore, those who exercise professional counseling related to development and land use are discouraged. Professional counselors on the other hand are not known by the public. Therefore, professional counselors need be trained to cope with this emerging trend of land management. They should also be provided with some government incentives and be encouraged to make themselves relevant to the public.

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