



Ethnographic Narrative of Forest Decline in the Goderich Community: The People's Perspectives

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Abstract

This report is based on a qualitative investigation carried out to unearth people's perceptions in the Goderich Village community of the causes / drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. It has explored the historical background with regard to culture / tradition and economic activities. Regeneration has surely made an impact in beautifying the entire community, but at the expense of the demise of cultural values, and also future environmental risks.

Ethnographic methodology was used as the main approach to investigating opinions and with more open-ended style questions used to help explore deeper understanding of people's perceptions about common drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. Views on people's perception about the way forward in cushioning future disaster were also addressed in the conclusion.

Keywords: Ethnography; Forestry; Deforestation; REDD+; historical Perspectives

Introduction

Historically, the community of Goderich has been in existence as early as in the era of 1415–1670 by a Portuguese voyager, Pedro Da Sintra [1] along the peninsula of what is referred to as the Western Area Peninsula Forest (WAPFoR). It is a reasonably highly populated (m19,000+) [2] community with pockets of smaller towns and a mixture of diverse ethnic indigenes [Reference to "Population Density Map of Sierra Leone]. Being a constituent part of WAPFoR, and most importantly, its closeness to the capital city of Freetown, the community seemed to have lately experienced increased attention with the high rate of migration that is supported by developments in housing and accessible road works construction to make the area very habitable for existing and intending dwellers.

Aim and objectives of the Article

The main aim of the article is to address the true cause(s) of deforestation and forest degradation through ethnographic approach from the perspectives of residents in the wider community of Goderich.

In order to be able to achieve this, the study will seek to address the following objectives:

Explore people's views about their feeling with regard to the wide scale deforestation of protected land.

Provide an assessment of concerns expressed by participants in relation to changes in the cultural, social and economic way of life.

The extent of deforestation experienced around the Goderich area, and particularly in the Goderich community has resulted in the following question been developed to explore the main extent of the situation around the community: What are the main causes of deforestation in the wider Goderich community as perceived from an ethnography approach?

Background of goderich (economic, cultural and social link with forestry)

The village is segregated into pockets of smaller communities and these include:

Oba funkia: A small populated community consisting mainly of the Creoles (over 98%), who are practicing Christians mainly affiliated to the Anglican denomination (historically, Church of England), Methodists (Wesleyan tradition) and the Huntingdon Connection (closely associated with the Huntingdon community in the UK). People in this community are very traditional in their way of life, for example, performance of regular acts of libation, a sign of respect paid to the deceased. Social activities is closely linked to traditional societies like the 'Oro, also known as the Egba Emaleh and Hunting (more so the Hunters). The Hunting society is traditionally rooted from Nigeria, but considered a way of life by village community dwellers to celebrate their achievements / successes after time spent in the forest to hunt for bush-meat, which can be shared with people in the community. Hence their successes is celebrated through public performance of a 'masked caricatured living-human object, and a showcase of bush-meat that would have been hunted after several days and nights spent by members (mainly men) around the vicinity of local forests. In addition to this, high ranking men in the hunting society are looked upon to make use of traditional values passed down to them in using herbal leaves to protect people from illness which are least likely to be cured through conventional hospital treatment.

Antar town: This is also part of the Goderich community comprising of mixed ethnic groups, mainly settlers who reasons for relocation have been influenced by the vibrant fishing activities around Gondo Water and Shallow Water sea fronts. This part of Goderich is

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highly recognised far and wide in the capital city and beyond in Sierra Leone, mainly because of its supply of variety of fishes (smoked and fresh, and mainly Minoes, Herring and Snapper) supplied to markets around the capital city of Freetown. One would also expect that such high level of activity can also incorporate the use of local forest resources like fire-wood and charcoal as a means of preservative for fish.

Typically, the Antar Town community is mixed in terms of religious (mainly fervent Muslims and a minority of Christians and atheists) and traditional values, and with variety of indigenous languages spoken by people due to their origin from different parts of the country. There is also a small, but cohesive pockets of Ghanaian community migrants who have contributed immensely to developing the fishing industry and their activities are more concentrated in large outboard machine operated fishing vessels, with nets used to trap fish [mainly Herrings] in open sea.

Typical traditional societies associated with people in the Antar Town community include the 'Ojeh', also a Nigerian imported tradition mainly from the Yoruba culture. Rituals are normally performed by men, and similarly like the Hunting society, there is a high dependence on members, highly ranked to make use of herbs collected from local forests as a means of curatives in the event of unexpected attacks by clandestine intruders to molest the society (commonly called Ba-woojeh). There is also the women's counterpart which is the 'Bundo' society, more associated with female genital mutilation. These are women from mixed ethnic backgrounds, and the main aim is to empower women into becoming future and carers and wives. These women are also very skilful in their ability to teach younger recruits the art of traditional values like the use of forest land for initiation and herbs to help prevent or cure illnesses [3].

Sherbro town: This is also a mixed populated community with descendants who mainly originated from Sherbro communities from different parts of Sierra Leone. A very quiet community, also aligned with the Creoles from Oba Funkia and are mostly Christians. Economic activities of people from this part of Goderich involve agriculture, and with a high reliance on the local forest by the men to fetch wood, mostly for sale (to generate income to meet the demands of family life) and domestic consumption.

MMCET community: This community was established in 1965 with the sole purpose of establishing a higher education geared towards educating citizens to become qualified teachers in secondary schools across the country. Hence, 95% of the population is mainly students resident in halls and staff (lecturers with their families, and other administrative workers). Prior to the war era, the MMCET community was over 90% forested, with added advantage of its dedicated Agriculture department nurturing agricultural productivity in the entire Goderich Village community. Because of the extent of poverty experienced by people generally in the village, forest reserve around the MMCET vicinity have gone through a long history of deforestation, with the current situation now worsen by the 'land grabbing culture' perpetrated in the aftermath of the 10 year civil war in the country. The deforestation of land around the MMCET Community in the 1960s, and even up to the early part of the civil crisis in 1991 was considered as a way of livelihood sustenance (domestic consumption for cooking and meeting other household chores such as ironing with the use of the traditional coal Goose [4].

Maggay town and fornima: This is an important community around Goderich Village that was once sparsely populated by descendants from different parts of the country. Gbendembu, as the

area is most commonly known, used to be a highly forested community but with the rise in population (mainly movement from the provinces), it was evident that deforestation was going to be prominent as a way of giving rise to the construction of beautiful and expensive houses, serving the so-called elites in the country.

Adonkia (annexing ogu and bangu farms): This community used to be a quiet and small community covered mainly by forest. Bangu and Ogu farm annex of the Adonkia community were viewed as the economic active areas with a lot of ongoing fishing activities taking place. The fishing activities were an influence to attracting new dwellers. Deforestation activity is a common phenomenon due to high level of poverty and low level of manifested by people in communities to meet their survival needs. More lately, the high intensity of deforestation was exacerbated by the relaxed policy of successive governments in the late 1990s to early 2000s to tighten laws prohibiting large-scale and senseless degradation of land around the country [5]. In the present day, this is now seen as the most highly expensive community in Goderich with the expansion of large scale building construction works undertaken by NASSIT and private individuals, thereby adding to the continuing problems of deforestation, and the demise of essential biodiversity and exposure to hazardous climatic change [6].

Literature Review: Theoretical Perspectives on Deforestation Drivers

Deforestation is a topical discourse in recent time, and championed by international organisations like as the World Bank and specialist agencies of the United Nations, for example [FAO and UNEP]. Studies conducted by Kissinger et al. [7], Boucher et al. [8] and also the 'Union of Concerned Scientists [9], outlined some of the main drivers for deforestation and forest degradation as due to the human activities, which also account for a reduction in carbon stock; leading to direct agricultural activities is estimated to accounted for over 80% of the degradation of land around the world.

As explained by Farcy and Deville [10], it is acknowledged that one of the main role of forest as applied in historical Goderich community concerned the preservation of cultures and traditions; that which makes it possible for indigenes to access as a way of survival for majority of the time, but more so for keeping up with traditional / cultural values, like hunting and performing rituals. The growing relationship between human beings and their interaction with the acquisition of land has given rise to the introduction of various forms of enforcement legislations on a global scale, and in the case with Sierra Leone, the Forest Law acts of 1916, followed by the 1988 Forest Acts and many more [5,11-13]. To the ordinary community resident in the village, the protection of forest area or enforcement legislations may be interpreted as a form of hegemonic control to restrain community residents from exercising their right of access to land areas which they perceived as part of their territory, and more so, an imposition of the aesthetic interpretation of their routes and cultural heritage.

Indigenous forest community residents, particularly in Africa have come under criticism for not having a long-term view of the environmental impact of their usage of forests [14]; the level of forest exploitation experienced in the post-war era around WAPFoR in Sierra Leone, and particularly around the Goderich community, meant that even government officials have also been totally oblivious about the future consequences of their destructive acts and relaxed legislations on access to protected forest areas. As Leach and Fairhead [15] puts it, across all countries in the West African region, the major and immediate cause of deforestation have been blamed on the conversion

of land for agricultural use, and logging as a identifies as a major role in other areas. The works of Gardner-Outlaw and Engelman [16], seemed to have been placed well in terms of understanding the root cause of the current deforestation as evident in the Goderich area; amongst these include increased population, failed government policies and the continued construction of houses in protected forest locations as a way of urbanising the community.

Based on Kissinger et al. [7] report, future trends in deforestation and forest degradation is based on the following;

Global population growth which is projects at 8.2 billion by the year 2030, more so in urban areas. This situation is likely to be heavily felt around urban centres in developing countries in Africa where the expanded population will be expected to rise as a result of population mobility.

Economic growth: A common phenomenon prevailing in countries like Russian Federation and China, and based on the OECD/FAO [17] projection, these economies are expected to see an 8% rise in growth rate within 10 years period. A possible reason for this might be due to the influence and pressure of these economies to adopt the western way of life, thereby giving rise to the need to expand land use far and beyond to accommodate the expected economic boom. Other regions such as developing nations in Africa and Latin America are also likely to be affected by this economic driver of deforestation and forest degradation due to expansion in foreign direct investment activities taking place in rich natural resourced economies like Sierra Leone which witnessed a rise in her per capita output during the year 2013/14 [18].

Agricultural commodities: Based on Kissinger et al. [7] report, this is estimated to increase by 70% in the year 2050. This is more so to do with the increase level of global rise in population rate, thereby adding pressure on the agricultural sector to expand land-use to meet the growing demand for goods produced.

Oil palm: This is an essential produce for the production of soap and other essential bi-products. Oil Palm plantations tend to be a long term investment and this means that land area is likely to be depleted in order to give rise to expanded plantations.

Meat: According to a report from the FAO [19], this is expected to rise up to 85%. This is true for developing countries like the African economies where reliance on forest resources like bush-meat is seen as a cheap means for survival.

Bio-fuels: According to the report, it is anticipated that this will increase in the next ten years and more so to do with the increase demand for fuel consumption to cater for the rise in the world's population.

Wood products (pulp, paper and saw logs): Based on Kissinger et al. [7] report findings, and also supported by research conducted by Boucher et al. [8], it is expected that annual production capacity will rise up to 1.8 billion cubic metre. The projected Figures 1 and 2 may possibly be higher given the excessive rate of illegal trading activities experienced by poor nations in Africa; for example, in the case of Sierra Leone where illegal logging culprits seemed to be escaping investigation by corrupt legislative authorities [6].

Fuel wood/charcoal: This is an on-going problem experienced in developing economies, particularly poor rural community residents whose livelihood can only be met through access to forest resources

such as wood products. In communities such as Goderich Village where the expansion in population is on the increase (due to migration), it is possible that indigenous poor residents will seek to search far afield for new areas to exploit cheap forest resources. Based on this high level exploitation of forest resources, the report estimated that the soil biomass will decrease by 175 million as of 2008, and up to the projected year of 2030.

Mining: This according to the report is expected to rise as a result of population increase and also backed by increased economic activity. As in the case with Sierra Leone, this had proved to be true as experienced during the civil crisis of 1991-2001 [5,11,20].

Majority of the time, these human activities, particularly in agriculture are not deliberately carried out as a way of depleting the environment, but more so as a means of survival, particularly in poor communities where the need for restoring used lands are not very well supported by modern agricultural technologies.

Based on Hiemstra-Van der Horst et al. [21], the rising population growth rate experienced between 1970s - 1980s, particularly in the tropics saw a detrimental impact on deforestation and forest degradation, and for which the situation as seen in and around the vicinity of Goderich Village community is no exception. Increased population in the Sierra Leone also exacerbated high rate of deforestation, giving rise to expensive house prices which outstrips affordability of an average indigenous resident [5,6,12,22].

Medrilzam et al. [23] in their article expressed the complexities involved in fully explaining the real cause / drivers of deforestation; an indisputable act about the existence of the relationship existing between humans as social system and nature as the ecological system. In order to ascertain the true understanding of existential relationship, they then applied the method of 'Soft System Thinking Methodology (SSM)', which is based on an understanding of the system by acknowledgment of the experience of people living within the system itself.

A report conducted by Houghton [24] attributes deforestation / forest degradation and high carbon density of forests as the main drivers for carbon emission. Based on his study (also an excerpt from the FAO/JRC [25] survey, it indicated an increase in tropical net deforestation from 8.2 million ha yr⁻¹ during the period 1990-2000 to 10.0 million ha yr⁻¹ during the period 2000-2005. In the situation with Sierra Leone, and in particularly the Goderich community, both deforestation and degradation seemed to be a common thing as there is a tendency for people to clear forests and degrading lands to give way to modern developments such as housing construction.

The use of forest transition model as explained in Hosonuma et al. [26] and Jackson [13] articles provide a clear illustration about the impact of deforestation and forest degradation on carbon emission stock, and ultimately environmental hazards. Hosonuma [26] also emphasised commercial and subsistence agriculture, Mining, Infrastructure and Urbanisation as the main drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. Most nations in developing countries, particularly tropical economies in Africa, Asia and Latin America seemed to have adopted the REDD+ strategy as a way of mitigating the aforesaid drivers of forest decline (more to be explored from discussing the findings).

Methodology, Sampling & Analysis

Given the nature of the research question, open-ended style questions were developed with the aim of ensuring that a more

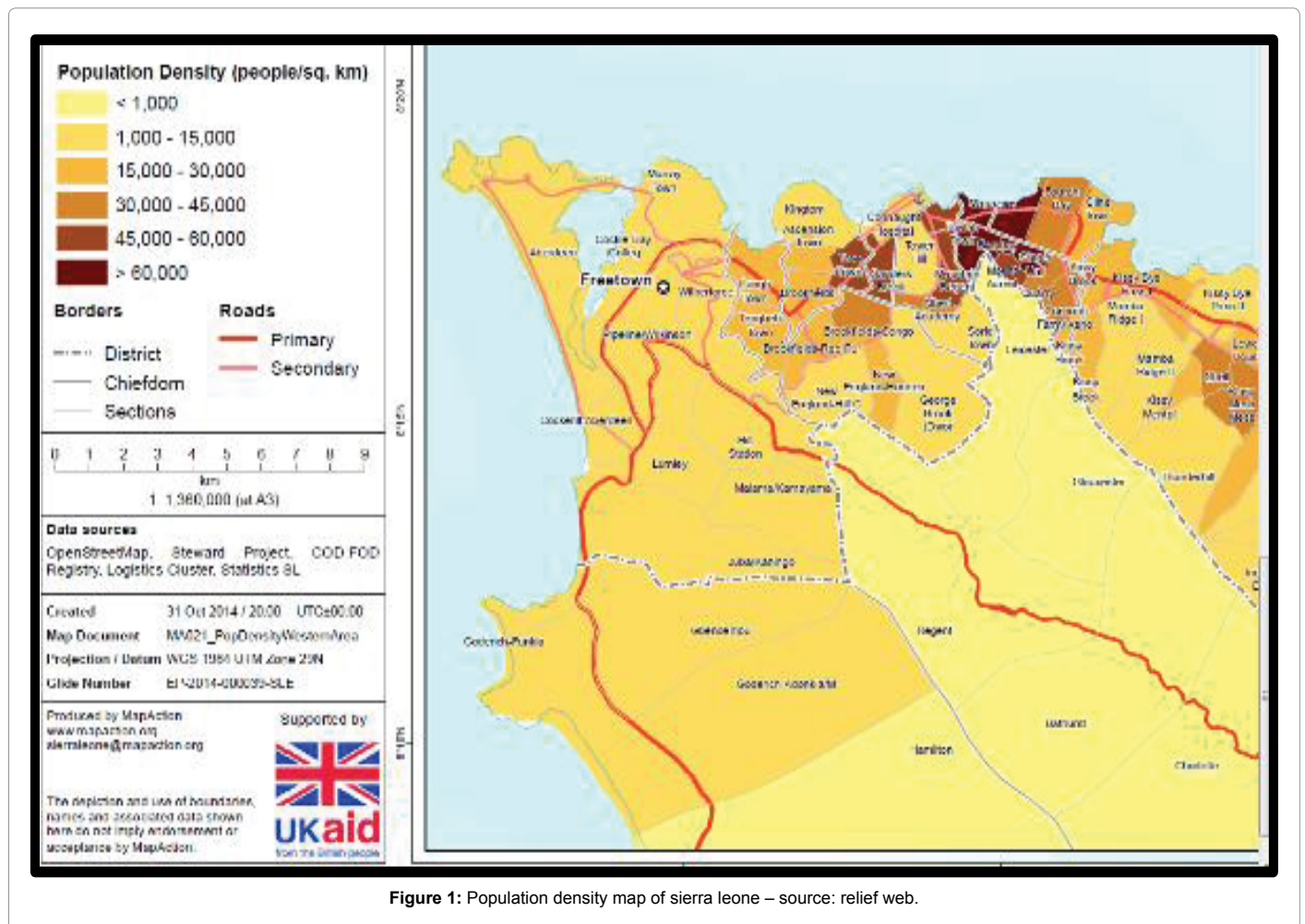


Figure 1: Population density map of Sierra Leone – source: relief web.

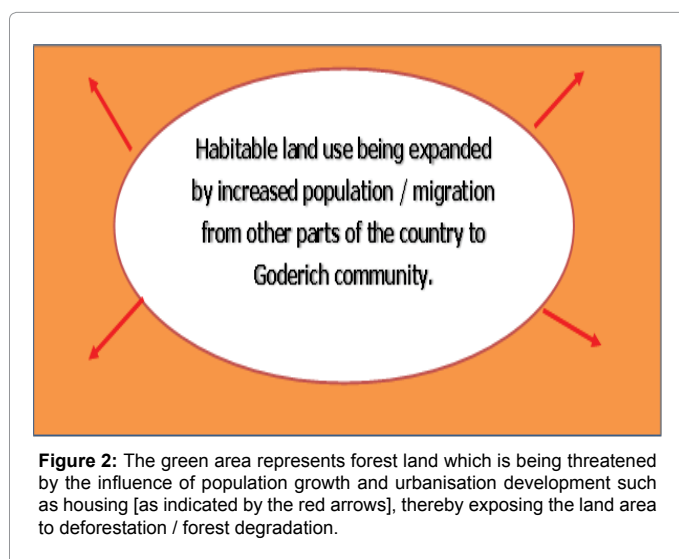


Figure 2: The green area represents forest land which is being threatened by the influence of population growth and urbanisation development such as housing [as indicated by the red arrows], thereby exposing the land area to deforestation / forest degradation.

realistic theoretical underpinnings is grounded on the analysed responses received [27]; a purely qualitative research that underpins the exploration of opinions about people's perspectives of their understanding of the root causes or drivers of deforestation and forest degradation taking place in their community.

Study area

The study was conducted with respondents selected from the wider Goderich Village community; one of the largest community in the WAPFoR area, with estimated population of 19,209 [28]. The community is naturally endowed with beautiful beaches, and both lowland and hill-top forest locations, and one of the first focal point for sea voyagers into Sierra Leone.

Study design, population sample and data collection

The study based on Ethnographic Method of investigation with the rationale of exploring in details people's narratives about their perceptions on the drivers of the high rate of deforestation in the community. Ethnography as a methodological concept is defined by Brewer [29] as:

“The study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally” [2].

Despite criticism surrounding its use as a form of pseudo-scientific method, it has been viewed as the most preferred choice of methods for this inquiry as it provide the means for people to express their views openly. On this note, the inquiry was designed with open-

ended questions based around themes which then created scope for participants to express their views as they view it necessary.

The study population included participants from all sections of the communities and, for which four participant groups were used to express their views about the identified themes. Participants were encouraged to air their views on the basis of how they perceive issues to resonate within their thinking. All questions were left open-ended with the hope that it would create scope for further as the interview progresses. Overt expression of points and digression into topical discourses was viewed as a great benefit for a rational decision to choosing ethnographic methodology over a range of research techniques available to social researchers.

Result and Discussion

The analysis was done by applying NVIVO qualitative software. The advantage of using qualitative software is that, it allowed themes to be established, which then create scope for further probing. It is a cross-sectioned interviewed which allowed four different groups [referred to as R1 to R4 in Appendix 1: Results table] from different backgrounds such as education, religion and ethnicity to heuristically express their views / perception about main themes of the research, from which theoretical approach is expected to be grounded. On the basis of interview schedule, the following were the three discursive themes:

1. Historical notion of Goderich community and perspectives on change.
2. Causes and issues around deforestation and forest degradation of lands.
3. Mitigation strategy.

Based on the above mentioned themes, the interview was then divided into four groups of research respondents [R], and with the same questions asked to ensure heuristic responses are expressed about perceived opinions, and more so an expression of views relating to the main drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and their impacts on community life.

With reference to the first theme [Historical notion of Goderich community and perspectives on change], all four responded groups felt that the community is not the same as it used to be in the 1970s and even earlier. All felt that cultural values are being eroded, a digression into what is considered to be a response outcome for the second question on theme TWO. Responses on the second question for theme ONE, explored people's views about changes noticed, and for which the most highlighted views was based around the landscape. This was highlighted as a concerned response as it illustrates fears about change, but more so that which they perceived is destroying their environment as a result of past decision by central government to urbanise the community with very little or no consultation with community members. With respect to the third question on them ONE, it was felt that urbanisation changes in the community was leading to a melt-down of their sense of community life, with cultural values being threatened or being swept away [also closely linked with the expected response for question 2 on them TWO].

With reference to question 1 on theme TWO, large scale building construction work to meet housing demands was identified as principle driver of deforestation and forest degradation in the community. This is an area that has been established from research to be affecting nations, and particularly so with prospective developing nations in parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia [8,26]. Wood cutting was also highlighted as another driving factor of deforestation but it was only expressed by one of the response groups. This might have been due to

APPENDIX 1 [RESULT SUMMARY OF ANALYSED THEMES]	
Main Themes	Responses Summary with Groups [R1-R4]
Theme 1: Historical Notion of Goderich community and perspectives of changes	
Do you think Goderich is the same as it used to be around the 1970s or earlier?	All four response groups [100%] felt that the Goderich community is no longer the same as it used to be in the 70s. More digression into the changes which is now seemed to be eroding cultural values [R3 and R4].
What changed have you noticed in the environment?	Responses have geared towards the environmental change in forest landscape and the newly build houses which makes it more risky for future.
Are these changes affecting your understanding of belonging?	People felt that with the migration of people in the community, cultural as well as traditional values are melting down, and that it will be eroded in time to come. Risk of fear.
Theme 2: Causes and Issues around deforestation or degradation of forest land	
What do you think are the main drivers/causes of deforestation in the community?	All groups [100%] asserted their views on issues like the large-scale urbanisation projects of building construction work and backed by migration. Wood cutting is also an issue raised, but one of the groups [25%] felt it is not done to a large scale as those who are engaged in it are merely doing so as a means of survival.
Are these changes affecting your way of life (culture, tradition and survival rate)?	All R groups [100%] addressed the severe impact of changes on cultural values and most importantly, their traditions of hunting, and also loss of the value of relying on bush leaves as traditional / folk medicine for illnesses. Representatives from some groups, particularly those linked to the fishing industry are also worried about the difficulty of their businesses, and the risk of losing income/livelihood generated from their reliance on forest resources like wood.
What about the restrictions imposed now government agencies like the EPA and NPAA, is that making life difficult for you?	All groups thought that the EPA and other agencies have to do their job, but are greatly [the most] worried about restrictions imposed on their access to forest land. Loss of income without much alternative recourse to other means of survival.
Theme 3: Mitigation strategy	
What do you think needs to be done to improve the situation for indigenous people?	All four R [100%] groups have harmoniously raised their voices about the need for job creation to help the poor in the community rather than the harassment of preventing them from using the forest to fend for their living.
Are you aware about the REDD+ initiative?	All, except R3 are not aware about the REDD+ initiative. Some representatives felt it is there but the initiative is not very well targeted for them to understand its value in terms of addressing ways to help them curtail their acts of invading forest and depletion of forests resources.
If Yes, have you gained anything from it as a way of helping you adjust to the changes experienced?	There is very little awareness about gains from the REDD+ initiative, despite couple of the R3 team stressing their understanding about the value of the initiative. Group members felt that the resources from the REDD+ initiative is not adequately apportion to support their cause.

the fact that some of the members in the identified group have attained high level of education to enable them to be critical in their minds about on-going environmental issues in their community. The impact of wood cutting as a driver of deforestation was diluted as they felt that the extent of wood-cutting was infinitesimal, as 90% of it is used for domestic consumption.

Response on the second question for theme Two also emerged as a going concerned issue as people felt worried about their cultures and survival rate. Forest is an essential part of a community life [30], particularly in places like Goderich where traditions such as hunting and herbal leaves are considered ways of life for people. Resources from forest are valuable to cushioning and sustaining lives for the poor in communities like Goderich, and such activity include the fetching of log / wood for domestic consumption and preserving fishes caught by fishermen on a daily basis in the fishing industry. The destruction of forest reserves is threatening lives, hence making people worried about the future of their being in the community.

With reference to question three on theme TWO, respondents have expressed high level of concerns about governmental agencies [such as the Environmental Protection Agency – EPA] restrictions imposed in accessing forest protected areas. They felt that with the recent urbanisation works, it appeared as if government is blaming community members for the loss of huge stock of forest land, rather than exploring the root cause of deforestation and planning strategies.

With reference to the MITIGATION theme [3], responses for question 1 have been directed at the creation of more job opportunities to help mitigate on-going problems of loss of livelihood imposed on the restriction of accessing protected forest areas. Given the low educational attainment of those who are highly dependent on forest resources for survival, respondents felt that their scope for livelihood sustenance is threatened, and which was never the case prior to the expansion of the community.

With reference to the second question for theme THREE, it is clear that very few people [about 10%] knew about the REDD+ initiatives which is meant to cushion their present circumstances. It is a well-known fact that the situation is not an attributable fault to indigenous community members, as the situation have occurred as a legacy of the result of government relaxed policies which allowed people to exploit reserved lands, also backed by the 10year civil crisis which left people with no choice, but to migrate into prospective areas like Goderich. It seemed more likely from the outcomes of the interviews that officials associated with the REDD+ initiatives are not as well equipped to administer the program or are deliberately involved in squandering resources to satisfy their selfish ends [an area needing further probing]. Those who are aware about the REDD+ initiatives felt that it is not impacting on their lives as much as they would have thought.

Conclusion

What has been done cannot be undone; the best way forward is to ensure that effective planning is addressed to help cushion the impact on those indigenous community members who are seriously feeling the impacts of failed government legislations in relaxing restricted access to protected forest land. The research was carried out with the aim of exploring heuristic views from people about their opinions relating to the main drivers of deforestation in the area using purely ethnographic and qualitative investigation.

Forest is an essential part of life to people in the community of Goderich, through its cultural values to societies, herbal usage of leaves, and most importantly, reliance on resources like forest wood for domestic consumption. It is with no doubt that, indigenous people have developed intrinsic fears about their sense of belonging / self-identity as the community continues to expand by the urbanisation development projects of building construction projects and many more. There needs to be a means of dialogue to ensure that government officials collaborate actively with people to make the community still a better place to live, while at the same time, safeguarding their cultural values and traditional ways of life that has been going on for decades.

Implementation of REDD+ initiative may not necessarily be the answer to current problem of deforestation as people perceived it to be, and to them, it is all about exercising their historical power and control and for which people of Goderich communities have enjoyed for a long period of time. In this vein, if REDD+ initiative is to be used as a means to cushion the impact of stabilising environmental damages caused through depletion of forest lands, it must engage local community residents through collaborative efforts to address both cultural and traditional ways of life of the people in the community. REDD+ officials must ensure people become aware about the benefit of government intrusive intervention strategies, but more so, future gains to the community through collaborative working partnership in ensuring that vital skills are gained through active like agro-forestry, and access to employment in managing local affairs.

In conclusion, one would subscribe to the already acclaimed theoretical underpinnings that deforestation and forest degradation is a man-made phenomenon, spearheaded in most cases through conscious or unconscious destruction of the environment as a way of meeting our socio-economic ends. The diagram below provides a summary of the outcome from the interview responses, in a bid to grounding a theoretical concept from the study.

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