A Documentation of Some Traditional Aspects of Wood Consumption in Anaocha, Nigeria

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Abstract
The usefulness of wood to mankind varies from place to place, community to community, state to state, and nation to nation. Wood is a natural product, which is one of the components of biodiversity and a bio-product that serves numerous purposes to mankind. Such multifunctional purposes include those of sociopolitical, economic, religious, and cultural aspects of man. This article examines some traditional aspects of wood consumption in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria, with a view to ascertaining the uses to which the people put wood as a by-product of the trees around them. In-depth interview, on-the-site observation, and focused group discussion were used to elicit information from knowledgeable elders, artisans, and wood vendors in different towns that make up the local government area. This research brings to limelight aspects of wood consumption in Anaocha and lends credence to the belief that wood is still the major source of revenue and energy in rural areas, probably because it is a free gift of nature. The research findings show that modernization has not completely eroded the value of wood in the study area.

Keywords
wood resources and products, wood consumption, conservation practices, Anaocha Local Government Area

Introduction
Over time, man’s quests for survival and development have led him to put wood into use for heating, building, construction, and utilitarian equipment. As noted by Sowunmi (2009), knowledge of the environmental setting of man is essential to obtain a fuller understanding of man and his cultural development through time, in view of the close relationship between man and his environment. Kramer (2006) also noted that man has learnt to burn wood to warm up himself and to overcome fear of the night. With time, he began to cook with it. Thus, cooking and eating utensils were also fashioned from wood. Therefore, wood is the most important material contact man has with the entire body of his ancestry. It has been paramount in aiding, comforting, and paving the way to civilization. Wood is one of the oldest source of energy and commonest service material known to man, and has been used for over 500,000 years (Sharpe, 1976). Factors such as family size, cost of wood, season, type of cooking device, alternative energy sources, and the type of wood determine the level of wood consumption (Hamed, 1990). According to Food and Agricultural Organization of United Nations (1995), two out of five people worldwide depend on wood or charcoal as the source of domestic energy. Floor (1997) noted that wood represented 60% to 90% of the energy consumption of Africans. In the dry savanna zone of Africa, wood is the major source of energy (Keita, 1987). In the Sudan and Sahel climatic zones, majority of the urban population and the totality of the rural people depend exclusively on wood for heating (Hamed, 1990).

The introduction of Western culture has led to the love and quest for metal/enamel wares, and ceramic objects, with declining interest in wood products. Hence, wood products are now sold side by side with metal or ceramic objects in markets, with the latter gaining upper hand in terms of quantities and quality of products produced and sold. In fact, there is the belief in some quarters that if wood products are not patronized, it would over time discourage their production. This belief has led to the fear that if wood resources are not conserved for future generations, they will go into extinction like most African phenomena. In recognition of this imminent disappearance of natural assets, Eluyemi (2002) has advised that all movable and immovable cultural heritage...
need to be preserved and handed over to succeeding generations. Unless this is done, the material evidence of our past stands the risk of obliteration. If that happens, the link between the past and the present is severed. This argument explains why there is need to document aspects of wood consumption in Anaocha Local Government Area (LGA) of Anambra State, Nigeria.

**Method**

The article examined the various aspects of wood consumption in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State, with a view to ascertaining its implications on the lives of the people (see Figure 1). The study used in-depth interview and on-the-site observation to elicit information. Semistructured interview was conducted with two categories of people (key informants). They are those who are directly involved in the wood consumption and the local historians. The local artisans provided information on the production processes, the raw materials used, and uses of finished products. They also gave insights into the types of products, patterns of demand, prices, and categories of buyers, whereas the local historians provided useful background information. A cross-case analysis method was used to analyze the interviews conducted. This entailed grouping the responses from different people to the questions or analyzing different perspectives on central

![Figure 1. Map of Anaocha Local Government Area showing wood consumption areas.](image_url)
issues. Through this technique, the semistructured interview guide constituted a descriptive analytical framework for the qualitative data analysis.

**Results and Findings**

**Wood for Architectural Purpose**

In Anaocha LGA, hardwoods such as mahogany (*Afzelia africana*), iroko (*Milicia excelsa*), palm trees (*Elaeis guineensis*), ebony (*Diospyros* species), and others constitute major raw materials for architectural works such as roofing of houses, wooden doors and windows, fortifications, and wooden floors. These wood species are used by most people in building shops/stores, dwelling houses, shrines, animal pens, and yam bans. Presently, due to the influence of civilization, architectural uses of wood are gradually being replaced with modern raw materials for building such as cement blocks, bricks, aluminum roofing sheets, window glasses, and rods (see Figure 2).

**Wood for Musical Instruments**

Most musical instruments, such as flutes, drums, gongs, *bongo*, *okbokolo*, *ichaka*, and so forth, of both ancient and contemporary Anaocha people are made of wood of different types, ranging from hardwood *Iroko* to soft ones such as *Akpu*—*Ceiba pentandra*. Four types of wooden musical instruments were identified. The differences are based on their functions. They are membranophones (*Uboaka*), aerophones (wind instruments; *Opi onu*), metallophone (*Okungwa*), and other resonant materials (*Akumaku Aka*).

Membranophones (*Uboaka*) are rhythmical sound-producing instruments furnished with tensely strained membranes, which are caused to vibrate by percussion or by friction to produce sound. The pitch produced from them varies with the degree of tension of the membrane. Because of this, the name “leather drum” properly applies. There are two drums of this type: *Amoonya Abia* and *Igba*. Aerophone, on the contrary, is a musical instrument that produces sound primarily by causing a body of air to vibrate, without the use of strings or membranes, and without the vibration of the instrument itself adding considerably to the sound. Metallophone consists of tuned metal bars, which are struck to make sounds usually with a mallet. The instrument has a single row of bars tuned to the distinctive pelog or slendro scale, or a subset of them. The Western glockenspiel and vibraphone are also metallophones. They have two rows of bars in an initiation of the piano keyboard and are toned to the chromatic scale. Finally, resonant materials are those materials which are caused to vibrate forcibly by striking one against another - percussion (see Figure 3).

**Wood for Carving Religious Figurines**

Anaocha like other Igbo societies practice African Traditional Religion (ATR). This is exemplified in their continued use of wood to carve religious figurines. As noted by Kramer (2006), Africans use wood from birth till death. The abundance of works of wood may have been caused by the fact that wood is readily available and easier to work on. Softwood types such as *Akanta* (*Rauvolfia vomitoria*), *Ngwu* (*Alba feminea*), *Akpu* (*C. pentandra*), and *Ube* (*Dacryodes edulis*) are used by most wood carvers in Anaocha for carving figurines and other sacred objects such as *Ikenga*, *Agyu*, masquerade masks, and royal stools/drums. This aspect of wood usage in the area is very important because it affirms the people’s support for African cosmology and preference in carved objects made with good wood. The woods for carving purposes in Anaocha are shown in Table 1 and Figure 4.

It should be noted that carved objects are admired based on the beauty of the carved work. Inquiry about the quality of wood used comes to play only when the admirer wants to make a purchase. This is to assure him or her of the durability of the carved work. Again, the final touch of the master carver on the object represents his desire and love for perfection.

**Wood for Fortification**

In the ancient times, wooden materials such as *Ogilisi* (*Newbouldia laevis*) and palm fronds (*E. guineensis*) were used in making fences and gates of most compounds in Igbo communities. This is still obtainable in Anaocha LGA. Palm fronds, *Ogilisi*, and planks lumbered from palm trees are used to fortify family compounds of those that cannot afford cement blocks. Wood is also used for boundary demarcation of compounds, farmlands, villages, and towns (see Figure 5).

**Wood for Casket Production**

Right from time immemorial, products from wood have been used in various forms to bury the dead. In many Igbo-speaking communities and beyond, wood resources such as bamboo stems and banana leaves were used to bury people of diverse social classes. Presently, wood is put into a
specialized and constructive shape known as the casket, with the sole purpose of burying the dead. Caskets are of different sizes, shapes, and patterns/designs, and are made from different types of wood such as Agbu (whitewood—Alstonia boonei), Obeche (Terminalia superba), Mansonia (Mansonia altissima), teak (Oworo)—Tectona grandis. According to our informants, five types of caskets are produced in Anaocha: up-high casket, six-corner casket, dome casket, top-stone caskets, and concord caskets.

The Up-high casket after production does not require painting, rather fanny is applied as a decorative substance. The six-corner casket is next in rank of quality to the up-high casket, and all types of wood can be used for its production. The dome casket is the most expensive type of casket in Anaocha because of the complex dome shape design carved on top of the casket’s cover. Two types of hardwood (Agbu and Mansonia) are used for its production. The top-stone casket, on the contrary, derives its name from the grave stone found on the top of the cover of the casket, whereas the concord casket is the most affordable casket among the study group. It is good looking and well designed, and quality wood types such as Agbu, Obeche, and Oworo are used for its production (see Figure 6).

Wood as a Source of Energy Supply

According to Babanyara and Saleh (2010), fuelwood constitutes the main source of fuel for cooking, as more than 76% of Nigerians use fuelwood, leaving only 26% for cooking gas, kerosene, coal, and electricity. On the contrary, Sambo (2005) argued that 80 million cubic meters (4.3 × 109 kg) of fuelwood are used by Nigerians for cooking and other uses.
domestic purposes per annum. Sources of fuelwood include deadwoods, dry branches, twigs, wet/life woods, sawdust from wood, and charcoal extracted from wood. Users of fuelwood in the study area include smiths, palm oil millers, cassava (garri) producers, and bakery industries, among others. Wood extracts from trees such as Dialium guineense, Burkea africana, Pentaclethra macrophylla, Cylicodiscus gabunensis, and Tamarindus indica are mostly used for fuelwood/energy supply and as such are threatened by extinction (see Figure 7).

Wood as a bio-product can serve as a source of income generation to man. In Anaocha, wood resources such as fuelwood (firewood), sawdust, and charcoal (extracted from wood) constitute major sources of income to most families that depend on it to improve their standard of living. Ethnographic sources revealed that fuelwood (firewood) and wood resources are highly demanded by most entrepreneurs, such as bread bakers, plastic companies, brick makers, garri producers, smiths, and so forth, on daily basis in Anaocha and beyond. Mostly wood and wood sources (charcoal, sawdust, etc.) are transported by wood vendors from rural areas to urban cities for sale and use. Monies generated from sale of wood resources are used in solving domestic problems such as payment of children’s school fees, house rents, and feeding, to mention but a few.

Wood for Household Furniture

Anaocha traditional crafts reveal an understanding of the harmonious utilization of wood resources. Furniture produced from wood sources in the study area included upholstery, cane chairs, basket, broom, mat, and mortar/pestle. All these constitute household materials used for subsistence living in the study area.

Oga tree provides major raw material for cane weaving, and cane crafts are produced in various sizes and shapes to serve different purposes. Its products include cane cupboard, cane bed, cane chair, cane basket, and cane mirror. Baskets, on the contrary, are produced in large quantities, ranging from large to medium and small to extra small sizes serving different purposes.

A broom is made up of 400 to 800 broom sticks, which are scrapped off their leaves neatly. The sticks are tied strongly together with a twine and are ready for use. Brooms are packaged in bundles and are sold in the market. Palm leaves and coconut palm leaves can be used in the production of different kinds of mats. Mats are used either for sleeping (a kind of bed), ornamental shrub, or for fencing compounds.

Mortar plays an important role as kitchen utensil. In Anaocha, mortar and pestle are too important to be missed out in any family, and this explains why it is among the items a newly married lady takes to her husband’s house. The objects are used together for pounding of yam, cassava, and palm fruit, and for grinding pepper and other ingredients used in cooking soup and stew. Mortars and pestles are of different sizes: Ikwe—big mortar, Odo—medium-sized mortar, and Okwa—small mortar. They have different design patterns and perform different functions in every household in Anaocha. Hardwood types such as Iroko (M. excelsa) and mahogany (A. africana) are used for making mortars and pestles of various types. Outside the aforementioned types, the people also carve utilitarian equipments like bowl for different purposes such as food bowl (Okwa nri), meat bowl (Okwa anu), kola nut bowl (Okwa oji), and axe handle (AnyuKate).

Discussion: Implications of Wood Consumption in Anaocha LGA

In Anaocha, wood and wood products have socioeconomic, political, religious, and cultural implications. These are enshrined in the people’s ways of life and exemplified in their norms, values, beliefs, and customs. Religiously, some trees (Iroko, Ofor, Annumewe, and Ogilisi) are perceived to be sacred because of the religious roles such trees play within the locality as well as their perceived inherent supernatural powers. Trees, such as Iroko, coconut, and so forth, are linked to reincarnation of certain individuals. It is a general belief that a reincarnated individual buries his or her Iyi-Uwa (a special kind of stone, which forms the link between an Ogbanje and the spirit world) with which his or her
reincarnation was made possible under such trees. *Iyi-uwu* is an object from Igbo mythology that binds the spirit of a dead child (known as *Ogbanje*) to the world, causing it to return and be born again by the same mother. Furthermore, coconut tree is associated with reproduction. This explains why Anaocha people bury the umbilical cord of a new born baby under the tree upon its natural fall-off. Thus, the child owns the tree upon maturity with the belief that as the coconuts are harvested, his or her offspring will be multiplied.

Trees such as *Ofor* and *Iroko* are regarded as sacred; such trees are perceived to be living sacrifice. Ethnographic sources revealed that white or red cloths are tied around the tree and that such cloth is often stained with blood of sacrificial animals such as fowls, goats, cows, and so forth. Furthermore, the foot of the tree is decorated with broken pieces of potsherds and stones that are arranged strategically. Prayers and libations are often done under such a tree which is often linked to a particular deity.

Wood types such as *Iroko*, *Akanta*, and *Ngwu* are used in carving sacred objects such as masquerade heads, images of deities (gods and goddesses), and religious musical instruments such as drums, gongs, and flutes. This is because of the belief that they are associated with *Ala*, the earth goddess, and has connection to the supernatural beings or the spirit world that links the people with their ancestors and ancestress. Thus, some trees are revered as demigods and attract lots of rituals, ceremonies, offerings of sacrifices, and dedications in the communities where they are found. In fact, sacred trees such as *Iroko*, *Ngwu*, and *Ofor* are installed as gods by most communities in Anaocha.

Wood and wood resources constitute diverse economic benefits to the people of the study area. Trees such as *Iroko*, mahogany, and *Obeche* provide the people with timber materials such as planks, plywood, and sawdust used by most woodworkers in the area. Wood also provides raw materials for building and construction of houses, shops, schools, churches, furniture, and agricultural implements for farmers in the area. Wood products such as firewood (fuelwood), charcoal extracted from wood, provide homes and industries with alternative sources of energy.

In most homes in Anaocha, firewood performs several functions and purposes such as cooking, frying, roasting of food stuffs, lighting, and warming of homes, whereas operators of most local industries such as bread bakers, local wine brewers, clay brick makers, wood carvers, and food vendors make use of wood/wood products in large quantities. Also, wood products such as firewood and sawdust constitute major sources of income generation among the people. Wood, in its own regard, provides the people with timber and logs of wood used in the building and construction of lorry carriages, trucks, canoes, boats, and bridges used in conveying goods and services from rural to urban centers within and beyond the local government. Economic trees, such as mango, guava, orange, pawpaw, pears of all species, coconut trees, and so forth, serve as sources of food, revenue generation, and are of medicinal values.

Cultural and sociopolitical values of wood are critical. Wood products perform numerous functions in Anaocha cultural activities and political organizations. Ethnographic resources revealed the cultural and political significance and symbolisms of some sacred woods such as *Ofor* stick (*Detranium macrocapun*) and the *Ogilisi* plant (*N. laevis*) in Anaocha. The *Ofor* stick, for instance, is a symbol of authority and is held by the eldest in the family. The *Ofor* stick in the hand of a titled man (*Ozo* or *Nze*) signifies and symbolizes a staff of office, symbol of authority, justice, and uprightness. This implies that the *Ozo* title holder in Anaocha is both the political and spiritual head of his people. The person in custody of the *Ofor* is believed by his people to be a man of integrity, trustworthiness, and dignity whose judgment is acceptable by all and sundry. On the contrary, it is a general belief that whoever tells lies or judges wrongly could be struck dead by the spirit inhabiting the *Ofor*. The *Ogilisi* tree found in most shrines and palaces of paramount personalities in Anaocha is believed to be a special type of tree with spiritual potency.

It is noteworthy that wood types mostly harvested are the ones readily available within the area as a free gift of nature, rather than from a tree plantation. Suffice it to say that some wood materials are more durable and stronger than others; hence, wood users prefer them to others. Wood types, such as mahogany, *Iroko*, *Ngwu*, and so forth, are more favored than *Akpu* wood. The above statement is in consonance with Njiti and Kemcha (2002) that wood species which do not essentially serve as a food source but burn well and smoke less are exploited for fuelwood, whereas some species which are known to produce gradual and good flame are much more preferred. On the contrary, wood species that are dense and resistant to rot and insect attack are exploited for use in furniture and construction works. It should be noted that wood usage will always be patronized in view of its values to the people. Thus, rural dwellers tend to depend on wood for consumption and subsistent living, which over time would lead to deforestation, and as such the impact of climate change would be felt more within such areas. To avert such impending crisis, efforts should be geared toward wood conservation.

**Wood Conservation Practices in Anaocha**

According to Eluyemi (2002, p. 3), conservation is “the identification, documentation (appropriate registration) and proper storage of cultural objects, whether in private hands or in museum.” The obvious reason for proper conservation of cultural and natural objects (wood, wood resources, and wood products) is to keep them whole and safe for now and for the future and to make them available for research and for interpretation. Thus, the major objective of conservation or preservation is to keep the heritage in good condition, that is, to prevent damage or destruction from natural, chemical, and biological agents (Eluyemi, 2002).

The forefathers of the people already had their traditional ways of preserving and conserving wood/wood products.
Anaoha people of Anambra State conserve and preserve available wood resources in their environment. There are two methods of wood conservation practiced in Anaoha: traditional and modern methods. The traditional methods of wood conservation are enshrined in the people’s norms, values, beliefs, and customs exemplified in taboos, local laws, and sacred sanctions which have, over time, become the people’s way of life. These methods are effective in conserving trees, grooves, wood resources, and/or wood products. Trees such as Iroko and Ofor are perceived as sacred and as such people are prohibited from harvesting them for any purposes. However, in the event of a proposed developmental project around such a tree, consultations to oracle are made and the final decision lies with the chief priest of the deity to which the tree is associated. The reason is that such sacred trees are regarded as “demigods” and are believed to be linking humanity to divinity. It is a general belief among Anaoha people that defaulters might be punished by the gods, which may result to poor harvest of farm products, strange ailments, hardship, and even death.

Wood products such as religious figures (Ikenga and masquerade masks/objects) and a titled man’s regalia (such as Ozo’s sitting stool, staff, etc.) are all conserved using taboos and sacred sanctions. For instance, noninitiates into masquerade cults are prohibited from touching carved masks, while women are not allowed to carry or sit on an Ozo’s stool. These local laws and sacred sanctions help in instilling fear and respect for the objects, and as such, their values are held in high esteem by the people. Such objects are protected and preserved from damage caused by humans.

Wet/life wood resources are preserved by allowing them to sun dry and are further preserved under a roof to prevent contact with rain or water (which are agents of wood decay). Such wood species are also suspended from touching the ground where termites could easily attack them. Ethnographic sources revealed that used or spent engine oil or palm oil is used as a wood preservative to deter insect attack on timber surfaces during the harmattan/dry season. Ethnographic sources also revealed that used or spent engine oil or palm oil is used as a wood preservative to deter insect attack on timber materials as well as to protect them from adverse climatic/weather effects leading to breaking and cracking of wood surfaces during the harmattan/dry season.

The modern method of wood preservation among the people involves the use of chemicals such as insecticides and pesticides (chemical formula such as Barrettine and Gamaline, etc.). While those who can afford the cost make use of these chemicals, others who cannot resort to traditional methods of preserving wood, wood resources, and wood products. It is important to note here that the integration of traditional and modern conservation/management systems will no doubt move Anaoha wood management forward. Okpoko and Okonkwo (2005) noted that integrating modern and traditional methods promises enormous advantages of sustainable conservation practices and methods.

Conclusion

This study has been able to bring to limelight aspects of wood consumption in Anaoha, ranging from architecture, musical instruments, religious carvings, and fortification, among others. The study showed that wood is still the major source of energy in rural areas and for the majority of urban dwellers. Wood is essentially obtained from the natural forest more than from plantation. It is also a flourishing business in parts of Anaoha area of Anambra State due to their entrepreneurship in baking business and other manufacturing industries within the study area.

Wood is a bio-product that needs to be effectively managed for the purpose of sustainability as well as for posterity; thus, wood consumption in Anaoha has different aspects and tells a lot about the people’s socioeconomic, cultural, religious, and political lifestyles. This portrays the fact that wood resources are used in all ramifications in the development and growth of the people’s everyday life activities, including the tangible and intangible aspects of their lives. For this reason, mechanism should be put in place to ensure that constant harvesting of wood does not lead to deforestation in the area. The people should also be encouraged to make use of other alternatives rather than relying solely on wood.

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