

Assessing the Influence of Gender Awareness and Attitude to Forest Resource Conservation in Cross River State

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Abstract

Over the years man's activities has drastically affected the forest ecosystem without any effort in providing alternative to ensuring the sustainability of the natural ecosystem. This paper attempts to examine the influence of gender awareness and attitude to forest resource conservation. Ten communities were used in this study and of which six hundred questionnaires were administered using random sampling technique. Findings indicate that the indigenous communities' attitude and awareness to forest conservation was very poor as affirmed in the data collected that indicate that, the male gender attitude and awareness to forest resource conservation was low compared to female gender in the study area. Therefore, adequate measures must be put in place to ensure effective conservation of the forest ecosystem.

Keywords: Awareness attitude, conservation, gender, forest resources.

Introduction

Forest form an integral component of the biosphere essential to the stabilization of global climate and the management of water and land. They are home to countless plants and animals that are vital elements of our life support systems. Forests according to Roland (1995) are our greatest renewable natural resources. Unlike crude oil and other minerals, forests, if properly managed, are self-perpetuating. In addition to their importance as a dependable source of raw material, forests have far-reaching public benefits wholly divorced from wood substance. Over a vast portion of our land surface, forests conserve irrigation water, protect the soil, regulate stream flow, provide places of public recreation, and offer a suitable environment for wildlife. Under proper management, forests provide not only these multiple uses, but also employment and security for millions of people. The forest in itself can often be seen as a self-sufficient habitat because it tends to achieve a balance of the various processes and activities within it (Peters, Ekpoh & Bisong, 1995).

Forests, both temperate and tropical, are an integral part of the life support system of the planet, performing numerous ecological and social functions that are essential for the continuation of life such as climatic regulation, soil conservation and the provision of habitat for millions of species. According to Desh (1983) forests house a wide range of biodiversity which provides man with an array of goods and services among which are food and other delicacies, medicines such as the rosy periwinkles useful in treating Leukemia, quinine or Azadaracter Indica used for fighting malaria, and curare used for muscle relaxation in surgery. These and other medicinal plants are all haboured in the cabinet of the rain forest. Also, animal species who fall into the categories of rare and endangered species such as the drills, the guenons, black rhinoceros, cheetahs, the giant pangolin among others, all find their homes in the rainforests. Man in his bid to utilize the natural resources especially from forests at his disposal, has gone beyond mere application of technology to harness and utilize nature. In fact, the immediate and long-term consequences of global and regional deforestation threatened the very survival of life as we know it on earth. Indeed, thus scenario is occur Cross River State in general and Akamkpa Local Government Area in particular. Today, the forest resources in Akamkpa as undergone spiral of degradation due to the high level of exploitation by indigenous communities who solely depend on the forest resources for survival. Besides, the communities attitude and awareness on the need to sustained and conserved the forest resources seem to be very worrisome. This is why this paper wishes to critically evaluate indigenous communities attitude and awareness towards resource conservation with specific reference to gender awareness and attitude to resource conservation in Akamkpa local government area in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This research was conducted in Cross River State, taking into consideration ten communities in Akamkpa Local Government Area. This study considered into variables "male and female" (gender) and in each of the communities both variables were used as presented in table 1 which shows the projected population across the sampled clusters by gender.

Table 1: Distribution of population (projected up to 2010) across the ten sampled clusters bygender

s/n	Communities (clusters)	Male	Female	Total
1.	Oban	1305	1241	2546
2.	Mfamosing	1735	1598	3333
3.	EkongEnaku	581	574	1115
4.	Aningeje	3610	431	4041
5.	Ifumkpa	1037	879	1916
6.	IkoEsai	1700	1823	3523
7.	Ekuri	568	667	1235
8.	Mkpot	1278	1747	3125
9.	Old Ndebiji	590	580	1170
10.	Okarara	474	416	890
	Total	12,978	9,956	22,934

Source: NPC (2012)

However, the sampled for this study consist of six hundred (600) inhabitants in the study area with 351 (or 58.8%) male and 249 (or 46.5%) female. The selection of the sampled was based on certain characteristics which include, area of abode, age, level of education attainment and occupation. The rationale for this was based on the fact that they can supply the needed information for this study. Nevertheless, the data obtained were analyzed using chi-square which try to evaluate the influence of gender on attitude and awareness to resource conservation in the area.

Literature review

Bellamy (1995) defined gender as the wide set of characteristics that are seen to distinguished between male and female entities, extending from one's biological sex in humans to one's social role or gender identity. Smart (1998) also defined gender as the different roles and responsibilities attributed to men and women in society. It does not only mean the biological definition of sex as male and female, but also how these biological definitions are constructed in a social context, subject lo historical and cultural change. In most parts of developing countries, women are largely involved in environmental activities. They are the providers of food, stock breeders, suppliers of fuel wood and water and collectors of forest products. Nonso (2001) went further to state that women are also custodians of environmental knowledge and information. He gave an instance by quoting Bellamy (1995) that "Most women know the medicinal properties of various plants, can identify trees that make good wood, recommend food crop that strive well on particular soils and locate reliable water sources. By these constant activities, their interaction with the environment is very frequent.

Nonso (2001) also states that women occupy a central position in agricultural production in the developing countries that these positions became more obvious as men began to migrate lo the cities in search of white collar jobs and abandoned their traditional roles of growing cash crops to the women. In his views about gender issues and poverty in the environment, Smart (1998) noted that as most women basically depend on agriculture especially the widows, most of the time, their agricultural crops are wasted away by flood and erosion, their agricultural land is rendered infertile if not totally lost. He therefore suggested adequate tree planting campaigns to check the adverse effects of erosion and flood. Other environmental degradation factors which affects both men and women's health and the socio-economic wellbeing of Nigerians according to Smart (1998) include desertification and deforestation, water hyacinth, loss of biodiversity. This view is a serious indication of the fact that environmental knowledge is not gender biased. In NEST (1992), it was reflected that although women constitute a very significant proportion of the world's population, the links between women and the slate of the environment have only recently begun to be recognized, that women in Nigeria especially those living in rural areas, interact with and shape the environment. This is in agreement with Agbor (2001), who stated than in Cross River State, the economy is based on agriculture and forestry and that trade in non-timber forest products (NTFP) is a major employer of women and children. However, in the North West Amazon, gender-based knowledge system (GBKS) entitles men and women to distinct knowledge legacies which allot a specific adios and ethos to each person according to gender (Reichel, 1999). She went further to state that the GBKS are named specifically as women's knowledge and men's knowledge and they encompass gender-specific spatio-temporal reference and supervisory functions for the conservation of particular biodiversity domains and cultural dynamics.

In a study conducted by Reichel (1999) in the Columbia Amazon, it was discovered that among the Yukuna and Tanimuka Indians, the gender-based knowledge system allows women and men an effective management of the rainforest and society and their knowledge bases are encoding in a cosmological trans-explanatory system that empowers each gender as an active and conscious agent in biodiversity conservation. It was also discovered that as men and women in practical and in enchanted ways reiterate their ethnomemesor patterns of information, they plan and execute specific forms of biosocialresources management.

In another related study by Kugouza (2007) in Uganda, it was discovered that various roles are played by both men and women in Community Forest Management (CFM). However, in all the roles identified, men were dominant and some reported that constraints to women's participation included; women's needs differ from those of men, many programmes tend to overlook women's specific needs regarding forestry. This has resulted in political, cultural and economic barriers that restrict women's participation. Buyinza and Naguula (2007) also noted that policy-makers lack data, information and methodologies to address these constraints. Kugouza (2007) added that if Community Forestry Management approach is to succeed, then local people especially women should be stakeholders in policy formulation and decision-making. Some women also, reported that inaccessibility to tree resources like timber, imbalance in sharing revenue accruing from tree products, unequal opportunity to conservation, education and training and the general under valuation of women's roles in sustainable forestry management are problems faced by women in the management and conservation of forest resources. This corroborates Muheresa (2006) who reported that women tend to be more dependant than men on trees and small scale forest industries for income. A study carried out by Nabalegwa (2007) in Uttar Pradesh, India, showed that women derived 34-45% of their income from forests and common haul, compared with only 13% of men. Although, a significant proportion of the forestry industry workforce is made up of women, their roles are not fully recognized or documented.

Leleka (2007) observed that there is a significant difference among men and women in terms of willingness to participate in Community Based Forest Management (CBFM). This could be because there is always gender imbalance between the rights and responsibilities over forest resources. Women normally have multiple, often, disproportionate responsibilities, little ownership or control over productive resources. This imbalance in the ownership and control of resources places women in a subordinate and disempowered position relative to men and therefore, they are forever dependent. In another related study conducted by Lise (2005) it was found that 40% of women in Uganda are illiterate, they have a minimal role in decision-making; men are not willing to share power and community leaders may not invite women to meetings related to tree resource management. However, women are very willing to participate effectively if the situation is improved. However, despite the fact that this study has been conducted in a global perspective none has critically evaluated gender attitude and awareness towards resource conservation in Akamkpa which is the gap this work seek to bridge in the literature of knowledge.

Findings

The analysis of the data presented in table 2 indicate that the calculated χ^2 values of 42.52* and 14.88* were all found to be higher than the critical χ^2 value of 3.04 needed for significance at 0.05 alpha level with 1 degree of freedom. With these results, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is significant influence of gender on people's awareness and attitude towards the conservation of forest resources.

Accordingly, it could be inferred that 288 (46.0%) of males asserted to be aware while 63 (10.5%) of males asserted to be unaware. On the other hand, 142 (23.7%) of females professed to be aware while 107 (23.83%) of females asserted to be unaware of conservation of forest resources in the area. Similarly, with respect to the attitude of the people towards conservation of forest resources in the area, 258 (representing 43.0%) of males professed to cultivate a positive attitude, while 93 (15.5%) of males asserted to cultivate a negative attitude towards conservation of forest resources. On the other hand, 149 (24.8%) of the female respondents asserted to cultivate a positive attitude towards the conservation of forest resources in the area, while 100 (16.7%) of females professed to cultivate a negative attitude towards the conservation activities of government in the area in question. On the whole, more respondents (430 or 71.7% of total sample) asserted to be aware while 407 (67.83%) asserted to cultivate positive attitude towards conservation of forest resources in the study area while 170 (28.3%) professed to be unaware and 193 (32.2%) are still negative in their attitude towards conservation of forest resources in the area.

Table 2: The influence of gender on people's awareness and attitude towards the conservation of forest resources

Gender	Awareness		Total	Df	X ² -cal	Sign.
	(aware)	(unaware)				
Male (0)	288(251.53)	63(113.02)	351	1	42.52*	.000
Female (e)	142 (178.53)	107 (70.47)	249			
Total	430	170	600			
Gender	Awareness		Total	Df	X ² -cal	Sign.
	(positive)	(negative)				
Male (0)	258 (238.08)	93(113.02)	351	1	14.88*	.000
Female (e)	149 (168.82)	100 (80.18)	249			
Total	430	170	600			

Source: Data analysis, 2012

The demographic characteristics of the sampled population

The demographic characteristics of the sampled population presented in table 3 show that over 58.5% of the sampled population used for this study were male while 41.5% were female. Furthermore, it was observed that over 51.5% of the people used for this study were single and married while 28.1% were divorced and widowed. It was also noticed that 33% of the sampled population attended primary school followed by secondary school with a value of 30% while 21% have no formal education. Nevertheless, only 16% of those who attended tertiary education were used for this study.

Table 3: Demographic characteristics of the people

Sex	Sampled population	Percentage (%)
Male	351	58.5
Female	249	41.5
Total	600	100.0
Marital status	Sampled population	Percentage (%)
Single	179	29.8
Married	184	30.7
Divorced	68	11.3
Widowed	107	17.8
Separated	62	10.3
Total	600	100.0
Education	Sampled population	Percentage (%)
No formal education	126	21.0
Primary education	198	33.0
Secondary education	180	30.0
Tertiary education	96	16.0
Total	600	100.0
Occupation	Sampled population	Percentage (%)
Farming	150	25.0
Trading	120	20.0
Civil servant	216	36.0
Politician	84	14.0
Unemployed	30	5.0
Total	600	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2012

Conclusion

Today, the forest ecosystem has been depleted by man due to the quest for survival. This research which tries to evaluate the influence of gender awareness and attitude to resource conservation has shown that both gender are active partner in forest resources exploitation and without effective measures to protect the ecosystem from excessive depletion. Although, findings have revealed they both gender are involved in forest resources, but the rate of male encroachment in the forest ecosystem was more alarming compared to female as evidenced by the empirical work of Bright, (1995).

Recommendations

This work has exposed the major actors that are responsible for excessive forest exploitation without

appropriate measures in ensuring that the forest ecosystem is properly conserved. To this end, in order to avert this scenario of poor gender attitude and awareness towards forest resource exploitation, the following measures are hereby recommended.

- The government should provide a framework that would monitor excessive exploitation of the forest resources
- The indigenous committees within the ecosystem zone should be educated on the dangers of excessive exploitation of the forest resources
- The stakeholders responsible in forest resource conservation should educate the people on forest resources conservation practices
- The government should provide a taskforce that would effectively monitor those that are responsible in forest resources exploitation
- The government should provide other alternative sources of livelihood to the indigenous communities within the catchment areas.

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