

Environmental Sustainability Through Communication Channels: The Role of Community Education and Print Media in Forest Conservation in Itu Local Government area of Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

The research is on environmental sustainability through communication channels: The role of community education and print media in forest conservation in Itu local government area of Akwa Ibom State. To achieve these two hypotheses were formulated in line with the study objectives. A descriptive survey design was used in this work. The population of this study consisted of all the of all residents of in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Based on projected figures, the population of in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State is approximately 244,624 people. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling approach involving, simple random and purposive sampling techniques. A simple random sampling technique was utilized to select participants. The sample of this study consist of two hundred and twelve (212) respondents drawn from seven (7) communities in Itu Local Government Area. The instrument used for data collection in the study is a structured questionnaire tagged Communication as Tool for Sustainability Questionnaire (CTSQ). The data obtained from the questionnaire was duly coded and subjected to statistical analysis as follows; Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. Each hypothesis was tested at 0.5 level of significance. The results of the analysis revealed that there is a significant relationship between community education and print media and forest conservation in Itu local government area of Akwa Ibom State. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among other that the Ministry of Environment and Forestry should strengthen and expand community education programs to promote forest conservation practices among local residents, building on the significant relationship between community education and forest conservation.

Keywords: Environmental Sustainability, Communication Channels, Community Education, Print Media, Forest Conservation.

Introduction

Communication channel through relevant environmental education plays a critical role in promoting sustainable forest management practices, enabling communities to make informed decisions about their natural resources. By prioritizing sustainability, we can mitigate the

impacts of climate change, preserve natural habitats, and support ecosystem services. This approach not only benefits the environment but also enhances the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities, ultimately contributing to a more sustainable future (Obi, 2018).

Environmental education supports knowledge and skills that prepare people to take informed action on behalf of the environment. It focuses on human behavior and interaction with the bio-physical environment. Understanding this interaction is essential for sustainable forest management. Effective environmental education can promote environmentally conscious behaviors. It can also enhance community engagement in forest conservation efforts. By integrating environmental education into forest management strategies, communities can make informed decisions about their natural resources. (Monroe and Krasny, 2016). Environmental education is concerned with those aspects of human behaviour which are more directly related to man's interaction with bio-physical environment and his ability to understand this interaction.

Environmental education is an important tool in natural resource management. Environmental management is a subject that combines science, policy and socio-economic applications. It primarily stresses on finding solutions to practical problems that people face in cohabitation with nature, resource exploitation and waste production. Environmental education is widely considered the most appropriate tool with which to raise awareness concerning environmental problems and to promote changes in habits and behaviour that are detrimental to the environment. Environmental education is a conservation strategy that creates such synergistic spaces, facilitating opportunities for scientists, decision makers, community members and other stakeholders to converge.

The role of environmental education in general education is to provide a systematized structure capable of developing critical participatory, transformative and emancipator education that encourages, enables and empower participating subjects to be responsible and have both the desire and where with all to promote environmental ethics and citizenship. Environmental education provides the methods and content that can lead to environmental literacy and a more sustainable future. Through environmental education, people develop questioning, analysis and interpreting skills, knowledge of environmental process and systems skills for understanding and addressing environmental issues and personal and civic responsibility. Education develops an environmentally literate citizenry that makes choice that are better for the health of the environment, leading to a more sustainable planet.

The existence of evil forests, sacred streams and totemism, are promoted by the existence of African tradition religion. Due to punishment attached to the violation of the tenets of this religion, human beings are often afraid of doing anything especially in forbidden areas to avert punishment banishment or death from the gods or goddess (Abiodun, 2019). The idea of sustainable development and management of the wildlife is government oriented, while sustainable living is that everyone is able to judiciously manage the natural resources in a way that maintains the biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity and their potential to fulfill the present and future generation.

Sustainable living in itself is a function of environmental conservation. This involves training of personnel through workshops, seminars and communication strategies such as conservation clubs, community awareness, electronic media, print media, community sensitization as well as practical way of handling the environmental resources sustainably. The natural environment is of great importance and it requires no emphasis by us as human beings. It is the only planet in the universe where life is known to exist. Human beings as culture building animals, made possible by their very highly evolved brains, undertake forms of learning to attain increased control of the environment. This learning which could be self-directed, as individuals or groups, motivates man to impact upon the living environment as he attempts to explore, exploits and expropriate the natural resources of the environment to serve his needs (Ikpeeme, 2017). Also as human activities goes on inestimably, a lot of pressure becomes exerted on the carrying capacity of the living environment. Careless and over exploitation of the wildlife seems to focus on meeting the needs of today without providing for the requirements of our future generations. The result is that future generation face the threat of environmental degradation and its consequence (Leighty, 2015).

The sustainable conservation of forest resources is crucial for the environmental and economic well-being of communities in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. However, the degradation of forest resources remains a significant challenge in the region. To address this issue, effective environmental education strategies are essential. This study will investigate the impact of environmental education strategies on forest resources management in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. The study will focus on four key variables: enlightenment campaigns, community mobilization, print media, and conservation clubs.

Forest conservation is critical for maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services (FAO, 2020). Environmental education plays a vital role in promoting sustainable forest management practices (Krasny & Tidball, 2015). The study aims to identify effective

approaches to promoting sustainable forest management practices among local communities. By integrating environmental education into forest management, communities can make informed decisions about their natural resources. Environmental education is essential for promoting sustainable development (United Nations, 2015).

Based on this background, this study will explore the impact of environmental awareness strategies on forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. It will specifically examine the effectiveness of radio programs, community education, print media, and environmental clubs in promoting sustainable forest management practices and conservation among local communities. By investigating these approaches, the study aims to identify effective strategies for enhancing forest conservation and promoting sustainable development in the region.

Community education involves educating and empowering local communities to manage their forest resources sustainably. This approach recognizes the importance of local communities in forest resources management. It can involve activities such as community meetings, participatory planning, and capacity-building workshops. The goal is to build the capacity of local communities to take an active role in forest resources management. By educating communities, this approach can promote sustainable forest management practices and environmental conservation. Essien (2018) stated that community education as a process aimed at raising consciousness, spreading understanding, and providing the necessary skills, including the human and material resources for the social, economic, political and cultural development. Findsen (2016) defined community education as an organized learning activity that groups or individuals undertake for the personal, community, cultural or economic development. It touches all other areas of learning but its primary focus is the adult as learner and the community as the context. Akande (2017) equally see community education as the type of education needed to engender self-confidence, self-respect, and personal independence as well as to safeguard human rights and achieve social equality

Print media refers to the use of printed materials to disseminate information about sustainable forest management practices. These materials can include posters, brochures, newspapers, and more. The goal of using print media is to raise awareness and promote sustainable forest management practices among local communities. Print media can be an effective way to reach a wide audience and promote environmental conservation. Wu (2018) stated that Print media has played a significant role in promoting conservation of forest and wildlife. Studies have shown that publications in print media can effectively raise awareness about environmental issues. According to the authors incorporating pictures in print publications can increase

reader engagement and interest. Print media can be a valuable tool for conservationists to disseminate information and promote their work. Research has demonstrated that print media can contribute to increased public awareness and support for conservation efforts. Furthermore, advancements in printing technology have made it possible to produce high-quality publications that showcase conservation work.

Objectives of the study

1. Investigate the relationship between community education and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area.
2. Assess the relationship between print media and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area

Research Hypotheses

1. What is the nature of the relationship between community education and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area?
2. What is the relationship between print media and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area?

Materials and methods

The research is on environmental sustainability through communication channels: The role of community education and print media in forest conservation in Itu local government area of Akwa Ibom State. To achieve these two hypotheses were formulated in line with the study objectives. A descriptive survey design was used in this work. The population of this study consisted of all the of all residents of in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Based on projected figures, the population of in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State is approximately 244,624 people. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling approach involving, simple random and purposive sampling techniques. A simple random sampling technique was utilized to select participants. The sample of this study consist of two hundred and twelve (212) respondents drawn from seven (7) communities in Itu Local Government Area. The instrument used for data collection in the study is a structured questionnaire tagged Communication as Tool for Sustainability Questionnaire (CTSQ) and divided into two parts. Part “A” contained the demographic data of respondents while Part “B” was designed using 4-point likert scale of Strong agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The data obtained from the questionnaire was duly coded and subjected to statistical analysis as follows; Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. Each hypothesis was tested at 0.5 level of significance.

Results

HO₁

There is no significant relationship between community education and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area. In testing this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used. The result of data analysis is presented in Table 1.

The finding Table 1 showed that community education had a mean score of 12.746 with a standard deviation of 1.776 while forest conservation had a mean score of 26.460 with standard deviation of 2.1017. The outcome further showed that the r-calculated value of 0.102 is greater than critical-r of 0.088, tested at .05 level of significance and 210 degrees of freedom. Also, the $p < .001$ is less than $p < .05$. With reference to this result, the null hypothesis which stated that there is a significant relationship between community education and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area was rejected showing that there is indeed there is a significant relationship between community education and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area.

TABLE 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) of relationship between community education and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area (N=212)

Variables	$\bar{x}$	SD	r-ratio	Df	p-level
Community Education (X)	12.74	1.7757	.111*	210	.001
Forest conservation (Y)	26.46	2.1017			

*Significant at .05 level; $p < .05$.

HO₂

There is no significant relationship between print media and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area. In testing this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used. The result of data analysis is presented in Table 2.

The finding Table 4 showed that print media had a mean score of 11.365 with a standard deviation of 2.02090 while forest conservation had a mean score of 26.460 with standard deviation of 2.1017. The outcome further showed that the r-calculated value of 0.164 is greater than critical-r of 0.088, tested at .05 level of significance and 200 degrees of freedom. Also, the $p < .001$ is less than $p < .05$. With reference to this result, the null hypothesis which stated that there is a significant relationship between print media and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area. was rejected showing that there is a significant relationship between print media and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area

TABLE 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) of relationship between print media and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area (N=212)

Variables	$\bar{x}$	SD	r-ratio	Df	p-level
Print media (X)	11.37	2.0209	.164*	210	.001
Forest conservation (Y)	26.46	2.1017			

*Significant at .05 level; $p < .05$.

Discussion

Community education and forest conservation

The findings in hypothesis one analysis showed that the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between community education and forest conservation in Itu LGA of Cross River State. This conclusion therefore means the more effective the community education environmental challenges the more the forest will be conserved.

The result of this analysis is in harmony with Essien (2018) that stated that community education as a process aimed at raising consciousness, spreading understanding, and providing the necessary skills, including the human and material resources for the social, economic, political and cultural development. Findsen (2016) defined community education as an organized learning activity that groups or individuals undertake for the personal, community, cultural or economic development. It touches all other areas of learning but its primary focus is the adult as learner and the community as the context. Akande (2017) sees community education as the type of education needed to engender self-confidence, self-respect, and personal independence as well as to safeguard human rights and achieve social equality.

Print media and forest conservation

The hypothesis two analysis equally indicated that the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is a significant relationship between environmental print media and forest conservation in the research area. This conclusion therefore means the more the print media report of about environmental challenges the more he or she can assist in forest conservation..

The result of this analysis is in harmony with Wu (2018) stating that Print media has played a significant role in promoting conservation of forest and wildlife. Studies have shown that publications in print media can effectively raise awareness about environmental issues.

According to the authors incorporating pictures in print publications can increase reader engagement and interest. Print media can be a valuable tool for conservationists to disseminate information and promote their work. Research has demonstrated that print media can contribute to increased public awareness and support for conservation efforts. Furthermore, advancements in printing technology have made it possible to produce high-quality publications that showcase conservation work.

Conclusion

Based on the result of the study the following conclusions were reached that: There is a significant relationship between community education and forest conservation in and significant relationship equally exist between print media and forest conservation in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Sequel to the research finding, these recommendations was presented by the researcher

1. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry should strengthen and expand community education programs to promote forest conservation practices among local residents, building on the significant relationship between community education and forest conservation.
2. Local Government Information Offices and Environmental Organizations should leverage print media to disseminate forest conservation information and awareness to the local community, capitalizing on the significant relationship between print media and forest conservation.

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