

Influence of Gender and Environmental Awareness on Attitude of People towards Forest Conservation in Ekuri Communities in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State

Omoogun, A. C. And Odok Anthony O

Department of Curriculum and Teaching

University of Calabar, Nigeria

Email: omoogun.ajayi@yahoo.com

Received: June 10, 2013 Accepted: June 25, 2013 DOI: 10.5296/jpag.v3i2.3984

Abstract

This study examined some psychological variables and attitude of people towards forest conservation in Ekuri communities in Akamkpa local government area of Cross River State. This Ex-Post Facto research involved two hundred respondents consisting of farmers, traders and students selected through stratified random sampling technique. A questionnaire constructed by the researchers was used for data collection while independent t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical analysis were used for data analysis. The research findings revealed that there is a significant influence of gender and environmental awareness on attitude of people towards forest conservation. Based on these findings, appropriate recommendations were made.

Keywords: Environmental awareness, forest conservation, local government

1. Introduction

It is difficult to find any forms in nature or any two areas on the earth surface, which are exactly alike. Clearly, the surface of the earth is highly varied, but the ways in which people perceive and evaluate the world is far more varied. There is so much evidence of clear differences in perceptual functioning among individuals that one wonders how it happens that the realities differ so much from the vision of what might be. Environment is therefore, a mental construct, and there is neither one environment nor one image of an environment (Williams, 2009).

As specie, human beings are highly polymorphic. Human beings may be brothers or sisters from the same parents but in internal and certain organic measures, they are almost different species. Thus human attitude to the environment and its resources reflect great individual biochemical, physiological and temperamental variations. For instance, a colour-blind person's world is somewhat less polychromatic than that of someone with normal vision. An extreme sufferer sees the world only in yellows, blues and greys. A melancholic person has a different outlook on life from a sanguine fellow (Ebong and Bassey, 2004). Consequently, each individual brings a variety of cognitive activities to bear in environmental cognition: expectancies, preferences, attitudes, memories, even symbolic elaboration and transformation of the world of reality. In environmental perception, no two individuals, not even identical twins see the same reality, as people approach the nature of the environment through a highly interpretative or filtering process as rightly observed by Bisong (2011).

The attitude of people towards forest conservation on one hand and its utilization on the other hand depends mostly on their belief system, cultural disposition, level of awareness, age, sex differences religious affiliation among others. Environmental perception is the mental image of the physical environment held by an individual or group and this mental image of the physical environmental affects one's attitude towards the forest and other environmental resources (Atte, 2010).

Our behavior towards the environment; the way we feel or think about the environment depends on the way we understand, notice things and the image created in us about the true nature of the components of the environment. This is usually controlled by our desire to meet our needs and aspirations. Environmental conservation refers to efforts and activities to maintain and sustain those attributes in natural and urban environments, which are essential both to human, physical and mental health and to the enjoyment of life (Anijah-Obi, 2002).

People put on different attitude towards environmental conservation for varying reasons: it could be because they are poor or because they are wealthy (Ikpeme, 2007); It could be because of lack of awareness or skills for solving environmental problems or for conserving environmental resources (Obeten, 2007); It could be because of difference in attitude of people resulting from being male or female (Obi, 2004). So, when individuals behave in a particular way, there are factors responsible for such behavior. This is to say that the preservation and conservation of environmental resources suggests positive and friendly attitude while the careless utilization of these resources suggests negative attitude (Oji, 2009).

2. Statement of the problem

There is hardly any doubt about the significance of forest resources in its supportive role for continuous existence and continuity of society. Yet the gradual but continuous depletion and disappearance of wildlife and forest resources generally, is a source of primary concern and calls for urgent redress by those who are conscious of the need for environmental conservation. The quest for acquisition of wealth and living a life of immense comfort has forced people to ignore the laws that govern the natural cycles. This variation in environmental perception has caused widespread endangerment and even extinction of flora and fauna species and man also has been exposed to various environmental hazards including flooding, erosion, water shortages, climate change, land fragmentation among others (Aniah, 2009).

Though, the forest is a renewable resource, the main biological problem basic to deforestation is the length of time required to for its formation and the relatively precarious nature of tree regeneration. The purely protracted nature of cutting trees at a rate greater than natural regeneration and growth has caused rapid depletion of forest resources. This study will therefore examine psychological variables and perception of people towards forest conservation in Odukpani Local Government Area of Cross River State.

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

In this study the researchers made use of the Ex-Post Facto research design, which is meant to examine phenomena after they have already occurred. This purpose of this study can be achieved using the Ex-Post Facto design because the manifestation of the independent variables have already occurred and are inherently not manipulable,

3.2 Population

The population of this study consisted of all farmers, traders, students and members of Forest Management Committee residing in Ekuri communities (Old and New Ekuri) in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State.

3.3 Sample

The sample for this study consisted of two hundred respondents consisting of farmers, traders, students and members of the forest management committee selected from old and new Ekuri communities through stratified random sampling technique.

3.4. Instrumentation

The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. A closed-ended questionnaire was constructed and administered to the respondents to enable them choose the alternatives that best describe their opinions. The questionnaire contained two parts. Part 1 contained items on respondents' demographic data, while part 2 contained items measuring gender, environmental awareness and attitude towards forest conservation with each variable represented by five items in the questionnaire.

The instrument used for data collection was properly validated by two experts in test and

measurement to ensure that the items selected for inclusion in the questionnaire were capable of eliciting relevant responses from the respondents, which is required for valid analysis of data in the study. To determine the reliability of the instrument used for this study, a test retest reliability was conducted on a smaller sample of forty respondents. Data obtained was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) and the result yielded 0.426. This showed high level of reliability of the instrument.

4. Method of Data Analysis

4.1 Hypothesis One

There is no significant influence of gender on the attitude of people towards forest conservation. To analyze this data, independent t-test was utilized. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Independent t-test analysis of the influence of gender on attitude of people towards forest conservation.

Variables	N	x	SD	T
Male	109	13.96	2.64	4.26*
Female	91	12.28	1.95	

Significant at .05 level; df = 198; Critical t = 1.96

The result of this statistical analysis as presented in table 1 indicates that the calculated t-value of 4.26 is higher than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom. The result is significant and the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant influence of gender on the attitude of people towards forest conservation in old and new Ekuri communities in Akamkpa local government area of Cross River State.

4.2 Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between environmental awareness and attitude of people towards forest conservation. To analyze this data, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was utilized. The result of this analysis is presented in table 2.

Table 2

Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of the relationship between environmental awareness and attitude of people towards forest conservation.

Variables	Σx	Σx^2	Σxy	Cal-r
	Σy	Σy^2		
Environmental awareness	2819	7946761	7239192	0.647*
Attitude towards forest Conservation	2568	6594624		

Significant at .05; df = 198; Critical r = .138

Table 2 indicates that the calculated r-value of 0.647 is higher than the critical r-value of .138 at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom. The result is significant and the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between environmental awareness and attitude of people towards forest conservation in old and new Ekuri communities in Akamkpa local government area of Cross River State.

5. Discussion of Findings

The result of the first hypothesis indicates that there is a significant influence of gender on attitude of people towards forest conservation. The result of this hypothesis is in line with the findings of Asu (2008) which stated that There are gender differences in the perception of people towards forest utilization, degradation and conservation. These differences are transmitted from one generation to another through gender role socialization. The men are considered as primary destroyers of the forest while the women are seen as secondary users of the forest. There are little or no instances where women are seen to engage in logging activities like the men do.

The result of the second hypothesis indicates that there is a significant relationship between environmental awareness and attitude of people towards forest conservation. The result of this hypothesis is in line with findings of Cross River State Forestry Commission (2002) which states reports that awareness creation is a viable tool for forest conservation at various levels. The report states that, ignorance has been identified as a detrimental factor in forest resources conservation and management. Most people in rural areas are still ignorant of the value of the forest and its resources to their social, economic and ecological well-being, which results in widespread deforestation.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the conservation of forest resources has assumed a prominent position in global debates and conferences due to the supportive role the forest plays in maintaining ecological balance. The conscious and unconscious working of the human mind influences to a large extent how people perceive and behave towards the utilization, conservation and management of forest resources. Gender and environmental awareness were found to significantly influence individuals' attitude towards forest conservation in old and new Ekuri communities.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made;

- i. Gender role socialization should be discouraged and if possible eliminated in order to change negative roles carried out by males with regards to forest utilization and conservation.
- ii. People should be regularly and adequately sensitized on the value of forest resources in order to promote its conservation.
- iii. Environmental protection and conservation efforts should be focused on the human front in order to change negative attitude towards forest resources utilization and conservation.

References

- Ajah, G. M. (2010). *An Assessment of Factors Militating against Sustainable Forest Management in Rural Areas*. A paper presented at a stakeholders summit in Ikom Local Government Area, Cross River State.
- Amika, E. B. (2009). *Awareness as a Viable Tool for Environmental Conservation*. Calabar: Forestry Commission.
- Aniah, W. T. (2010). *Peoples' Perception towards Environmental Resources Utilization and Management*. Lagos: Tunde Press.
- Anijah-Obi, F. N. (2002). *Fundamentals of Environmental Education and Management*. Calabar: Clear Lines Publications.
- Asu, E. O. (2008). *Gender Issues in Environmental Conservation and Management in Nigeria*. A paper presentation in Akamkpa, Cross River State.
- Atte, E. I. (2010). *Forest Conservation: Implication for Participatory Approach to Natural Resources Management*. Calabar: Forestry Commission.
- Bisong, T. U. (2011). *Environmental Perception and Human Behaviour towards Natural Resources Conservation in Nigeria*. Unpublished material.
- CRSFC (2002). *A Strategy for Sustainable Conservation and Management of the Forest of Cross River State*. Calabar: Forestry Commission.

Ebong, M. O., and Bassey, B. J. (2004). *Introduction to Environmental Perception and Resource Management*. Calabar: MABASS printing company.

Obeten, O. I. (2007) *Determinants of Attitude of People towards Sustainable Forest Management in Nigeria*. A Paper presentation

Obi, F. B. (2004). *Women and Environment*. Unpublished Lecture Note.

Oji, G. O. (2009). *Psychological Issues in Environmental Conservation and Management*. Unpublished Lecture Note.

Williams, D. K. (2009). *Need Gratification and the Future of Forests in Nigeria*. A seminar presentation at the University of Calabar, Cross River State.