Research Article
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Challenges facing community participation in managing natural resources in Omoku, Nigeria

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges facing community participation in natural resource management in Omoku Town, Rivers State. The study adopted a survey research design. Three Hundred and Eight Three (383) questionnaires were distributed in the sixteen (16) communities in the study area. The study adopted the purposive sampling techniques in selecting the twenty-four (24) respondents in each community. Three Hundred and Eighteen (318) questionnaires were retrieved from the respondents. The data were analysed with descriptive statistics. The study found that change, complexity, uncertainty and conflict are the factors militating against community participation in managing natural resources in Omoku. The study concluded that community participation in managing natural resources in Omoku is minimal and practiced to some extent by a few well-known institutions and community groups. The study recommends that the effective participation of the community in managing natural resources will ensure the sustainability of natural resources, benefit all stakeholders, improve livelihoods and reduce poverty in the study area.

Keywords: natural, resources, managing, community, participation

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Introduction

The speedy loss of natural resources in developing countries has become a growing international and national concern. This has led to increased interest in environmental governance and protection that several governments, donors and nature conservation authorities have shown serious commitment to. However, to attain this goal, there is a need for participation.[1] Roe and Nelson[2] posit that the term "community resource management" has to do with managing natural resources such as land, wildlife, and water for the benefit of local communities.

Typically, developing countries in Africa have stirred from a top-down approach to an all-inclusive bottom-up approach. This has been a shift within the model in recognition of the importance of community cooperation, participation, and leadership, both for the results of the development of short-term or long-term sustainability.[1] International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) vision of community participation in managing natural resources entails that human culture is founded in respect for nature which this generation assumes a social responsibility to manage and conserve nature for the sake of future well-being.[3] Shackleton et al.[4] posited that the problem of community participation has presently become an enduring principle in decision making and facilitating the attainment of development goals.

Most developing countries, particularly in Africa, have sought to utilize a non-participatory approach in decision-making. Songorwa,[5] asserts that policies are controlled by those in power while rural communities take the place of beneficiaries during implementation. For Songorwa, rural communities are truncated from the resources they are supposed to lawfully regulate, manage, and utilize. However, a community-based resource management approach is that which places communities in the position to be able to fully manage their natural resources (forest, land, water and biodiversity) within a planned setting (Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM).[6]

According to Community Based Natural Resources Management[6] the active participation of stakeholders in natural resources management, and decision-making process, will yield numerous advantages economically and environmentally.

Murphree[7] emphasizes that community resource management is a deviation from the status quo which is a change in decision-making from the center to the fringes. Murphree[7] further added that the decision-making process for local communities, at both the design and implementation stages, relates to the traditional way in which local communities share in executing programs. Similarly, Malla[8] believes that community resource management has enhanced the livelihoods of the underprivileged. Malla[8] further added that the benefits can range from the creation of job opportunities to note worthy managerial rights and revenue generation in the long run.

Thindiva[9] adds that successful administration of a community's resources benefits members in a community when it enables them to play a vital role in decision-making and in managing their natural resources. Songorwa[5] also argues that the idea of human participation in natural resource management is a major dimension of good governance. Furthermore, participation gives the community complete and hands-on control over the decision-making of their natural resources such as water, grassland, forests, common lands, and protected areas, and the resource manager has found that increasing the role of local people in resource management is more appropriate. This is why community participation has become so important to researchers, organizations, and nations. For instance, Ajake[10] noted that participation has been utilized to justify growing state control over forests and building local capacity and self-sufficiency. It has been used to justify decisions made by foreign agencies and to describe the process of man-power development and decision-making.

Therefore, it is necessary to study the challenges that are preventing community participation in the management of their natural resources to reduce the impact of environmental pollution. This was what led to this study of the Omoku community in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni

Local Government Area Council as it was considered an area with challenges which this study seeks to address, because the people of Omoku depend heavily on their natural resources such as wildlife, land, food and water that is diverse and abundant. The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges facing community participation in managing natural resources in Omoku.

Literature review

Meaning of natural resources

A resource is any factor that can be utilized to fulfill human needs. The resource can be considered based on materials like raw material, land, or abstract, in terms of human knowledge and job characteristics (Ratter 2002). There are two basic types of natural resources; Biological resources which include; minerals or other natural resources. Biological resources such as forests, fish and wildlife are called renewable because they can be replenished. Mineral reserves, such as gold, tin and oil, on the other hand, are non-renewable resources as they are not capable of regenerating except after long geological periods, but both types are comprehensive. The huge difference between both is that biological resources are consumed. Mineral resources represent a fixed stock whose stock can be reduced over time.[11]

Natural resource management

Management refers to detailing and controlling.[12] Management according to Storey[13] requires plans and objectives which will require a manager to supervise, handle and direct the decision-making and work process. As such, the manager has the responsibility and authority to allocate capital, technology, and human resources to achieve the desired goal.[14] Thus, natural resources management consists of making pragmatic decisions and actions regarding the policies and practices of how to assess, protect, allocate, develop, use, manage, rehabilitate, repair, restore, monitor and evaluate resources (Erwest et al 2004). Kellert et al.[11] refers to the management of natural resources such as land, water, soil, plants and animals, with a special focus as it relates to how management affects the quality of life of present and future generations. Erwest et. al (2004) also argued that the management process includes the economic, social, environmental and technical aspects that influence decision-making in resources management. Resource management combines land-use planning, water management, biodiversity conservation and the future sustainability of industries such as agriculture, mining, fisheries and forestry.[11] Hence, resource management is complex and requires a great deal of advanced planning. Resource management in this context involves less direct protection of natural resources. It means sustainable and environmentally friendly management.

Community management of natural resources

According to CBNRM Net,[6] community resource management refers to managing natural resources according to a detailed plan developed and approved by all stakeholders, which gives the resource management community the legal right to have substantial financial resources in all situations and with lots of incentives. Responsibility for the sustainable use of natural resources has become the primary responsibility of communities, with the assistance and supervision of technical services. Roe and Nelson[2] posit that the term "community resource management" has to do with managing natural resources such as land, wildlife, and water for the benefit of local communities.

Likewise, Roe and Nelson[2] argue that natural resource governance takes different forms in different localities and under different social, political, and bio-physical conditions. According to Roe and Nelson,[2] it may depend on the commercial use of natural resources, such as the care of wildlife by local tourism or hunting companies, or it may depend primarily on natural resource livelihoods, such as a non-timber forest product. Community-based natural resource management models focus on strengthening institutions that are locally responsible for the use and management of natural resources so that local groups can make better decisions about the use of natural resources.

Natural resource management challenges

Mitchell[14] documents that natural resource planners and managers as well as rural development planners face diverse and often interrelated challenges. Mitchell further added that change is one of the challenges that the natural resource manager faces. This means that there is always rapid change in our natural and human systems. Many of these changes are due to human activity. Therefore, managers need to take these potential changes into account in the decision-making process and plans must be flexible to adapt to prevailing conditions. Another challenge identified was complexity. According to Mitchell, the interconnections between the natural system and the results of the interaction between human activity and the natural environment are complex. Thus, managers need to understand the processes and interactions between the various components, as well as the sustainable management of development and development strategies for a given system.

Ewert et al. (2004) and Mitchell[14] also identified uncertainty as a challenge. According to them, due to complexity and change, managers do not have complete knowledge of all facts that influence decision making. Mitchell[14] identified conflict as another challenge. According to Mitchell,[14] different and often conflicting values and viewpoints are usually used in resource allocation and use. Leaders often face conflicting situations and must acknowledge mediation between the conflicting parties.

Community participation

According to Shackleton, Campbell, Wollenberg, and Edmunds,[4] community participation in decision-making, documentations, and international conference publications has increased as a major factor in achieving sustainable development in Africa in recent decades. Hamdi (1994) argues that the term community participation refers to a specific form and purpose in decision-making that affects their lives of community members. Hamdi (1994), further added that community participation is a process in which professionals, families, community, groups, and government officials come together to work on something beneficial in a formal or informal partnership. Shackleton et al.[4] also argued that community participation is now an established principle when considering issues related to decision-making for achieving sustainable development.

Methodology

The study provided an interpretive philosophy that aims to explore and reflect on the inner feelings and opinions of the respondents. A mixed-method was used for this study. According to Onwugbuzie and Turner,[15] the hybrid method combines a quantitative and qualitative approach which provides deeper insight. A structured questionnaire and face to face interview were used to collect data from a population of 383 (Three Hundred and Eighty-Three) which made the 16 (Sixteen) communities in the study area namely:- Obohia, Usomiri, Eluohna, Obitima, Ali-Oma, Usominielouhna, Egwe, Ibuzorohna, Obakata, Obieri, Oha-Oma. The purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the sample size. The responses generated were processed with statistical package for social science (SPSS) and analysed using descriptive statistics (Table 1).

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Table 1 Distribution of sample size

S/N	Communities	No. of respondents sampled per community	No. retrieved
1	Obohia	24	19
2	Usomini	24	22
3	Eluohna	24	20
4	Okwu-Ugnoh	24	17
5	Ali-Oma	24	21
6	Obosi	24	23
7	Okwuoba	24	20
8	Agborgwe	24	22
9	Obitima	24	19
10	Aliohuru	24	21
11	Usominielouhna	24	17
12	Egwe	24	23
13	Ibuzorohna	24	21
14	Obakata	24	17
15	Obieti	24	21
16	Oha-Oma	24	15
	Total	384	318

Results and discussion

Data about the challenges facing the community in managing natural resources in Omoku City, Rivers State, Nigeria are presented below:

Demographics of the respondents

The responses to the study were mainly from adults. Both men and women represent the respondents. Educational qualification varied between basic education and bachelor's degree. The profession of the respondents was very diverse and included agriculture, civil servants, farm owners, Businessmen/Traders, Private Co-operation and artisans.

Table 2 indicated that 70.4% of the respondents agree that change is a challenge facing community participation in natural resources management while 21.7% disagree. Table 2 further showed that 79.4% of the respondents agree with the view that complexity is a challenge while 8.5% disagree. The table also showed that 81.8% accept uncertainty as a challenge while 11.6% disagree. Similarly, 90.9% agreed that conflict is a challenge while 9.1% disagree.

Table 2 Challenges facing community participation in natural resources management in lOmoku

Variable/Item		SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD	Total
Challenges Facing Community Participation Scale		**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**			**N%**
2a	Change	-42	-27	-25	-105	-119	3.73	1.38	318
		13.20%	8.50%	7.90%	33.00%	37.40%			100
2b	Complexity	-16	-11	-37	-143	-111	4.01	1.03	318
		5.00%	3.50%	11.60%	45.00%	34.90%			100
2c	Uncertainty	-21	-16	-21	-159	-101	3.95	1.09	318
		6.60%	5.00%	6.60%	50.00%	31.80%			100
2d	Conflicts	-29	0	0	-115	-174	4.27	1.14	318
		9.10%	0.00%	0.00%	36.20%	54.70%			100

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Table 2 also revealed that the majority of the respondents agreed that change, complexity, uncertainty and conflict are all challenges facing community participation in managing natural resources in Omoku with mean scores of 3.73, 4.01, 3.95 and 4.27 respectively. The findings of this study are similar to the findings of Mitchell[14] that rapid change in our natural and human systems due to human activity, complexity in the interaction of human activities with the natural environment, Uncertainty due to complexity and change and conflicting values and view points in the allocation and use of resources are challenges confronting community participation in the management. of natural resources in their communities. The study also revealed that community participation in managing natural resources in Omoku is minimal and practiced to some extent by a few well-known institutions and community groups.[16]

Conclusion

The study examined challenges facing community participation in managing natural resources in Omoku. The study found that change, complexity, uncertainty, and conflict are factors militating against community participation in managing natural resources in Omoku. The study concluded that community participation in managing natural resources in Omoku is minimal and practiced to some extent by a few well-known institutions and community groups. The study recommends that the effective participation of the community in managing natural resources will ensure the sustainability of natural resources, benefit all stakeholders, improve livelihoods and reduce poverty in the study area.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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