

RELIGIO-CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS STRATEGIES: AN INSIGHT INTO PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN IKOT EKPENE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study examined religio-cultural and environmental awareness strategies as an implication of people's attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources in Ikot Ekpene of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Two null hypotheses which guided the study were tested and a questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. A co-relational survey design was adopted for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select four communities in the area of the study. The sample for the study was 260 respondents Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was used to test the hypotheses and was accepted at $p < .05$. The results obtained reveal that the two independent sub-variables: faith-based organizations and traditional plays have significant association with peoples' attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources. Recommendation were preferred based on the findings.

Keywords: Religio-cultural, Environmental awareness, Attitude, Sustainable management, natural resources.

Introduction

Natural resources are nature's endowments provided for the sustenance and support of peoples' livelihoods. Not only do the endowments serve to sustain and support livelihoods, they also perform unique ecological functions which are of high value to the continuous existence of human on earth. Natural resources could be classified as terrestrial, aquatic and atmospheric based. The terrestrial based include land, soil, trees (forests), non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and terrestrial animals. The aquatic based are water-bodies and the various resources therein while atmospheric based are gases which both human beings and plants make use of. The importance of natural resources towards the sustenance and support of peoples' livelihoods is even more evident in its shaping of peoples' occupation types based on the type of natural resource which is more abundant in a given geographical location. For locations in proximity to large water-bodies such as oceans, seas and rivers, the occupation types are mainly fishing and its allied businesses while locations where there are large tracts of forests/fertile land will mainly have farmers and its allied businesses.

Sustainable management of natural resources is a concept concerned with the process of how natural resources are exploited and utilized in a controlled manner so as to ensure that they will be of continuous benefit to posterity (Eyo & Ogo, 2013). The process involves planning, executing and monitoring how natural resources are exploited and utilized with a focus of ensuring the perpetuity of the resources' capability towards not only the sustenance and support of peoples' livelihoods but

also the unique ecological functions they perform. According to Takon and Amalu (2013), when there is no sustainable management of natural resources in a given area, the possibility of disparity in the perceptions and subsequent attitude of people towards the resources is very likely.

Ogo, Effiong, Eyo and Akpan (2013) reported that agricultural practices such as bush burning, shifting cultivation and commercial logging had served to impact negatively on forest ecosystem. Etim (2015) revealed that for most farmers within the area of study, crop yield was heavily dependent on application of inorganic fertilizers. Ekpenyong (2015) investigated and revealed that hectares of built-up areas within the local government had increased from 767 hectares in 1986 to 2,222 hectares in 2007. In their study, Nelson, Udoakpan and Jacob (2015) found out that over exploitation of NTFPs in the few sacred forests in the area of study had adversely affected the density of shrubs, herbs, climbers and palms in the forests.

In their study, Udoh, Akpan and Uko (2017) examined natural assets of farming households and revealed that fuel-wood gathering of NTFPs was the least most accessible asset. Oladele, Aiyeloja and Oworen (2017) found out that unsustainable collection of NTFPs (forest spices) in some communities in the area of study (specifically Ikot Inyang, Mbiaso, Amayam, Abiaokpo Ikot Essien and Ikot Obong Edong) was adversely affecting their usual abundance in the forests in those areas.

Environmental awareness depicts the extent to which an individual is both aware of, and participates in resolving environmental issues. Hassan, Noordin and Sulaiman (2010) view it as the emotional attachment and favourable disposition towards adopting best practices of environmental sustainability. Environmental awareness is one of the indices of environmental literacy. It refers to an understanding of one's physical environment, which arises because of synthesizing information which such a person possesses. The awareness is obtained through sensing favourable and unfavourable situations that are heavily influence by historical, cultural, ecological, socio-economic and other circumstances in the environment. Thus, having environmental awareness is something which could be manifested in one's behaviour and not just a set of conceptions, which exist in one's mind-set.

Faith-based organizations are organizations or institutionalized systems which have a connection with a religion, faith, or belief system. The organizations or institutionalized systems could be indigenous or non-indigenous. In the context of this study, the indigenous one would be termed traditional religion. The tenets of the traditional religion are all about faith and belief in various forms of nature (Moyer, Sinclair & Diduck, 2014) and these various forms of nature include rocks, caves, trees, water-bodies and different types of animals (Fontein, 2006).

Faith and belief in various forms of nature is evidenced in a variety of sustainable management practices such as sacred grooves, forbidden forests, totemism, sacred landscapes, sacred ponds amongst others (Rim-Rukeh, Irehievwie & Agbozu, 2013). The practices have been attributed to a spiritual respect for, and a practical awareness of the natural environment and these practices are as a result of age-long norms, values, and taboo systems which are deeply rooted in their religio-cultural milieu (Rusinga & Maposa, 2010).

Traditional plays are those theatrical displays which indigenous people indulge in that show their age-old beliefs, customs or culture. According to Mohanty and Parhi (2011), they could be seen as the process of transmitting age-long values and the contextual manifestation and interpretation of their environment. The displays are related to their past, present and future, and it provides them with a glimpse of reality and awareness which results in them being educated. In addition, the displays indicate a sense of belongingness, togetherness, and affinity in a cultural context, and also, are considered to be an integral part of dances, masquerade displays, story-telling, proverb-telling, games of local riddles and traditional drama and puppet displays (Ismail, 2015). Traditional displays have a very strong influence on indigenous people because of their acceptable idioms, proverbs, and clichés, functional significance, and entertainment components. This is because they overcome issues like language difficulty, speech, words and some barriers of communication such as perception, interest, attitude, interpretation, and understanding (Essien, 2014).

Theoretical framework

Theory of planned behaviour by Icek Ajzen 1985

In 1985, Icek Ajzen propounded that an individual's action is a function of the following; (i) behavioural beliefs – beliefs concerned with likely consequences of a particular behaviour; (ii) normative beliefs – beliefs concerned with normative expectations of other people, and; (iii) control beliefs – beliefs concerned with relative factors which may either enhance or hinder behavioural performance (Ajzen, 1985). In their respective aggregates, behavioural beliefs result in the individual developing either a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the given behaviour; normative beliefs result in the individual developing perceived social pressure also known as subjective norms, and; control beliefs which result in the individual developing perceived behavioural control – a concept which refers to the perceived difficulty or ease of performing a given behaviour.

Collectively, the three indicators (attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behaviour control) result in the individual's formation of a behavioural intention. On a general note, the rule is that, the more favourable the individual's attitude and his or her subjective norm, coupled with a greater perceived behavioural control should result in the individual developing a very strong intention to actually perform the given behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Given a sufficient degree of actual control over the behaviour, an individual is expected to display his or her intentions (perform the given behaviour) when the opportunity arises.

The bottom line about the theory is that it explains how various sets of beliefs result in human behavioural intentions being influenced by attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (Floress, Akamani, Halvorsen, Kozich & Davenport, 2015). This implies that an individual's behavioural intention is basically dependent on the three indicators. Of all the three indicators, attitude has the strongest influence on behavioural intention as a result of it being premeditated on beliefs concerned with probable consequences of the behaviour (Hrubes, Ajzen & Daigle, 2001). Ajzen (1991) asserts that negative attitudes most likely result in negative behaviour. In their submission on the connection between attitude and

conservation behavioural outcomes, Ansong and Roskraft (2011) added that locals' in proximity to tropical rainforest reserves with negative attitudes would most likely indulge in illegal and destructive logging, unsustainable harvesting of NTFPs and a low level of support for conservation initiatives.

The theory's relevance to the present study is hinged on the important influence of attitude on behavioural intention. Attitude is premeditated on a set of beliefs directly connected to an individual's evaluation of probable consequences of behavioural intention. Negative attitudes are yielded when an individual develops a negative belief while positive attitudes are yielded when a positive belief is developed. An understanding of why negative attitudes is displayed towards sustainable management of natural resources in the area of the study could give rise to an understanding of how to influence the peoples' attitudes to be positive in terms of managing the natural resources sustainably. A change of attitude in turn, could go a long way in halting further decimation of the natural resources, thus ensuring their continuous provision of unique services to the environment and human.

Statement of the problem

The necessity of natural resources in any given environment is due to the fact that they serve to support and sustain human livelihoods, and also, perform certain unique ecological functions which are very valuable to the continuous existence of life on the earth. Therefore, it is pertinent that they are sustainably managed. It is premised that positive attitudes towards the environment are depicted by sustainable management prone behaviours towards natural resources while negative attitudes towards the environment are synonymous with a reckless and careless usage of natural resources.

In the area of the study, usage of natural resources includes bush burning, unchecked commercial logging, heavy dependence of crop yield on application of inorganic fertilizers, uncontrolled development of built-up areas with reckless abandon towards the environment, and over exploitation of NTFPs from the very few remaining forests in the area to the point which their usual abundance has been adversely affected. The consequence of the peoples' attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources is that the area of the study is the second most vulnerable LGA to environmental degradation in the state. It is against this backdrop that this study examined religio-cultural and environmental awareness strategies: an insight into people's attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources in Ikot Ekpene, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine the association between environmental awareness strategies and people's attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources in Ikot Ekpene LGA of Akwa Ibom State.

Specifically, the study ascertained the extent of association between;

- i. faith-based organizations and attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources.
- ii. traditional plays and attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources.

Research questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study;

- i. How do faith-based organizations relate with attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources?
- ii. How would traditional plays relate with attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study;

- i. Faith-based organizations have no significant association with attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources.
- ii. Traditional plays have no significant association with attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources.

Research design

A co-relational survey design was adopted for the study. The design is suitable for studies whose focus is to determine how a given set of variables are correlated (positive, negative, or no correlation at all). It is a design which is adopted when a study is designed to indicate the magnitude and direction of the relationship between a given set of variables (Idaka & Anagbogu, 2012). The design was adopted due to the perceived association between the study's variables. To be specific, the design was adopted due to the perceived association between environmental awareness strategies and peoples' attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources.

Area of the study

The study was carried out in Ikot Ekpene LGA of Akwa Ibom State. It lies between latitudes $5^{\circ}0'$ and $5^{\circ}30'N$ and longitudes $7^{\circ}30'$ and $7^{\circ}45'E$ (Oladele et al., 2017). It is bounded to the north by Obot Akara and Ikono LGAs, to the west by Obot Akara LGA, to the east by Ikono LGA while Essien Udim LGA bounds it to the south (Ekpenyong, 2015). The landmass of Ikot Ekpene LGA is 125km². The major waterways in the area are the Obot Aya, Inyang Atamini and Okara rivers. Administratively, the area has 11 political wards with Ikot Ekpene town serving as the headquarters. The indigenous language spoken in the area is called Annang. Their main occupation are farming, weaving and carving as the area is blessed with fertile land, an abundance of raffia trees and wood for carving. Worthy of note is that the headquarters-Ikot Ekpene is known as the "Raffia City". Christianity is the major religion in the area. There are four higher institutions in the area namely; The Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, School of Nursing, St. Joseph Major Theological Seminary and Ritman University. There are secondary and primary schools in the area. The culture is expressed in the following traditional plays; Ekpo, Abiakpo, Uta, Ikon, Asian Akananwan, Asian Uboikpa Mbopo and Abang.

Population of the study

The population area is 254,806. This is the projected estimate for the year 2019 (NPC, 2019).

Sampling technique

Purposive sampling technique was used for the study. This is a sampling technique which affords the researcher the opportunity to intentionally include in his or sample elements adjudged to satisfy certain pre-determined criteria based on the study's purpose (Idaka & Anagbogu, 2012). Based on the above technique, four communities in the LGA where some remaining pockets of forest were selected and 2% each of their population based on their projected population for 2019 was sampled.

Sample

The sample consisted of 260 respondents. A breakdown is shown in table 1.

Table1. Sample distribution for the study

Sampled community	Population of sampled community	Sample
Ikot Inyang	3105	62
Mbiaso	3065	61
Abiaokpo Ikot Essien	3516	70
Amayam	3341	67
		260

The mean scores and standard deviations of the study variables are as presented in Table 2. The result as presented in table 2 revealed that the mean scores obtained by the subjects as regards faith-based organizations and traditional plays were 16.36 and 16.48 respectively. The result also revealed that a mean score of 15.21 was obtained as regards to attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources in the area of the study.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the research variables (N=260)

SN	Variables	Mean	SD
i.	Faith-based organizations	16.36	1.85
ii.	Traditional plays	16.48	2.49
iii.	Attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources	15.21	2.45

Results

Hypothesis one: Faith-based organizations have no significant association with attitudes towards sustainable management of natural resources. To test this hypothesis, faith-based organizations and attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources were compared using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result of the analysis is presented in table 3.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of faith-based organizations and attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State (N=260)

Variables	\bar{x}	SD	r	p-level
Faith-based organizations (X)	16.36	1.85		
Attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources (Y)	15.21	2.45	.478*	.000

*Significant at .05. $p < .05$; critical r-value = .098.

The result of the analysis in table 3 revealed that faith-based organizations produced a mean score of 16.36 with a standard deviation of 1.85 while attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources produced a mean score of 15.21 with a standard deviation of 2.45. The result further revealed that the calculated r-ratio of .478 obtained with a p-value of .000 is greater than the critical value of .098 and this met the condition required for significance at the .05 level.

Hence, the null hypothesis that faith-based organizations have no significant association with attitudes towards sustainable management of natural resources was rejected. With the obtained value of .478 it indicated that faith-based organizations had a significant positive association with attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis two: Traditional plays have no significant association with attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources. To test this hypothesis, traditional plays and attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources were compared using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result of the analysis is presented in table 4.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis of traditional plays and attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State (N=260)

Variables	\bar{x}	SD	r	p-level
Traditional plays (X)	16.48	2.49		
Attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources(Y)	15.21	2.45	.289*	.000

*Significant at .05. $p < .05$; critical r-value = .098.

The result of the analysis in table 4 revealed that traditional plays produced a mean score of 16.48 with a standard deviation of 2.49 while attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources produced a mean score of 15.21 with a standard deviation of 2.45. The result further revealed that the calculated r-ratio of .289 obtained with a p-value of .000 is greater than the critical value of .098 and this met the condition required for significance at the .05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis that traditional plays have no significant association with attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources was rejected. With the obtained value of .289 it indicated that traditional plays had a significant positive association with attitude towards management of natural resources in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State.

Discussion of findings

Hypothesis one revealed faith-based organizations as having a significant association with attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources. This result is not surprising, based on the connection which people attach to whatever faith or belief system(s) that they reverence or pay obeisance to. Without some form of faith or belief in an institutionalized system or organization where worshippers go to pay reverence to, an individual seems to be empty without any form of connection with a supreme being. Thus, the finding could apparently imply that a favourable disposition towards sustainable management of natural resources within a given locality could be enhanced when faith-based organizations are enlightened on the role(s) they would play in facilitating such.

The finding agrees with Jimoh, Ikyaagba, Alarape, Obioha and Adeyemi (2012) who reported that a traditional faith-based system amongst locals had laws and taboos which made them checkmate wildlife extraction from the forest within their area. The finding is also in consonance with Udeagha, Udofia and Jacob (2013) who revealed that sacred forests which provided an opportunity for people to display their traditional beliefs and practices served to influence their conservation based attitudes. Siguake, Katsaruware, Chiridza and Saidi (2015) also investigated and revealed that traditional faith-based systems could serve as a driving force for favourable dispositions towards a forest and its resources.

The result of hypothesis two revealed traditional plays as having a significant association with attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources. The result could be attributed to the following; (i) every community has a rich traditional cultural heritage which is used to disseminate messages or information to the public, and when such is displayed, it gives them a sense of appreciation which they have for their culture; (ii) showcasing traditional plays gives locals the opportunity to affirm aspects of their historical antecedents and how they should behave within the community towards their resources, and; (iii) it makes the older generation in such communities have an opportunity to pass oral traditions to the younger generation for preservation of their culture. The implication here could be that organization of such traditional plays in a way which will involve participation of most of the locals could serve to make them even more attuned to whatever attitude is expected of them towards the natural resources within their locality.

The finding is in consonance with that of Mohanty and Parhi (2011) who reported that traditional plays were used to significant effect for both conveying of messages and rural development. Yoshida et al. (2011) also revealed that traditional songs and plays were an effective medium for disseminating health-based information among locals. The finding also agrees with that of Obasi and Ebirim (2014) who observed that traditional plays were significant in facilitating lifelong learning amongst adult learners in rural communities.

Conclusion

It was concluded based on the findings that faith based organization have significant association with attitudes towards sustainable management of natural resources. It was also concluded that, traditional plays have significant association with attitude towards sustainable management of natural resources.

Recommendations

It was recommended that faith based organizations should be encouraged to increase their activities on natural resources management. in the same vein, traditional plays should be intensified to help in changing attitudes towards natural resources management

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