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USING TOWN HALL MEETINGS AND FOLK MEDIA COMMUNICATION AS COMMUNITY EDUCATION STRATEGIES FOR CREATING AWARENESS ON FOREST RESOURCE CONSERVATION IN NORTHERN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the extent to which town hall meetings and folk media communication could be used as community education awareness creation strategies on forest resource conservation in Northern Cross River State Nigeria. Two null hypotheses were formulated to guide and direct the study. The hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The ex-post factor research design was adopted for the study. The choice of this design was necessary because the variables under study have already occurred and cannot be manipulated. The population of the study comprised of 6,000 registered adult male and female farmers and timber dealers. A sample of 600 respondents was drawn from the population of the study using stratified and accidental sampling techniques. A four point modified Likert scale type instrument titled "Town Hall meetings and folk media community education Awareness Creation Strategies on Forest Resource Conservation" (TMFCEACSFRC) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two expert in the Department of Educational Foundation University of Calabar, Nigeria. The instrument was administered by the researchers with the help of three trained research assistants. The data was analyzed using One-way Analysis Variance (ANOVA). The result of the analysis revealed that awareness creation through town hall meetings and folk media communication significantly influence forest resource conservation. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended among others that town hall meetings should be held

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regularly to discuss the issues that concern forest resource conservation and the forest communities should be encouraged to adopt the folk media in creating awareness on forest resource conservation.

Keyword: Town Hall, Folk Media, Community Education

Introduction

Forest resources or products are materials derived from forestry for consumption or commercial use such as lumber, paper or fodder for livestock, they include products such as wood timber, pulpwood, wildlife, water, minerals etc. Man has constantly depended on the forest resources for his survival due to it relevance. Forest resources are storehouse of a large variety of life forms such as plants, mammals, insects, bird, reptile microorganism etc. There are biological community that consist of a complex ecosystem which is predominantly composed of trees, shrubs, water sources, soil, aquatic creative, wildlife, timber and non-timber resources over millions of years.

Forest resources no doubt play a significant role in keeping the earth planet healthy by absorbing carbon-dioxide and releasing oxygen that human beings depend on for survival and for stabilization of the climate. Forest resources helps in the habitation of most biodiversity, regulate the earth climate, prevent soil erosion and landslides and enriches the soil. (Apir 2022). Forest resources provides medicine, food, wood energy, shelter, building material, fodder and fibre, generate income and employment, protein, maintain in water cycle and improves the livelihoods of people. (Omari, Omoogun & Effiom 2019). According to Augustine et al (2025) Community environmental education is a significant instrument for environmental protection.

Despise the relevant of forest resources to man and the ecosystem, the rate at which they are depleted in the study area is becoming so alarming and fattening. According to Edu (2018) about eighty percent (80%) of the forest areas in Cross River State has been wantonly destroyed for reasons such as timber logging, industrialization and road construction while the remaining twenty percent (20%) left is gradually been threatened by human activities such as unsustainable farming, hunting, bush burning and over grazing. This ugly development has resulted to environmental hazards such as poor water quality, soil erosion, low crop yield, flooding, greenhouse effect, biodiversity loss, acid rain, climate change and global warming.

In an attempt to conserve the forest ecosystem, the government of Cross River State through the Cross River State Forestry Commission have introduced policies that could reduce or check excessive exploitation of forest resources. These include preventing or prohibiting harvesting of plant and animal species in the forest reserve areas, preventing the harvesting of plant and animals species which are regarded as threatened or endanger species, enacting forest laws and issuing of permits before forest resources are harvested. (Apie 2022).

Inspite of the frantic effort so far made by the government and other stakeholders to protect the forest ecosystem from wanton destruction, it seems the effort have not yielded the expected outcome or provided the expected results as forest resources in Northern Cross River State in recent times are exploited in a faster rate than ever before. According to Anthony and Essien (2017), this could be attributed to lack of awareness creation. It is therefore hoped that with awareness creation on forest resources conversation through town hall meetings and folk media communication the rural dwellers and indeed the immediate beneficiaries of the bounties of the forest could be sensitize on the relevant of forest resources to mankind and the ecosystem. It is therefore base on the above that this study seeks to find out the extent to which town hall meetings and folk media communication could be used as important community education strategies in creating awareness on forest resource conservation in Northern of Cross River state, Nigeria.

Literature review

Apie (20122) define town hall meeting as a communal meeting held in a special hall to discuss issues and events that affect their lives. It could also be referred to a type of gathering where locals and politicians meet to discuss issues that affect them.

Folk media include visual, verbal and annual forms accepted by a specific community and used to entertain, inform or instruct. There are means through which messages, thoughts and feelings are expressed. The folk media could be referred to as the people media. They include songs, dance, folk tales, riddles festivals, village square, talking drum, drama etc. (Sharma and Singh 2015).

Oden (2021) stress that awareness through community town hall meetings helps in enlightening the rural community members receive proper information that could help the community in their daily interaction. According to him before the advent of modern mass media (print and broadcast media) in Africa societies or communities did not live in Isolation from one another but people interacted and share opinions, ideas, thoughts and

feeling in their communities through various channels such as market places, family meetings and village square meetings. Udomisor, Ekpe & Inyang (2014) opined that messages passed in community town hall meetings include; agricultural innovation messages, sustainable forest management and many others. In a similar vein Bassi, Mongune and Joseph (2017) noted that awareness creation through community town hall meetings bring about conservation of animals aquatic and other forest resources.

According to Sam, Nnaji and Etefia (2014) conservation practices globally are changing from the scientific approach to the traditional management approach, with emphasis on managing forest resources in a way that ensures greater flow to the stakeholders especially local community members. They stressed that community town hall meeting therefore requires a more comprehensive approach which include strengthening the technical capabilities of rural communities as well as engendering support for sustainable resources use from larger community groups. Elo (2020) commented that in each community, members have their own ways of organizing meetings which is designed and operated to suit the needs of the members of such community and the natives of such communities operate the media.

Oden (2021) posits that through town hall meetings awareness is easily created in the rural communities where information on day to day activities is disseminated and many issues that affect the community are discussed. Ibii (2000) opined that rural people have few social contacts outside their environment hence acquiring information to boost their socio-economic status is usually through village town hall meetings. Participation in socio-economic activities and community involvement plays significantly improve environmental communication (Ubana, et al 2025).

The indigenous folk media are presumed to be a potent tool for not only community based learning but also information dissemination on culture and preservation of environmental resources (Idris & Umar 2016). Sharma & Singh (2015) summarized the advantages of folk media in community development to include; (i) enhancing the clarity and distinctness of indigenous communication (ii) flexibility in accommodation of novel themes, issues and ideas and (iii) gives room for popular participation. According to Sharma & Singh (2015) folk media should be an integral part of any communication programs for rural development because it is unique in nature as it look at the day-to-day life pattern of the rural masses.

Yemer (2020) asserts that traditional folk media are locally oriented

easily accessible flexible, portable inclusive and relatively inexpensive. Sharma & Singh (2015) maintain that traditional or folk media should be an integral part of any communication programme for rural development. It is a communication system which integrate cultural beliefs and attitudes with national and societal needs. It is unique in nature as it is seen as a communal entertainment for the audience.

Essien and Anthony (2018) postulates that folk or traditional media is a significant instrument in propagating environmental adult education information within the rural populace. Juvvigunta, (2017) stipulates that with folk media the target audience who are either literate or illiterate could be attended to. It provide information and education in farm of entertainment and can integrate environmental issues into developmental policies.

According to Galadima & Lawal (2017) Folk media is a collection of cultural associations which accumulate a given society's indigenous knowledge, norms, beliefs, customs, experiences, expressions and tradition and pass same down from generation. There are four fundamental areas that are usually considered when defining indigenous folk media viz (i) being traditional based (ii) being culture related (iii) being trans-generational and (iv) being shared by community-based groups.

In a study carried out by Oyemyi and Olofinsawe (2015) to find out how rural women in Ondo State Nigeria access and use agricultural information, A survey research design was adopted. A sample of 1000 respondents was drawn from the population of the study using random sampling technique. The questionnaire was the main instrument use for data collection. The data collected was analysed using frequencies and percentage. The result of the analysis revealed that farmers in the study area mostly source for information from the folk media sources. The study also affirm that rural dwellers actually utilized information disseminated from folk media. The finding of the study further revealed that folk media could be the best means to disseminate information among the rural farmers on forest resource conservation.

Onwuemele (2018) opined that indigenous folk media groups are the main source of climate-based information for farmers in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. He stress that farmers are more disposed to accessing and using the traditional folk media as their agricultural information source. Idris and Umar (2016) maintain that folk media is the most utilized source of information to the farmers. According to them it is the best channel used for information dissemination among both the literate and illiterate farmers. Ubana et al (2025)

opined that artificial intelligence is a vital tool to enhancing information. Sulaiman and Oramedia (2011) decried the negative influences of foreign cultures in African society that has led to deculturalized Africa. According to them many indigenous communication systems have gone extinct. Yahaya (2003) stress that indigenous folk media is the most important way by which the rural dwellers communicates among themselves and with others. It is the representative of real-life of the society that provides information and education in form of entertainment.

Statement of the problem

The rate at which forest resources in Northern Cross River State, Nigeria has been depleted in recent time is alarming. About 80% of forest in the study area has been destroyed for reasons such as timber logging, industrialization, urbanization and road construction, while the remaining 20% is been threatened by human activities such as unsustainable farming practices, bush burning and over grazing. This situation have resulted to environmental hazards such as poor water quality, low crop yield, soil erosion, flooding, green house effect, biodiversity loss, acid rain climate change and global warming.

The government of Cross River State have made concerted effort through the Cross River State forestry Commission to reduce or check over exploitation of forest resources in the study area. For instance the forest laws have been enacted, permit are issued before forest resources like timber are harvested and harvesting of plant and animal species regarded as endangered and those in the forest reserve areas is prohibited.

Despite the effort made so far to curb over exploitation of forest resources in the study area, the forest ecosystem remain threatened. This ugly development could be attributed to lack of awareness among the rural populace. It is therefore hope that if awareness is properly created through town hall meetings and folk media the rural dwellers who are the immediate beneficiaries of the forest resources will become conscious of the consequences of forest depletion. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to empirically investigate the extent to which awareness creation through town hall meetings and folk media could assist in conserving forest resources in the study area.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which awareness creation through town hall meetings and folk media influence the conservation of forest resources in Northern Cross River State. Specifically the study seek to;

1. Find out the extent to which awareness creation through town hall meetings influence forest resource conservation in Northern Cross River State.
2. Examine the extent to which awareness creation through folk media influence forest resource conservation in Northern Cross River State.

Statement of hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide and direct the study.

1. Awareness creation through town hall meetings does not significantly influence forest resources conservation in Northern Cross River State.
2. Awareness creation through folk media does not significantly influence forest resources conservation in Northern Cross River State.

Methodology

The ex-post factor research design was adopted for this study. According to Joshua, (2005) Ex-post factor is a type of design which allows for generalization of the relationships of variables without direct interactions from the nature. The choice of this design is necessary because the variables under study have already occurred and cannot be manipulated.

The study was carried out in Cross River State, Nigeria. It coordinates are $6^0$41'N and $8^0$58'E. It is bounded in the North by Benue State, South by Ikom and Western Boki LGAs, East by the Republic of Cameroon and Eastern Boki and in the West by Ebonyi State. The area is also referred to as Northern Senatorial District. It comprises of Ogoja, Bekwarra, Obudu, Obanliku and Yala Local Government Areas of Cross River State. The major occupations in the study area are farming and trading. Food crops such as yam, cassava, rice etc and cash crops such as oil palm produce, and cocoa are produced in commercial quantities by the people. The major languages spoken in the study area are "Bekwarra", "Yala", "Bete", "Bakor" and "Mbe".

A sample of six hundred (600) respondents was drawn from the population of six thousand (6000) using stratified and accidental sampling techniques. The population of the study consist of registered adult male and female farmers from 20 years to 60 years of age. The questionnaire titled "Town-hall meetings and folk-media community education awareness creation strategies and forest resource conservation". (TMFCEACSFRC) was used for data collection. Two experts in the department of educational foundation from the University of Calabar, Nigeria validated the instrument. Split half reliability method was adopted to ascertain the

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reliability estimate of the variables. Twenty (20) adult (male and female) who were not part of the study sample were used for the reliability test and the co-efficient obtained range from 70 to 80 which was considered high enough for the test instrument. The data obtained was analysed using One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Results

Hypothesis One: Awareness creation through town-hall meetings does not significantly influence forest resource conservation in Northern Cross River State. Awareness creation through town hall meetings is the independent variable while forest resource conservation is the department variable. One-way analysis of variance was the statistical tool used for data analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 1 and II

Table 1

Summary data and One-way ANOVA of the influence of awareness creation through town hall meeting on forest resource conservation (N=588)

Awareness creation through town hall meetings	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
Low – 1	171	35,1754	3.06473
Moderate – 2	246	36.6016	3.18219
High - 3	171	36.4094	2.87315
Total	588	36.1310	3.11749

Source of variance	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig of f
Between group	223.875	2	111.938	11.947*	.000
within group	5481.041	585	9.369		
Total	5704.917	587			

*Significant at .05 level, P-value = .000, df = 2,585

Table 2

Fishers least significant difference (LDS) multiple Comparison analysis of the influence of awareness creation through town hall meetings on forest resource conservation LSD

(I)Awareness through town hall meetings	(J)Awareness through town hall meetings	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig.
Low	Moderate	1.42619(*)	.30476	.000

	High	1.23392(*)	.33103	.000
Moderate	Low	1.42619 (*)	.30476	.000
	High	.19227	.30476	.528
	Low	1.23392(*)	.33103	.000
High	Moderate	-19227	.30476	.528

*The mean difference is significant at .05 level

The result in table 1 revealed that the calculated f-value of 11.947 is higher than the p-value of .000 at .05 level of significance with 2 and 585 degrees of freedom with this the null hypothesis was rejected. The result therefore implies that awareness creation through town hall meetings significantly influence forest resource conservation in Cross River State. A post hoc analysis was employed using Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis which gives the specific difference in level of significance among the awareness created through town hall meetings. The choice of fisher's least significant difference LSD post hoc test was necessary because it is simple, liberal and can be used for many group variables. The result is presented in table 2.

The result of the analysis in table 2 shows that respondents whose awareness creation through town hall meetings was low, were significantly different in forest resource conservation from those whose awareness creation was either moderate or high. Also, respondents whose awareness creation through town hall meetings was moderate were significantly different from those who were high in forest resource conservation.

Hypothesis two: Awareness creation through folk media does not significantly influence forest resource conservation in Northern Cross River State. Awareness creation through folk media is the independent variable while forest resource conservation is the independent variable one-way analysis of variance was the statistical tool used for data analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 3 and 4.

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Table 3: Summary of data and one-way ANOVA of the influence of awareness creation through folk media on forest resource conservation (N = 588)

Awareness creation through the folk media	N	$\overline{X}$	SD
Low – 1	178	35,2079	3.06180
Moderate – 2	234	36.6239	3.19529
High – 3	176	36.4091	2.87307
Total	588	36.1310	3.11749

Source of variance	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig of f
Between group	222.156	2	111.078	11.852*	.000
within group	5482.760	585	9.372		
Total	5704.917	587			

*Significant at .05 level, P-value = .000, df = 2, 585

Table 4: Fishers' Least significant difference (LSD) multiple comparison analysis of the influence of awareness creation through folk media on forest resource conservation LSD

(I)Awareness creation through folk media	(J)Awareness creation through folk media	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std error	Sig.
Low	Moderate	1.41607(*)	.30448	.000
	High	1.20123(*)	.32543	.000
Moderate	Low	1.41607 (*)	.30448	.000
	High	.21484	.30546	.482
	Low	1.20123(*)	.32543	.000
High	Moderate	-21484	.30546	.482

The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The result of the analysis in table 3 revealed that the calculated f-value of 11.852 is higher than the p-value of .000 at .05 level of significance with 2 and 585 degree freedom with this result the null hypothesis was rejected. This result therefore implies that awareness creation through folk media has significant difference on forest resource conservation. Since awareness creation through folk media has a significant influence on forest resource conservation, a post hoc analysis was employed using Fisher's least significant difference LSD multiple comparison analysis which gives the specific difference in the level of

significance among awareness creation through the folk media. The choice of fisher's least significant difference LSD post hoc test was necessary because it is quite liberal, simple and can be use for many groups variables. The result is presented in table 4.

The result of the analysis in table 4 indicate that the respondents whose awareness creation through the folk media was low were significantly different in forest resource conservation from those whose awareness creation through the folk media was either moderate or high. Also respondents whose awareness creation through the folk media was moderate was significantly different from those who were high in forest resource conservation.

Discussion of results

Hypothesis one: Awareness creation through town hall meetings does not significantly influence forest resource conservation in Northern Cross River State.

The result of the analysis revealed that awareness creation through town hall meetings significantly influence forest resource conservation in the study area. This result is supported by the views of Oden (2021) who stress that awareness creation through town hall meetings help in enlightening the rural community member through proper information on their daily interaction with the environment. The result is further supported by Bassi, Mongunc and Joseph (2017) who opined that awareness creation through town hall meetings bring about conservation of animals aquatic and other forest resource. It therefore mean that one of the ways which awareness can be created on forest resource conservation is through the hall meeting where information on forest resource conservation could be disseminated in the local language of the people.

Hypothesis two: Awareness creation through folk media does not significantly influence forest resource conservation.

The result of the analysis revealed that awareness creation through folk media significantly influence forest resource conservation. This result is supported by Essien and Anthony (2018) who asserts that folk media or traditional media is a significant instrument in propagating environmental adult education information among the rural populace. The result is further supported by Juvigunta (2017) who stress that, with folk media the target audience who could be either literate or illiterate could be attended to equally. Yahaya (2003) also postulate that, indigenous folk media is the most important way by which the rural dwellers communicates among themselves and with others. This mean

that when information about forest resource conservation is disseminated through the folk media the rural populace will understand better thereby resulting in sustainable forest resource conservation.

Conclusion

Town hall meetings and folk media are very instrumental in propagating or disseminating information on forest resource conservation when awareness is created using folk media or through town hall meetings the rural populace understand better. It is therefore important to encourage the use of these strategies in creating awareness on the consequences of forest resource depletion as well as conserving the forest resources.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Town hall meetings should be held regularly to discuss issue that concern forest resource conservation.
2. Researchers and environmental experts should encourage the use of town hall meeting in information dissemination among the rural populace.
3. The folk media should be used in disseminating information on forest resource conservation.
4. The forest communities should be encouraged to adopt the folk media in creating awareness on forest resource conservation.

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