

Promoting Conservation Awareness through Environmental Education among Indigenous People of Ogoni in Rivers State

By

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Abstract

This study examined the necessity for promoting conservation awareness through environmental education among indigenous people of Ogoni in Rivers State. The survey research method was used for this study with a population of 240 farmers and fishermen purposively selected with sample from 2 registered co-operative societies. Data collected were analysed with weighted mean for the two research questions used for the study. The reliability of the instrument was determined through a test-retest method of testing reliability. The data obtained were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient (r) statistics. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained and it was considered high enough to use the instrument for the study. The criteria mean for acceptance and rejection of mean score was 2.5 derived from 4-point Likert scale questionnaire. The findings of the study indicated that EE enhances the conservation awareness of indigenous people for their sustainable livelihood and that EE also enhances cultural practices for the conservation and management of natural resources for the sustainability of indigenous people's livelihood. Based on these findings, it was recommended that more efforts are needed for the mobilization of actions, awareness raising and participation of indigenous people in conservation efforts and also government, relevant environmental agencies and stakeholders will need to provide synergy in promoting environmental education programmes through outdoor and indoor campaign activities for indigenous people.

Keywords: Conservation, Awareness, Indigenous people, Environmental Education, Multinational oil-companies.

Introduction

Since the discovery of oil in the Ogoni land region of Nigeria, private oil companies, as well as the Nigerian government, have exploited these resources in ways that have significantly degraded the environment, undermined public health and political issues for the Ogoni people. There have been many unsuccessful interventions to the Ogoni environmental problems. Part of the reason for this failure has been the Nigerian governments' long history of curtailing civil right which has eluded the efforts of rights campaign in regions such as Ogoni land.

Conservation awareness through Environmental Education is hereby proposed to be adopted and to provide theoretical knowledge and practical skills to the Ogoni indigenous people

to protect themselves from environmental hazards and take care of their natural environment. In the implementation of environmental education programmes in Ogoni land by the government and through the CAMPFIRE approach, this paper explores the Ogoni indigenous knowledge and cultural practices in addressing environmental problems in Ogoni land.

Consequently, oil exploitation has placed a resource curse, dynamic in Ogoni land, and the natives of that region have sought to resist what they deem as exploitation of resources from which they have scarcely benefited from. Oil exploration began in Ogoni land in 1957. The first oil wells in Ogoni land were drilled in Ebube and Bomu Communities. The discovery of oil led to the establishment of an oil refinery in Alesa Eleme in Ogoni land. Today, Ogoni land stands as the fifth largest oil producing community in Nigeria with around 56 oil wells. The Ogoni people, however, have not shared in the profits generated from oil production in Ogoni land. In 1990, for example, 55 percent of the generated oil revenue was allocated to the Federal government of Nigeria, 32.5 percent to the state government, 10 percent to the local government respectively while 1 percent was set aside to tackle environmental problems and 1.5 percent was allocated to the oil and mineral commission.

The discovery of oil in the Ogoni land has not only affected the environment, people and other aspects of the society, it has also caused conflicts between the Ogoni people and their communities, oil companies and the Nigerian Government. The discovery and exploration of oil in Ogoni land has brought some consequences on the Ogoni people, environment and society. These consequences are emissions of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide and gas flares resulting in air pollution. It also includes waste management of oil effluents, oil spills on land and rivers, and deforestation.

The health consequences experienced by people in Ogoni land as a result of oil production activities include respiratory issues, asthma, cancer, skin throat and lung infections, headaches and miscarriages among women. The social and economic effects of oil exploration in Ogoni land is experienced as the contamination of agricultural land and water sources by oil exploration activities has had a negative impact on agricultural production and fishing, because Ogoni communities are heavily dependent on fishing and farming for their livelihood, pollution of the land, and rivers has resulted in increased poverty. Another socio economic effect of the oil exploration has been an increase in the cost of living and outsourcing of jobs.

In the light of the above, conservation awareness through environmental education allows individuals to explore environmental issues, engage in problem solving and take action to improve the environment. Furthermore, individuals develop a deeper understanding of environmental issues and have the skills to make informed and responsible decisions, conservation awareness through environmental education helps individuals to understand their environment, builds knowledge and skills necessary to address complex environmental issues such as oil exploration. Through environmental education, individuals develop a deeper understanding of ecological problems and have the required information and skills to make responsible and correct decisions (Greenfield, 2022).

Given the ever increasing degradation of the environment arising from oil exploration activities, “farmers, pastoralists, fishermen, loggers, plantation operators and other land and water users need to be trained in production methods that are both sustainable and more productive in the long term than present practices” (Ezimah, 2014). He further contends that it will require that services be staffed with sufficient number of extension workers to maintain effective contact with land/water users and of specialists to provide extension workers with adequate technical support. To be successful, extension services must take great pains to explain to land/water users the need, purpose and expected results of any measures they recommend. Demonstration, normally involving the more responsive members of the community, will be most important for convincing the community at large of the value of such measures designed to preserve the natural resources (Ezimah, 2014).

Empowering local people for environmental conservation is seen as a measure for capacity building. This is the view contained in Agenda 21 adapted by the special session of the UN General Assembly which states inter alia in Rao, (2000):

Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interest and enable their effective participation in their achievement of sustainable development.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The social and economic effects of oil exploration in Ogoni land is experienced as the contamination of agricultural land and water sources by oil exploration activities has had a negative impact on agricultural production (farming) and fishing. The Ogoni indigenous people

are heavily dependent on fishing and farming for their livelihood, thus the pollution of the land and rivers has resulted in increased poverty. Another socio-economic effect of the oil exploration has been an increase in the cost of living and outsourcing of jobs.

Conservation awareness through environmental education for the Ogoni people has therefore become a necessity in order to conserve, preserve and manage their endangered environment. This will develop in the people appropriate knowledge, skills and awareness for their participation in the management of environmental resources and livelihood. This is the basic need of the people given continuous presence of oil multinational. The lack of government cooperation in finding lasting solution to the recurring degradation of Ogoni land is the problem of this study.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is on promoting conservation awareness through environmental education among the indigenous people of Ogoni in order to use their indigenous knowledge to find solutions to the environmental issues surrounding them.

The study is therefore designed to ascertain the use of environmental education in fostering environmental conservation awareness through the indigenous knowledge of indigenous people of the Ogoni.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Ascertain the extent to which environmental education enhances the level of conservation awareness of indigenous people for sustainable livelihood
- ii. To examine the extent to which environmental education enhances cultural practices for the conservation and management of natural resources for the sustenance of indigenous peoples' livelihood.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- i. How does environmental education enhance conservation awareness of indigenous people for sustainable livelihood?
- ii. How does environmental education enhance the cultural practices of indigenous people for the conservation and management of natural resources for their sustainable livelihood?

1.5 Methodology

The research design used for this study was the survey method. This is so because the survey research method can be used in the study analysis of individuals, institutions or communities. According to Denga and Ali (1989: 208) survey research is a form of “descriptive research that is aimed at collecting large and small samples from populations in order to examine the distributions, incidence and interaction of educational and sociological phenomena”.

The design for the study considered promoting conservation awareness through environmental education among the indigenous people in Ogoni in Rivers State. This consist of farmers and fishermen. For the purpose of this study, two kingdoms out of the five kingdoms were used from which the population of the study is made up of 240 farmers and fishermen who are members of registered co-operative societies from Gokana and Ken Khana kingdoms.

The instrument for data collection was the researchers’ structured questionnaire titled Questionnaire on Environmental Education Promoting Conservation Awareness (QEEPCA). The questionnaire was face validated by two experts, both from the Department of Adult and Non-Formal Education. The reliability of the instrument was established on a test-retest method testing reliability. The instrument was administered to 20 respondents who were not part of the main study. The data collected was analysed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) statistics. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 was obtained and it was considered high enough to use the instrument for the study.

The structured questionnaire, was a four point Likert rating scale of (SA) Strongly Agree, (A) Agree, (D) Disagree, (SD) Strongly Disagree, for easy comprehension and direct observation. Observation method was also used to ensure correct responses to the questionnaire items. Weighted mean scores were used to answer the research questions.

Results

Table 1: Weighted mean analysis of respondents on how environmental education enhances the conservation awareness of indigenous people for their sustainable livelihood (n-240)

S/N	Items	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	Remark
1	Knowledge and skills acquired through EE has improved the living standard of indigenous people	180 (720)	50 (150)	8 (16)	2 (2)	3.7 Agree
2	Conservation awareness acquired through EE has helped indigenous people understand their environment better	200 (800)	30 (90)	5 (10)	5 (5)	3.8 Agree
3	Indigenous people now have a clear understanding of their environment through environmental education	180 (720)	50 (150)	8 (16)	2 (2)	3.7 Agree
4	Indigenous people through conservation awareness can now sustain their natural resources for future use.	180 (720)	40 (120)	12 (24)	8 (8)	3.6 Agree
5	Indigenous people through conservation awareness now have a sustainable livelihood	210 (840)	20 (60)	7 (14)	3 (3)	3.8 Agree
6	Conservation awareness through EE gives indigenous people access to revenues generated from their natural resources	190 (760)	35 (105)	10 (20)	5 (5)	3.7 agree
7	The indigenous people now have their natural recourse sustained through conservation awareness.	185 (740)	40 (120)	12 (24)	3 (3)	3.6 Agree
8	The indigenous people now conserve their natural resources through a community-based approach.	215 (860)	15 (45)	8 (16)	2 (2)	3.9 Agree

Table 1 shows the weighted mean responses on how environmental education enhances the conservation awareness of indigenous people for their sustainable livelihood in Ogoni in Rivers State, with respective mean scores of 3.7, 3.8, 3.7, 3.6, 3.8, 3.7, 3.6 and 3.9 obtained. This is greater than criterion mean of 2.5, indicating that the respondents agree that environmental education enhances the conservation awareness of indigenous people for their sustainable livelihood to a great extent in Ogoni land, Rivers State.

Table 2: Weighted mean analysis of respondents on how EE enhances cultural practices for the conservation and management of natural resources for the sustainability of indigenous peoples' livelihood in Ogoni land. (n-240)

S/N	Items	4 SA	3 A	2 D	1 SD	Remark
9	Indigenous people and the government engage in regular dialogue through EE which has led to the reduction of conflict in the communities.	180 (720)	45 (135)	10 (20)	5 (5)	3.7 Agree
10	The tension usually experienced due to lack of government attention to environmental damage is significantly being reduced through EE	175 (700)	45 (135)	15 (30)	5 (5)	3.6 Agree
11	Providing EE to the people has greatly reduced the incidence of pipeline oil vandalism.	185 (740)	55 (165)	15 (30)	5 (5)	4.0 Agree
12	The indiscriminate destruction of natural resources of the indigenous people is minimized through EE.	195 (780)	35 (105)	7 (14)	3 (3)	3.8 Agree
13	Conservation awareness through EE has inspired the indigenous people to value and preserve their natural resources	205 (820)	30 (90)	3 (6)	2 (2)	3.8 Agree
14	Indigenous people through the knowledge and attitude acquired from EE are able to address any environmental issues in their environment	210 (840)	25 (75)	4 (8)	1 (1)	3.8 Agree
15	Indigenous people through the knowledge and skills gained from EE now enjoy better enhanced living standard from their natural environment.	190 (760)	30 (90)	15 (30)	5 (5)	3.7 Agree
16	Conservation awareness through EE has helped the indigenous people improve their cultural practices for the conservation and management of their natural resources for sustainable living.	210 (840)	35 (105)	3 (6)	2 (2)	4.0 Agree

Table 2 shows the weighted mean responses on how EE enhances cultural practices for the conservation and management of natural resources for the sustainability of indigenous peoples' livelihood in Ogoni in Rivers State, with respective mean scores of 3.7, 3.6, 4.0, 3.8, 3.8, 3.8, 3.7 and 4.0 obtained with each mean score above the criterion mean score of 2.5. It was therefore

accepted that EE enhances cultural practices for the conservation and management of natural resources for the sustainability of indigenous peoples' livelihood in Ogoni in Rivers State.

2.6 Discussion of Findings

The findings showed conservation awareness through environmental education has helped the indigenous people of Ogoni solve environmental issues in order to preserve the natural resources for future use. Further findings revealed that the indigenous people with the knowledge and skills of environmental education now have gained a better understanding of their natural environment and resources. This agrees with the view of Greenfield, (2022) & Ezimah, (2014). The findings indicated that EE has to a large degree helped the indigenous people understand how their decisions and actions affect the environment, build knowledge and skills necessary to address complex environmental issues, as well as ways they can take action to keep their environment healthy and sustainable for the future. The results clearly indicate that indigenous people are involved in the management of resources in their environment and to that extent, the findings of this study buttress principle 22 listed in the Main Principles of Agenda 21 at the Earth Summit Meeting at Rio de Janeiro, 1992 which was adopted by the UN General Assembly, as cited above. The above Principle calls for inclusiveness and participation of indigenous people through EE in the management and conservation efforts of environmental resources for sustainable development.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, conservation awareness through environmental education has the capacity to empower indigenous people to explore environmental issues, develop knowledge and understanding, engage in problem solving, and take action to improve the environment in order to sustain the environment and natural resources for future use. Thus environmental education can help protect these vulnerable species and preserve the natural resources of our earth for future generations.

2.8 Recommendations

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

- i. More efforts are needed for the mobilization of actions, awareness raising and participation of indigenous people in conservation efforts.

- ii. Government, relevant environmental agencies and stakeholders will need to provide synergy in promoting environmental education programmes through outdoor and indoor campaign activities for indigenous people

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