

Sources and Causes of Conflict that Exist Between Locals and Regulatory Boards on Bio-Diversity Management: A Case for Bindura Rural/Urban Dwellers and the Forestry Commission

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Abstract

The study sought to establish sources and causes of conflict that exist between locals and regulatory boards on bio-diversity management in Bindura rural/urban dwellers and the Forestry Commission. According to Zimbabwean laws, community is the owner of environment hence they have to control it. The society seem to be economically and socially forced by the situation to destroy their environment for example the erratic power cuts in urban set up force urban residence to depend on natural energy that is firewood for their domestic use. The community however continues to compete in the cutting of trees expediting the destruction of the environment. The forestry commission preserves the environment by stipulating measures against the destruction of forests. (Forestry Commission Act). This however is a source of conflict since the community claims it owns the forests and should depend on it whilst the forestry commission's legislative board guards against the destruction of the environment. The significance of the study was to come up with solutions of reducing deforestation and preserving the environment without causing conflict amongst regulatory boards and the community. The study was a descriptive survey which sought to establish views and perceptions of randomly selected concerned parties in the bio-diversity management and preservation. The main questions raised in this scenario were, was the community aware of their rights pertaining to cutting of trees in the forests? How best could the Forestry Commission Act be incorporated so as to inform the community? How can the conflict that do exist between the Forestry commission and the community be resolved

Keywords: forestry commission, environment, deforestation, Bindura dweller.

INTRODUCTION

Geographers sought explanations for the patterns of human occupation of the earth's surface. The major source for explanations was the physical environment, and a theoretical position was established around the belief that the nature of human activity was controlled by the parameters of the physical world within which it was set. The origins of this environmental determinism lie in the work of Charles Darwinism who advocates that ideas of natural selection and adaptation formed the basis of statements regarding environmental determinism which is the relationship between the physical environment, as the control, and human behaviour as the response. (Martin, 1981), (Livingstone 1984).

Reaction to the extreme generalizations of the environmental determinists led to a counter –thesis, that of possibilism, which presented the individual as an active rather than a passive agent. Possibilists presented a model of people perceiving the range of alternative uses to which they could put on environment and selecting that which best fitted their cultural dispositions. Possibilists recognized the limits to action which environments set, and avoided

the great generalizations which characterized their antagonists.

The relationship between human society and natural environment is central to human geography. There are two kinds of change that can affect elements of natural environment. The human impact on the natural environment is taking on powerful dimensions. Human activities are pouring so much pollution into the atmosphere that global environments may be modified as a result.

The importance of biological resource in life support systems and maintenance of human welfare cannot be underestimated. All human beings rely on the interdependent relationships which exist in the biosphere. Consumers such as herbivores, carnivores and omnivores forage for their food from producers like green plants, while decomposers play a crucial role in nutrient recycling within biological reserves. Whereas nutrient recycling and related flows are generally of vital importance to man there are certain basic biological resources which are of direct importance to human survival.

Chief among them include shelter, fuel, and medicinal purposes:

- Forests and woodlands regulate environmental conditions, including micro-climatic conditions in a manner which makes the environment more habitable. They act as natural wind breaks as well as temperature regulators.
- Plant tissue is used as fuel. Wood is used as domestic fuel.
- Both plant and animal tissues are used for medicinal purposes.

From the beginning humanity has been unevenly distributed over the land. Two related concepts have been competing that is the demand for biological resources and the supply of these resources. There seems to be competition between various forms of biological resources and the result of human related demands.

The demand for forest and woodland products has increased over the years. This has been caused by a number of factors, including the rapid growth of human population in the urban areas. This growth has been matched by a corresponding rise in the consumption of forest products. The traditional fuels still constitute the greatest proportion of the total energy consumption hence fuel wood supply has been outstripped by demand.

Forms of environmentalism have evolved. One such form of environmentalism has been spearheaded by those people who believe that plants have a right to survive. Some of the arguments which have been advanced along these lines are as follows:

- Man has the obligation to conserve and as such should reflect good stewardship.
- Man should behave in a manner that promotes global stewardship over species.

Realization that bio-diversity is under threat has prompted individual conservationists, governments and non-governmental organizations to adopt measures to conserve it.

The Forestry Commission has set legal and administrative infrastructure for sustainable management of biological species in the Forestry Act 1905 Part 6 V54-63 on tree cutting to protect the forests.

Due to erratic power cuts, Bindura district has immensely also started to experience several socio-economic problems as a result of shortage of forest and woodland products. Chief among them are:

- Environmental degradation caused by indiscriminate cutting of trees. Wood users are leading to massive devegetation.

- Direct exploitation of forest and woodlands products for fuel wood collection and other consumptive purposes
- People relying on less efficient energy sources and immature trees.
- The demand for domestic fuel has increased the demand for forest and woodland resources and this has contributed immensely to the degradation of these resource.
- Depletion of tree stocks since the rate of exploitation far exceeds the rate of regeneration.

These problems have enhanced numerous theft cases in the district hence this has brought in conflict between locals and regulatory boards.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study sought to establish ways of solving this conflict that existed between locals and the regulatory boards. The study would benefit the community by bringing awareness on the importance of preserving natural resources. It will also enlighten regulatory boards on ways of assisting the community without creating conflict. Policy makers would formulate policies to educate the whole nation amicably on effects of land degradation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is conflict between local residence and the regulatory boards due to deforestation in Bindura district .

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is the community aware of their rights pertaining to cutting of trees in the forests?
- How best can the Forestry Commission Act be incorporated so as to inform community?
- What measures are being taken by the forestry commission to inform the community?
- How can the conflict that do exist between the Forestry commission and the community be resolved?

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Men who were cutting the trees could not be interviewed because the researcher being a female feared would be intimidated hence data obtained was gender biased.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A descriptive survey was adopted because of its ability to collect opinions, views, and perceptions of both locals and regulatory boards. It was the appropriate design to describe the relationship that existed. Respondents were purposively sampled to

come up with two(2) foresters and twenty(20) local residents

INSTRUMENTS

A five item questionnaire was designed for this specific purpose .It contained closed and open – ended questions. Open –ended questions sought locals’ aspirations, push and pull factors, the questions were ideal to facilitate individual response and free the study from being confirmatory than being exploratory. Both the locals and regulatory boards were asked closed ended questions. Face to face interviews were conducted using a structured interview schedule to collect data from the forestry commission officials. Great care was taken to ensure that the human subjects were protected from any harm as a result of participating in this study. Pre-testing of the instrument was done in order to establish the validity and reliability of the data.

FINDINGS

Table1: Category , age and gender distribution

Category	Male	%	Female	%	Age range
Foresters	1	50	1	50	20-28
Locals	5	25	15	75	25-35
Total	6		16		

There was gender disparity among the foresters hence responses obtained were not subjective.

The majority (75%) of local residents were females and (25%) were males implying that whilst men cut the firewood women are actively involved in illegal selling of the commodity and usage of the commodity .

Closed-Ended Responses from Regulatory Boards and Locals

In closed-ended response from the regulatory boards it was highlighted that the Forestry Act well stipulates that:

- The occupier of the land has to inform the Forestry Commission or councillors, or village heads for farm inspection and get clearance or permission on tree cutting. The Forestry commission has to inspect and pass recommendations basing on what is on the ground for example Wet lands are not allowed to be cleared.
- According to the act there were certain trees which are not allowed to be cut for example all indigenous trees like the Muhacha, Muzhanje, Muwanga or Mutohwe trees. These trees take a long time to grow yet they are of multi-purpose use as compared to exotic trees.
- The forestry Commission regularize and recommends the tree cutting exercise because they are the regulatory board to guard against destruction of the environment. It was established that if trees are cut without the regulatory board’s permission, the possessor is

sued either by the police or the Forestry Commission and expected to pay fine depending on the magnitude of the offence.

Whilst this is the situation it appeared that most of these trees were no longer in place showing that locals were unaware of the durability and conservation of these trees and their impact on biodiversity. This has expedited evapotranspiration leading to shortage of bio-diversity –ecosystems.

Responses from foresters clearly indicate that locals are selling firewood as a way of living yet all indigenous trees are state owned. This is due to the fact that for example in communal areas, all people benefit from graze lands.

It was also established that locals were not aware and are not honouring the tree planting days.

On why the regulatory boards continue to impinge measures on tree cutting of trees, their concern was to reduce the dependency syndrome that has immensely affected locals to the extend that there is high rate of theft cases of illegal cutting down and selling of firewood. However locals had of the idea that they had to survive on forests. It was also established that the majority of people selling firewood were not owners of land.

Responses from Local Community

In open –ended responses, locals confirmed their dissatisfaction in the management of forests. They revealed that while they own the land:

- They were not considered and allocated land in the 2000 lands resettlement programme, new settlers came from other provinces and towns.
- They are not involved in the Management of forests .
- The locals are not well versed in the management of bio-diversity.
- There seem to be no resource sharing scheme in which local authorities are allowed to take part in planning and managing the fauna and flora of forests as well as in the formulation of policy on bio-diversity.
- There seem to be no sense of resource ownership and responsibility towards the conservation of natural resources in Bindura rural and peri-urban farms.
- Measures being made are in isolation to locals.
- Majority of biological species which are being extricated are as a result of poverty as the poor continue to plunder in order to earn a living.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Locals need to embark on management training of bio-diversity.
- Locals need to be involved in the planning and management of fauna and flora of forests so as to develop a sense of ownership. Such an approach be made so as to reduce the conflict between locals and technocrats and provide the means by which indigenous technical knowledge can be tapped for the conservation of bio-diversity.
- Further research on conflict resolution between locals and regulatory boards be carried at macro level.
- Locals need to be engaged on income generating projects to avoid destruction of natural resources.

CONCLUSION

It has been noted that biological resources are essential for the existence of life support systems. If local communities regard resources as theirs, they will make an effort to use them in a sustainable manner. Conflict that do exist is leading to degradation and depletion of forests. Unless measures are taken now to conserve bio-diversity the conflict will continue and the cost will be enormous. Measures to be adopted need complementary efforts.

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