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HUNTING PRACTICE AND FOREST RESOURCE CONSERVATION AMONG INDIGENT FARMERS IN OBUBRA L. G. A, CROSS RIVER STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between hunting practices and forest resource conservation, with a focus on indigent farmers in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. To guide the study, 0ne research question was raised and one hypothesis was formulated to guide the study. Predictive correlation research design was used and a sample of 321 indigent farmers was selected from a population of 6,433 using a combination of purposive and accidental sampling techniques. The Hunting Practice and Forest Resource Conservation Questionnaire (HPFRCQ) was used for data collection in this study. The HPFRCQ was validated by three experts, two from Department of Test and Measurement and one from Environmental Education all from University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State. The reliability of the HPFRCQ was also established using Cronbach's alpha method and coefficients obtained ranged from 0.82 to 0.87, indicating a high level of internal consistency. The data obtained was analyzed with Simple Linear Regression Analysis. The results revealed that hunting practice is significantly but negatively related to forest resource conservation in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. The researchers concluded that lack of awareness and education among indigent farmers about sustainable hunting practices contributed to the problem of unsustainable forest resource conservation in the research area. Based on the findings and conclusion, it was recommended that the government should promulgate and enforce a better policy against the unholy hunting of wild life. Fine and jail term can be given to defaulters to help conserve the forest wildlife.

KEYWORDS: Hunting practices, Forest resource conservation, Indigent, Farmers

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INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, wildlife encompasses all living organisms that occur in the wild state. The term is normally restricted to animals, particularly vertebrates (animals with backbone) and to a lesser extent animal without backbones (invertebrates). Because of rapid deforestation as well as other factors, animal species are disappearing. Wild animal species have become extinct as a result of changes in their natural habits. These animals include tigers, giraffes, monkeys, drills, bohor reed buck, roan antelope, chimpanzee, secretary birds, lions, leopards, elephants and gorilla's. As a result of heavy hunting for bush meat and partly because of the wide spread destruction of Nigeria's rainforest, a lot of our wildlife have fled to neighbouring Cameroun and the Republic of Benin for sanctuary (Nigeria Environmental Study Team [NEST], 1991). Through the centuries, hunters have exterminated lions from Greece and Mesopotamia, hippopotamus from Nubia, elephants from North Africa, bears and beavers from Britain, Wilson oxen from Eastern Europe and monkeys from Nigeria. Also, hunting for lucrative trade in wildlife parts for traditional oriental medicine contribute to eliminations of wildlife species.

Various policies, programmes and projects have been embarked upon as deliberate strategies to off-set natural resources depletion through platforms of natural resource protection such as the protected area systems. Protected areas within any geographical area mainstream ecological conservation objectives ranging from biodiversity protection, habitat provision, to enhancing natural and associated cultural resources appreciation for varied purposes and benefits. Protected areas are designed to exist in different forms based on the priorities for conservation needs within landscapes (Andrew-Essien, 2017).

The Obubra people are predominantly rural dwellers, heavily reliant on forest resources for their livelihood. The southern parts of Etung, Eastern Boki, and Akamkpa in Cross River State are significant sources of bush meat. Hunting and gathering are essential activities for the Obubra people. However, unregulated hunting and trapping have severely impacted wildlife populations. Certain Nigerian wildlife reserves have been decimated to near extinction. More recent studies have emphasized the need for conservation efforts. Akinyemi (2018) highlighted the devastating impact of hunting on wildlife populations in Nigeria. Ogunjemite (2020) also noted the severe consequences of habitat destruction on biodiversity in Nigeria. The Obubra people's reliance on forest resources is a significant threat to conservation efforts. Unsustainable hunting practices have led to a decline in wildlife populations. The use of traditional hunting methods, such as muzzle-loader guns, has contributed to the decline. Agbor (2001) in *Igwebuike and Etan, (2018)* maintained that most of the bush meat in the State (Cross River State) today comes from the southern part of Etung, Eastern Boki and Akamkpa, still vast tracts of tropical forest Carbide lamps are also used to hunt wildlife at night. The lack of regulation and enforcement has exacerbated the problem. Conservation efforts are necessary to protect Nigeria's biodiversity. The Nigerian government has implemented policies to regulate hunting and conserve wildlife. However, more needs to be done to address the scale of the problem. Education and awareness programs can help to reduce the demand for bush meat. According to Afolayan (2022), community-based conservation initiatives can be effective in promoting sustainable hunting practices

Hunting practice and forest resource conservation are crucial aspects of environmental sustainability, particularly among rural communities. In Nigeria, the Obubra Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State is renowned for its rich biodiversity and forest resources. However, the area is facing significant environmental challenges, including deforestation, habitat destruction, and wildlife depletion. The indigent farmers in Obubra LGA rely heavily on forest resources for their livelihood, which has led to concerns about the sustainability of hunting practices and forest conservation. Studies have shown that hunting practices can have devastating impacts on wildlife populations and ecosystems (Udumuo, Igwebuike, & Agiande, 2021). The use of traditional hunting methods, such as muzzle-loader guns and snares, can lead to overhunting and habitat destruction.

Furthermore, the lack of regulation and enforcement of hunting laws has exacerbated the problem (Afolayan, 2022). Forest resource conservation is also a significant concern in Obubra LGA. The area's forests are not only a source of livelihood for the indigent farmers but also provide essential ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, soil conservation, and water regulation. However, the forests are facing significant threats, including deforestation, logging, and agricultural expansion (Ogunjemite, 2020).

This study aims to investigate the hunting practices and forest resource conservation among indigent farmers in Obubra LGA, Cross River State. The study seeks to answer the following research questions: What are the hunting practices among indigent farmers in Obubra LGA? What are the impacts of hunting practices on forest resource conservation in the area? What are the strategies for promoting sustainable hunting practices and forest resource conservation among indigent farmers in Obubra LGA?

Theoretical background

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1954)

The Hierarchy of need theory was propounded by Abraham Maslow's (1954). Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory of psychology explaining human motivation based on the pursuit of different levels of needs. The theory states that humans are motivated to fulfill their needs in a hierarchical order. This order begins with the most basic needs before moving on to more advanced needs. The ultimate goal, according to this theory, is to reach the fifth level of the hierarchy: self-actualization. These needs make up five basic needs which are the major reasons for environmental resource depletion and degradation.

These needs are physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs. Our concern is on the physiological needs which represent basic needs such as food, water, clothing, shelter, oxygen, sex and elimination of waste products. These are also called biological biogenic or survival needs. Safety needs come in once physiological needs are satisfied. Safety needs include danger, economic security and job security. So, when physiological need has been satisfied to a certain extent, safety needs become the most dominant controller of human beings. These two needs become the most paramount to living organisms. As earlier stated there are five main levels to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. These levels begin from the most basic needs to the most advanced needs. Maslow originally believed that a person needed to completely satisfy one level to begin pursuing further levels.A more modern perspective is that these levels overlap. As a person reaches higher levels, their motivation is directed more towards these levels. However, though their main focus is on higher levels, they will still continue to pursue lower levels of the hierarchy but with less intensity. The implication of Maslow's needs theory to this study is that, since man according to Maslow is a wanting being, and there are always some needs he will always want to satisfy, and he sees forest resources as free gift for exploitation, this simply implies that once a particular resource is exploited to his satisfaction, that resource no longer motivates him, he turns to another resource seeking for satisfaction, and the quest to exploit other resources continues and will lead to overexploitation of forest resources.

Statement of the problem

The Obubra Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State is facing a critical environmental challenge. The area's rich biodiversity and forest resources are being threatened by unsustainable hunting practices and forest degradation. Indigent farmers in the area rely heavily on forest resources for their livelihood, leading to overexploitation and depletion of these resources.

Unsustainable hunting practices, including the use of traditional hunting methods, have led to overhunting and habitat destruction in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. The lack of regulation and enforcement of hunting laws has exacerbated the problem, resulting in declining wildlife populations and ecosystem degradation. This has had a ripple effect on the entire ecosystem, threatening the livelihoods of indigent farmers who rely on forest resources for their survival. If left unchecked, unsustainable hunting practices and habitat destruction could lead to irreversible environmental damage and loss of biodiversity.

Forest degradation and deforestation are also significant concerns, with agricultural expansion, logging, and other human activities threatening the area's forests. These forests provide essential ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, soil conservation, and water regulation, but their loss could have severe consequences for the environment and local communities. The consequences of unsustainable hunting practices and forest degradation are far-reaching, with biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, and negative impacts on the livelihoods of indigent farmers. Furthermore, the lack of awareness and education among indigent farmers about sustainable hunting practices and forest conservation is a significant concern. Generally, the situation in Obubra LGA is critical, and there is a need for urgent action to address the problem of unsustainable hunting practices and forest degradation.

Objective of the study

Specifically, the study seeks to:

Determine the relationship between hunting practice and forest resource conservation in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Research question

The following research question was posed to guide the study;

What is the relationship between hunting practice and forest resource conservation?

Statement of hypotheses

There is no significant relationship between hunting practice and forest resource conservation in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a correlation design to investigate the relationship between hunting practices and forest resource conservation among indigent farmers in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. The design allowed for the examination of the existing situation, enabling the researcher to draw inferences from a representative sample of the population. A combination of purposive and accidental sampling techniques was used to select a sample of 321 indigent farmers from a population of 6,433. The Hunting Practice and Forest Resource Conservation Questionnaire (HPFRCQ) was the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire was validated by three by three experts, two from Department of Test and Measurement and one from Environmental Education all from University of Calabar, Calabar , Cross River State. The reliability of the HPFRCQ was established through Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which ranged from 0.82 to 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. The data collected were analyzed using Simple Linear Regression Analysis to examine the relationship between hunting practices and forest resource conservation at 0.05 level of significance using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 22.

Result

Hypotheses:

There is no significant relationship between hunting practice and forest resource conservation in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. To test the hypothesis, Simple Linear Regression Analysis was used and the result presented in Table 1

Table 1: Summary of simple regression analysis on relationship between hunting practice and forest resources conservation in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State(N=321)

Variable	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	Std. Error		
Hunting practice	.186[a]	.035	.033	2.09476		
Source of variation	SS		Df	MS	F	p-value
Regression	94.357		1	94.357	-21.503 *	.000[b]
Residual	2624.037		598	4.388		
Total	2718.393		599			

*significant at .05 level

The analysis in Table 1 showed that the Adj R^2 is 0.013. This implies that 1.3% of the variance in the dependent variable (forest Conservation) could be accounted for by hunting practice. However, though the percentage contribution is small, a cursory look at the Table showed that F=-21.503 ($p<.05$) is significant. Also, since p (.000) is less than p (.05), it implies that there is a significant negative relationship between hunting practice and forest resource conservation in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. Therefore, the stated null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data in Table 1 analysis that there is a significant negative relationship between hunting practice and forest resource conservation in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. This assertion was based on the fact that p (.000) is less than p (.05). The result is in line with the study of Udumuo et al. (2021), stating that the relationship between hunting practices and forest conservation is complex and bi-directional. According to the authors unsustainable hunting practices can lead to overhunting and habitat destruction, ultimately threatening forest conservation. Conversely, effective forest conservation can also promote sustainable hunting practices by maintaining healthy wildlife populations and ecosystems (Afolayan, 2022). Therefore, it is essential to consider the interplay between hunting practices and forest conservation to achieve sustainable environmental management

CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed a significant negative relationship between hunting practices and forest resource conservation among indigent farmers in Obubra Local Government Area of Cross River State. The findings indicated that unsustainable hunting practices were a major threat to forest conservation in the area. The study also showed that the lack of awareness and education among indigent farmers about sustainable hunting practices and forest conservation contributed to the problem. Conservation efforts should therefore be focus on educating indigent farmers about sustainable hunting practices and forest conservation. Ultimately, promoting sustainable hunting practices and forest conservation among indigent farmers is crucial for maintaining the ecological integrity of the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that the government establish and enforce stricter policies to combat illicit wildlife hunting. To effectively conserve Nigeria's wildlife, defaulters should face penalties, including fines and imprisonment. The implementation of such policies would help mitigate the devastating impact of unregulated hunting on wildlife populations. Ultimately, the government's commitment to enforcing wildlife conservation laws is crucial to protecting Nigeria's biodiversity.

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