

**A STUDY ON ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATION OF  
PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS  
FOREST CONSERVATION IN IKONO LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT AREA, AKWA IBOM STATE-NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to investigate environmental implication of people's perception and attitude towards forest conservation in Ikono Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. Positive attitude towards environmental resources such as forest will promote conservation and sustainability. In order to achieve the set objective of this study, hypothesis and tested statistically at 0.05 level of significance. Using Pearson product moment correlation analysis. The design used for the sampling was the survey research design while the sampling procedure used was the simple random sampling technique. A well validated 29-item questionnaire tagged "Environmental Implication of people's perception and attitude towards Forest Conservation" was designed using the four point likert scale model and administered to a simple size of three hundred (300) persons drawn proportionally from the selected geo-political wards". From the analysis, it was found that the hypothesis was significantly related to forest conservation. Based on these, it was recommended that government should embark on an enlightenment campaign of the people, emphasis should be place on importance and benefits to be derived from forest resources. Awareness will help in creating positive attitude, motivation and commitment of the people to adopt environmental sound approach in seeking livelihood.-

**Keywords:** Environment, perception, attitude, Forest, Conservation

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## 1. Introduction

Conservation of natural forest is the controlled use of the resources in such a way that its capacity to renew itself is not impaired. Conservation of the natural forest ensures the continuity of the benefits derived from them. These benefits are so important to man that they ensure his continuous survival on the planet earth. In Nigeria, the decline in the total forested area is now resulting in a widespread concern for conservation at both national and local levels. The worsening deterioration of environmental quality, Okigbo (1991) observes, has given rise to environmental movements, political parties, various organizations, spearheading political activism and campaigns for changes in policies, laws, technologies and development strategies aimed at safeguarding the quality of our environment. How best to avoid the unpleasant consequences of the current assault on the world's forest should be the concern not only of forest and environmental experts but also of communicators and educators. I believe in concert with other inputs, communication and education which are the vehicles of awareness can help not only in arresting but also in redressing the threatened plight of our eco-system. Overtime, people's perception towards forest resources are that, forest is free gift of nature as such man should exploit them as means of livelihood. Today, forest resources have declined lead to biodiversity lost.

### 1.1 Statement of problem

Forests are of great use to mankind. The forest provides us with food, shelter, revenue as well as raw materials for industries. Forest also protects biodiversities, watershed, hydrological cycle and stabilization of the soil against erosion. Forest serves as habitat for wildlife, represent gene bank for declining genetic base of domestic plants and animals, tourist attraction and educational research. However, most rural communities depend absolutely on the forest for their farmland, livelihood and survival. Despite the importance of forest to mankind, the forest in Ikono Local Government Area is exploited through careless logging which has irregularly degraded the environment especially on steep slope and on fragile ecosystem. This problem has continued to occur irrespective of the teaching of environmental education in the curriculum of schools and the activities of Government and Non-governmental Organization (NGO's) towards preserving the environment. This study aims to find out if the environmental implication of people's perception and attitude towards forest conservation in Ikono Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State.

### *1.2 Purpose of study*

To determine the environmental implication of people's perception and attitude of the people of Ikono Local Government Area toward conservation of forest.

### *1.3 Research hypothesis*

There is no significant relationship between the people's perception and attitudes of the people and forest conservation practices in Ikono Local Government Area.

### *1.4 Significance of the study*

1. It will aid improve environmental awareness in order to enhance forest conservation effort in the communities.
2. It will stimulate the people's interest and change their attitudes to forest conservation.
3. The study will help decision makers, natural resources managers, students, literate and illiterate adults to develop their levels of environmental awareness and attitude towards forest conservation.

## **2. Literature Review**

Perception means to comprehend, to understand or to recognize. It is the response of the sense to external stimuli. It can be referred to as the sensory encoding of information. Sensory modalities play a critical role in environmental perception and could be described as a stimulus sensing. Their task is to pick environmental signals and transmit same to the brain or the central nervous system for processing (Anijah-Obi, 2001). The process of perception involve a series of psychological transformations which enable an individual to acquire, code stores, recall and decode information concerning the environment. It involves a two-way process between the individual and his environment. The environment presents the stimuli interms of distinctions and relations or forms, the individual with his own aspirations, purpose, psychogenic make up and socio-cultural characteristics, selects organizes, and endows with meaning, what he sees (Anijah-Obi, 2001). Perception is not just mechanical responses to environmental stimuli, but more of cultural, subjective process. So man's behavior is dependent on his perception of the environment. The way he perceives his environment influences his decisions and actions or charts his life course in this complex world (Ebong 1995).

The significance of perception to environmental conservation according to Ebong and Bassey (1995) is that it will help to draw our attention to the most crucial aspect of man, his perceptions, attitudes, motivations, personality and culture which are very necessary in understanding man

environment. Perception is also influenced by stable cultural characteristics which include the perceiver's personality, social class, age, sex, education, prejudice, value system and so on. Of these attitudes is the most important element conditioning perception, especially if it is defined to include a perceiver's feelings towards and belief about stimulus, governed by past experiences (Pocock and Hadson 1978). According to Petters, Ekpoh and Bisong (1995), attitude toward the environment and its resources is indicated through spiritual practices, cultural values, ethics of the people and their religious practices including their socio-economic activities. Humans behaves the way they do in their attempt to satisfy their needs, and that this may yield positive or negative results. Viser (1990), it is the understanding of individuals needs, drives, incentives, anxieties and responsibilities that influence the attitudes of the people towards the resources of the environment. Viser added that if individual perceive the forest as a resource, they will be moved to make use of the forest, individuals perceive that their environment and its resources belongs to their children yet unborn and that they are caretakers of the environment, there is that tendency that they will develop positive attitude towards the environment and the resources.

Attitudinal re-orientation is needed for heritage education that will discourage wanton and selfish exploitation and depletion of resources to the detriment of future generation. Abiri (1966) saw attitude as a very important element in learning and to him the inculcation of a wholesome attitude is a very important ingredient in the process of learning. He believed that attitude influence behavior. He therefore come to the conclusion that in the educative process, the nature of knowledge acquired and its application to real life situations depends on the attitude held by individuals and the society as a whole. Mouly (1967) was of the view that attitudes are directly related to learning. They do not only develop due to satisfy or frustrating nature of our learning experiences but the moment they are established, they facilitate or impede further learning and so become self-reinforcing. According to Ekpo (1991) the present day environmental crisis in Akwa Ibom State demands a change in attitude in order that initiative can be taken to rescue the environment from further destruction. Ebin (1995) holds that the knowledge of all aspects of environment as well as associated skills and attitudes are necessary if positive environmental habit is needed for future transformation of Akwa Ibom State. With the acquisition of knowledge, new values will emerge to serve as the framework for positive responses to the management of natural resources for sustainable development.

### 3. Materials and Method

The research design used for this study was survey research. This involves the collection of data to accurately and objectively describe existing phenomena. The study area of the research is Ikono Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Ikono Local Government Area is regarded as the cradle of Ibibio nation. The major occupation of the people of Ikono Local Government Area is farming, handicraft, trading, hunting etc. The people's dialect and official language is Ibibio and English language. The population of the study comprised all the communities in Ikono Local Government Area that made up the eleven geo-political wards of the area. This simple random sampling technique was adopted for this study. This is because the population of the study area is large to be studied by the researcher. Hence, the need to select and study a sample that will be representational of the population of the study. This same method was employed to randomly select fifty (50) persons from each of the six selected geo-political wards for the study with special consideration and occupation of the respondents. Consequently, a total of three hundred (300) respondents were drawn. The instrument for data collection used for this study was a 24-item questionnaire which reflected the researcher questions and hypothesis formulated for the study. A total of three hundred (300) respondents were targeted for filling of the questionnaires from the six geo-political wards that out of this, two hundred and eighty-seven (288) questionnaire were completed and returned in good form, making a return rate of 96%. For the reliability of the instrument used for this study, the split half reliability method was used. This involved administering the validated instrument once, to a sample of 30 respondents in the study area of the study.

### 4. Results and Discussions

The hypothesis posited here is no significant relationship between the people's perception and attitudes of the people and forest conservation practices in Ikono Local Government Area.. After testing the hypothesis using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient, the summary of the result were expressed as shown in table below.

Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation coefficient analysis of the relationship between attitude of people and forest conservation.

N = 288

Variables	$\Sigma x$ $\Sigma y$	$\Sigma x^2$ $\Sigma y^2$	$\Sigma XY$	r-cal
Perception and attitude of people	2464	43182		
			42015	0.97
Forest conservation	2450	42538		

Significant at 0.05 levels, df = 286, critical r = 0.113.

Table 1, shows that the calculate value of the two variables “perception and attitude of people (X) and forest conservation (Y)” for 286 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significant is 0.97. The result indicates that there is a high (strong) positive relationship between the variables, because the calculated r-value of 0.97 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.113. Based on this, the null hypothesis which sited that there is no significant relationship between the attitude of the people and forest conservation was rejected.

**Table 2: Frequencies and percentage of attitude of people and forest conservation**

	Item	SA		A		D		SD		TOTAL	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Trees are cut down every planting season in preparation for farming	120	41.7	111	38.5	37	12.8	19	6.6	287	99.6
2.	Forest resources is my sole means of livelihood	44	15.3	114	39.6	104	36.1	26	9.0	288	100
3.	Gathering of trees from the forest as fuel is common in my community	107	37.2	110	38.2	48	16.7	20	6.9	285	99.0
4.	Forest products have been over utilized than conserved	62	21.5	138	47.9	62	21.5	21	7.3	283	98.2
5.	I don't think environmental laws can change my attitude towards forest conservation	88	30.6	106	36.8	69	23.9	24	8.3	287	99.6
6.	I know that cultural practices have affected my attitude towards forest conservation	68	23.6	89	39.0	99	34.4	32	11.1	288	100

The finding of this study as shown in table 1 shows that there is a strong positive relationship exists between people's perception and attitude of people and forest conservation. The finding is

supported by Petters, Ekpoh and Bisong (1995), attitude towards the environment and its resources is indicated through the spiritual practices, cultural values, ethics of the people and their religious practices including their socio-economic activities. Humans behave the way they do in their attempt to satisfy their needs and that this may yield positive or negative results. In support of the findings of this study, Viser (1990), it is the understanding of individual's needs, drives, incentives, anxieties and responsibilities that influence the attitudes of the people towards the resources of the environment. That if individual perceive the forest as a resources, they will be moved to make use of the forest. The finding agrees with UNESCO-UNEP (1989), attitudinal re-orientation is needed for heritage education that will discourage wanton and selfish exploitation and depletion of resources to the detriment of future generation. The finding is also supported by Abiri (1966), saw attitude as a very important element in learning and to him the inculcation of wholesome attitude is a very important ingredient in the process of learning. He believed that attitude influence behavior. The knowledge of all aspects of environment as well as associated skills and attitudes are necessary if positive environmental habit is needed for future transformation of Akwa Ibom State.

Analysis of table 2, item 1, shows that 120 respondents 231 (80.2%) are of the perception that trees are cut down every planting seasons in preparation for farming while 56 (19.4%) disagreed. The implication is that during planting season pressure are laid on forest resource, as the entire community members must prepare different sections of the forest for planting. Many economic and medicinal trees are usually lost during this process. The people depend on forest resource for their mean of livelihood. This is revealed through 158 (54.9%) response that forest resources is their sole means of livelihood, while 130 (45.1%) disagreed as seen in item 2. A lot of awareness is needed to educate the people on alternative source of livelihood in other to reduce the pressure on forest resources. For item 3, 217 (75.4%) respondents agreed that gathering of trees from the forest as fuel is common in their community, while 68 (23.6%) disagreed. The environmental implication is forest resources is a source of cooking fuel. Most times the tree are cut down and allow to dry to enable the use them for cooking. This attitude has led to declined in forest resource as well as biodiversity lost. Many of the tree species have being extinct due to this act. Further analysis shows that, forest resources have over the years being over utilized without conscious effort for reforestation. Conservation of forest resources attitude is low since it is the major sources of income as well as their dependency for fuel. This finding is arrive at based on

200 (69.4%) respondent's agreement to the fact that products have been over utilized than conserved while 83 (28.8%) disagreed. 194 (67.4%) respondent of item 5 perceive that environmental laws cannot change their attitude towards forest conservation while 93 (32.2%) disagreed. There is need therefore for government at all levels (federal, State and local) to promulgate strict laws against indiscriminate logging and use of forest resources. It is believed that if government and private sector establishes industries, very many of the forest users will be gainfully employ thereby tilting their attention away from forest and its resources. For item 6, 157 (54.5% respondents agreed that cultural practices have affected their attitude towards forest conservation while 131 (45.5%) disagreed. Environmental awareness is the key to sustainable environment. If the community is informed environmental they people will begin to do aware with such cultural practices that are detrimental to forest resources. There is need for continued environmental advocacy between government and nongovernmental organizations and the people of the community on sustainable environmental practices.,

## 5. Conclusion

Perception and attitude of the people toward forest conservation is significantly related. Awareness will help in creating the attitude, motivation and commitment of the people to adopt environmental sound approach in seeking livelihood. Adequate environmental awareness of the people on the benefit and important of forest resources will help to conserve the forest. On the basis of the finding in this study, government should embark on an enlightenment campaign on the people. Here, emphasis should be placed on importance and benefits to be derived from forest resources. Government should organize poverty alleviation programme for the people. The programme should be directed at teaching the people other trades or professions which would shift the attention and interest of these people from the forest. Laws should be put in place to punish those engage in commercial logging and task force should be established to monitor and regulate the activities of commercial loggers.



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