The Role of Citizen Participation in Environmental Governance for Sustainable Rural Development in Bayelsa State

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Abstract

Citizen participation in Environmental decision-making for environmental protection and sustainability is critically important. This paper aimed to evaluate citizen participation in environmental decision-making in sampled area, with key objective to identify factors affecting citizen participation. The study area comprises ten oil and gas bearing communities within the Nun River Oilfield in Bayelsa State. Primary data were collected through the survey method, where a well-structured questionnaire was administered on 390 respondents in all sampled communities selected through the simple random sampling technique. Data were both descriptively and statistically analysed. The results of the descriptive analyses showed low participation between communities. Similarly, results of an ANOVA test showed that F-ratio calculated 1527.552 was greater than tabulated value of 3.84, and P-value 0.000 was less than significant 0.05 suggesting low participation in environmental control significantly varied among individuals and communities. Results also showed significant relationship with socioeconomic characteristics and participation: income and educational attainment and participation. 76? of respondents were unaware of relevant environmental laws and the consequences of their harmful anthropogenic activities, while 24% stated been aware, but blamed income level, illiteracy and nature of subsistence occupation for engaging in such activities. Results also showed that 68% of respondents were willing to participate. The researchers recommended that Government at all levels should should seek citizens and stakeholder's involvement in the formulation and implementation regimes of environmental control programmes, and organise awareness or enlightenment programmes to educate the citizens on the need to strike a balance between socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Ccitizens' Participation, Environmental Governance, Sustainability and Rural Development.

Introduction

Citizen participation is the belief that citizen involvement shall produce more public preference decision-making on the part of the administrators and a better appreciation of one's larger community on the part of the public (Box, 1998). The work Bank learning group on participation considered citizen participation as the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and decision in which affects them (World Bank, 1995).

Arnstein in 1969 defined citizen participation in terms of the amount of actual control the citizens have over policy decisions; he further maintained that participation is divided into three categories; non-participation; tokenism and citizen prove which he illustrated. The author believe that without actual redistribution of power, citizens participation is an empty initiative and likely to fail. Therefore, it is imperative to encourage significantly high level on the ladder of participation.

In Bayelsa State, citizen participation is government policies falls within Arnstein's categories of non-participation and tokenism. It is against this backdrop that this research is undertaken with objectives: to critically evaluate citizen participation, and unearth the factors militating against citizen participation in environmental decision-making and governance in the sampled communities. By so doing its effectiveness as a veritable tool for the attainment of sustainable rural development can be harnessed by policy-makers at all levels of governance.

Literature Review

Citizen participation in environmental decision-making for environmental protection and sustainability is critically important (Fox and Stoett, 2016). They further noted that this was underscored in the 2023 Agenda for sustainable development, which was created using unprecedented public outreach. According to Fox and Street, more than 75 million people from over 190 countries participated in the United Nations Global Online Survey on the 20230 Agenda. The need for further and more inclusive democratic participation was embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). Goal 16 specifically called for responsive, inclusive and participatory and representative decision-making at all levels (United Nation General Assembly, 2015).

According to Dietz and Stern (2008), for many policy-makers and environmental advocates, citizen participation is an intrinsic good, regardless of outcome. The author also averred that allowing impacted individuals, communities and stakeholders to take part in decision-making is a basic component of democracy; the principle of citizen participation holds that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision making process (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). Similarly, Ananda and Herath, 2003; Raushmayer and Risses, 2005) noted that the importance of citizen participation in the environmental decision-making processes, and emphasized the role of government agencies that is consistently assumed by researcher.

Therefore, citizen participation in environmental policy-making is to be adopted extensively by all levels of government; this reflects the general tendency of the citizen engagement in the public administration regimes (Copper, Bryer, and Meek, 2006) and the societal belief that citizens love the right to be informed, conformed with and permitted to share with decision-making authority on issues that concerns them (German, Floyd & Stehmen, 2001). With citizen participation, formulated policies might be more realistically grounded on citizen preferences, the public might become more sympathetic evaluators of the tough decisions that government administrators have to make, and the improved support from the public might create a less division and make the populace easy to govern and regulate (King, Feltey and Susal, 1998). The authors however stated that incorporating citizen input into agency decision-making is not a costless process.

Nevertheless, it is widely argued that improved citizen participation in government's environmental decision-making produces far-reaching benefits. King and Stivers (1991) noted that improved citizen participation could stem the deterioration in public trust evidenced by widespread citizen hostility toward government activities participant and help reshape, enhance environmental governance in rural communities (Beierte, 1999; Dalton, 2008).

Methodology

The Study Area: The study area has a total of fifteen (15) communities, which comprised of ten Nun River Oilfield Communities namely; Oporoma, Onyoma, Angiama, Luduon, Aguobiri, Bolou-Aguobiri, Agiama-gbene, Igeibiri, Obololi and Osokama and five Neighbouring Communities namely; Otuan, Oweikoroghe, Anyama, Ondewari and Ozezebiri in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Southern Ijaw Local Government Area has a total area of 2,68^2 kilometres with a population of 319,413 (National Population Commission, 2006). The studied communities are shown in the map of Southern Ijaw Local Government Area (see Fig.1).

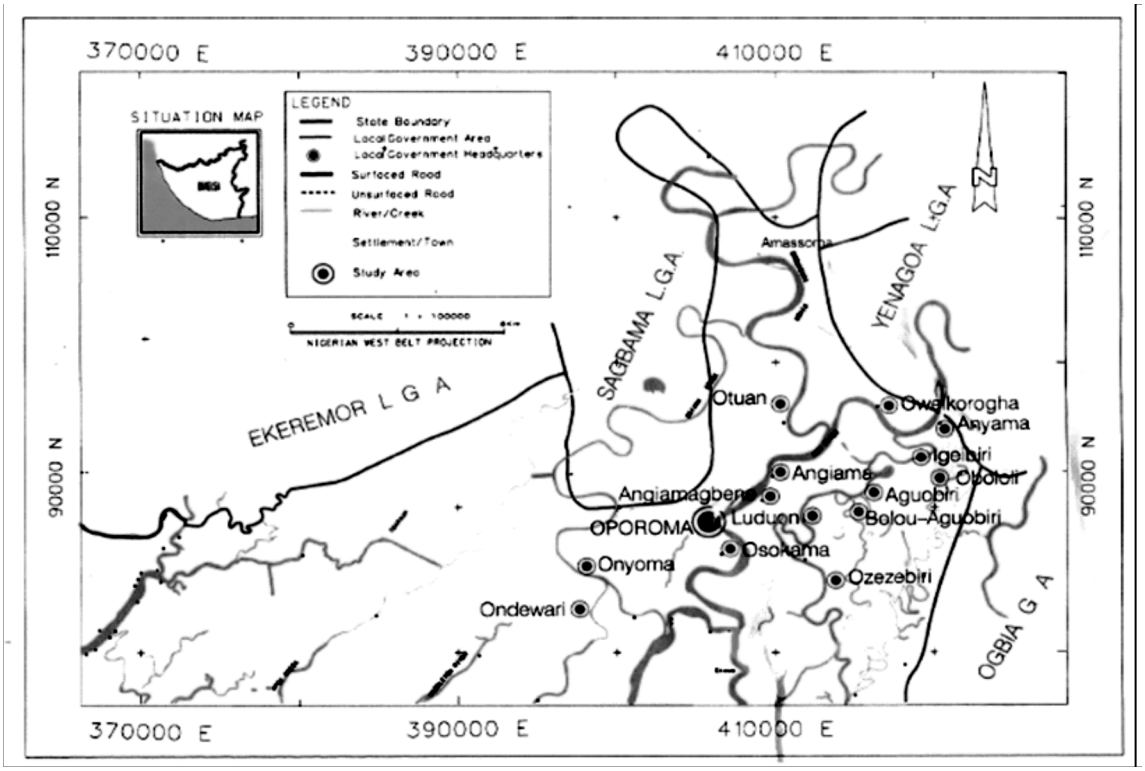

Figure 2. Southern Ijaw Local Government Area Showing the Studied Communities
Source: Office of the Surveyor-General, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

The sampled communities had a total population of 54,982 people as at 2019. The geographical coordinate of the central point of the study area which is Oporoma is in latitude 4^0 48^1 17^{11} North and longitude $6^0 04^1 44^{11}$ East. The Geology is made up from top to bottom with Benin, Agbade and Akata formations (Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited, 1998). The area lies in the wet equatorial climate region of the Niger Delta. It is typically a humid tropical climate characterised by high rainfall and high temperature (Gobo, 1998). The area experiences both dry and wet seasons. The temperature of the area ranges between 23 and 32°C with little monthly variations. The vegetation cover of the study area and that of the Bayelsa State is typical of the fresh water areas characterised by grasses and trees. The surface soil of the area shows moderate suitability for crop production.

The area is rich in natural resources which include oil and gas, with oil wells in most communities and pipelines crisis-crossing the area. the major economic activity of the area is agriculture including fishing, farming, forestry, lumbering, hunting, gathering of wild forest products and tapping of palm wine and brewing of local gin are the primary economic activities in the area (Allison-Oguru, Zuofa & Berepubo, 1999).

Types/Sources of Data: The study adopted the descriptive and explanatory research designs. The research utilized mainly primary data, which entailed the use of a well-structured and validated questionnaire and direct physical observation. The research included all ten (10) oil bearing communities covered by SPDC operations and five (5) neighbouring non-oil bearing communities, totalling fifteen communities in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area (SILGA) of Bayelsa State.

Target Population/Sample size: The total population of Nun River Oilfield Communities and Neighbouring Communities' was 103, 608 (NPC,2006). The sample size for the study was 398, which was determined adequate for the study using the Taro Yamane formula for determining sample size from a given population (Kpolovie, 2011). The multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for the study.

Firstly, the respective sampled communities constituted 15 clusters, from which the 398 samples were drawn. Secondly, the proportionate sampling technique was adopted to determine the number of samples to be drawn from each community based on its population size. Thirdly, having determined the respective sample size for each community, the systematic sampling technique at every four housing interval was used to identified the respondents for the study.

A set of 398 structured questionnaires was administered to the sampled 398 respondents, male or female household head that were available as at the time of visit. The questionnaire was administered directly by hand to the respondent to fill and return. This measure was adopted to improve the number of retrieved questionnaire. The obtained data from the administered questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages, means and graphical illustrations) and analysis of variance (ANOVA), which was adopted to test the hypothesis, which states that the socioeconomic characteristics of respondents significantly relates to degree of participation in environmental control. The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) was used to conduct the ANOVA test.

Results and Discussion

This section focuses on presentation of results and discussion of findings which enlightens the audience on how the result is presented to achieve the objective of the study. As earlier stated a total of 398 questionnaires were administered, out of which 340 representing 68% was retrieved and analysed.

Table 1: Notice of Environmental Problems

S/N	Factors considered	No. of respondent	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	265	77.9%
2	No	55	16.2%
3	uncertain	20	5.9%
Total		340	100

Source: (Field Work 2023)

The table showed that 77.9% asserted that they have noticed environmental problems in their communities, 16.2% said they haven't noticed any environmental problem, while 5.9% of respondents were undecided. Respondents also highlighted various environmental problems noticed in their communities which included; indiscriminate waste dumping, mainly in the waterways, loss of bio-diversities, indiscriminate logging, water/air pollution, soil/shoreline erosion, flooding as well as hyacinth invasion etc.

Table 2: Consequences of Identified Environmental Problems

S/N	Factors considered	No.of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Outbreak of disease	90	26.5
2	Loss of occupation	57	16.8
3	Increase social vices	41	12.1
4	Shortage of water	38	11.1
5	Shortage of food	103	30.3
6	Extinction of wild life	11	3.2
		340	100

Source: (Field Work 2023)

As shown in table 26.5% identified outbreak of diseases as a major consequence of the environmental problems, 16.8% identified loss of occupation, 12.1% identified increase in social vice. The table also showed that 11.1% of respondent identified shortage of water, 30.3% identified for shortage, while 3.2% of respondents identified loss of wild live as major consequences of environmental problems in the communities.

Table 3: Awareness of Government Environmental Regulat ions

S/N	Factors considered	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Aware	69	20.3%
2	Not aware	264	77.6%
3	Undecided	7	2.1?
Total		340	100

Source: (Field Work 2023)

The table showed that 20.3% of respondents said they were aware of government environmental laws and regulations, 77.6% noted not been aware, while 2.1% declined to supply any information. It is pertinent to also note that respondent expressed neglect by government agencies in processes culminating into the establishment of environmental laws and regulations.

Table 4: Willingness to Participate in Environmental Control Processes

S/N	Factors considered	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	272	80.0%
2	No	57	16.8%
3	Asterism	11	3.2%
		340	100%

Source: (Field Work 2023)

The table showed respondents willingness to participate in environmental control process, if called upon by decision/policy makers. As shown 80.0% expressed their willingness to participate, only 16.8% expressed unwillingness, while 3.2% were indifferent of the question.

Table 5: Constraints to citizen participation

S/N	Factors That Hinders Citizen Participation	No. Respondents	
1	Lack of public awareness hinders citizen participation	38	11.2
2	Absence of regulatory agencies	37	10.9
3	Low income level	50	14.7
4	Lack of confidence on government/ policies and programmes	50	14.7
5	Illiteracy	97	28.5
6	Non-involvement of citizens	68	20.0
	TOTAL	**340**	**100**

Source: (Field Work 2023)

As shown in the table 11.2% identified lack of public awareness as a major constraint to citizen participation in environmental decision-making, 10.9% said it was absence of relevant regulatory agencies, 14.7% said it was low income level i.e. poverty, another 14.7% noted lack of confidence on government. The table also showed that 28.5% noted illiteracy and 20.0% of the respondents identified non-involvement of citizens in decision-making process that culminated into the enactment and subsequent implementation of environmental laws and regulations.

Undoubtedly, the above results have raised a fundamental question "how do policy-makers harmonize citizen participation into its efforts towards environmental control for the attainment of sustainable rural development in Bayelsa State".

Conclusion

The question of whether respondents have noticed any environmental problem in their communities was answered unanimously in the affirmative with a resound 78% of respondents; suggesting that environmental problem abound in sample communities. The research has shown that respondents are to a large extent aware of the consequences associated thereto. There was an observation enthusiasm to answer the question on whether respondents were aware of the existence of extant environmental laws and regulations, about 77% of respondents expressed ignorance of such environmental laws and regulations. This leaves much to be desired as the sustainability of the environment and the success of environmental laws and regulations depends largely on the active participation of the citizens. This calls for a more comprehensive environmental education or campaign in sampled communities.

Similarly, on whether respondents were involved in processes leading to enactment or establishment of environmental control statutes, over 85% stated that they were not involved. The question on the willingness of participate in programmes towards environmental control was also answered unanimously in the affirmative with a resounding 80% indicating their willingness to participate, a small percentage expressed indifference, while 16.8? said they weren't willing to participate. It is important to note that they attributed their unwillingness to the insensitivity of government towards their plight as individual and community.

Irvin (2004) noted that there can be no genuine participation without partnership, delegated power and effective citizen control over a range of issue affecting their lives. Thus, Nabatchi, (2012) posited that citizens' participation should be entrenched into the institutional framework of administrative agencies regardless of the challenges of inclusive governance.

Recommendations

Consequent upon the finding and conclusion made thereafter, the researchers recommends that government should undertake a comprehensive evaluation of all extant environmental laws and regulations with a view to harmonizing effective citizen's participation in the processes leading to the enactment of such laws and regulations.

Government should view environmental sustainability as community responsibility and as such assess the various local cultural practices and value systems that have fostered environmental control, and harness and encourage such practices. Environmental education be enshrined in the nation's school's curriculum throughout the formal and non-formal education system; undertake comprehensive environmental education programmes and awareness campaigns to provide rural people with relevant and adequate information on the need to sustain the environment.

Finally, the local government being the closest tier of government to the rural dwellers be strengthened to optimal capacity and provided with required professional staff. This will enhance them to analyse environmental policies and to document impacts for decision makers; collate data based on the environment which will help in effective and sound environmental planning and management in rural settlements; and also to be able to design and undertake programmes that shall make the citizens aware of the need for a cleaner environment, while doing various anthropogenic activities.

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