

RESEARCH STATEMENT

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I am an information scientist with a specialty in data management. I am also knowledgeable about forest and natural resource conservation policymaking. As such, I am interested in contributing to a deeper understanding of how information may be managed to support forest and natural resource conservation decision-making. Decision-making in the forestry and natural resource spheres often entails a complex process that can lead to unintended consequences not only in the absence of the right information but also - and more importantly - if such information is not managed properly. I am interested in using quantitative and qualitative techniques to gain a better understanding of information management within the context of forest and natural resource policymaking, generating insights that can inform theory as well as real-world policy practices.

The thrust of my current research focuses on designing effective strategies to improve the dissemination of natural resource conservation information within forestry-dependent communities. Below, I present a brief overview of my work in this area. I also provide a short account of a conservation learning resource project for managing forest resource extraction I am currently developing for selected forest communities facing resource shortages

DISSERTATION ON CONSERVATION INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

My recently completed master's thesis looked at strategies for disseminating conservation and sustainability-focused information within rural, forestry-dependent communities. Due to factors such as over-harvesting, open-access exploitation, and poor enforcement of existing regulations, scarcities persist among some critical forest resources that provide a level of sustenance to many rural households

Borrowing from theories and concepts in fields such as leadership science, interactive or social learning, and communication, therefore, my work explored an agency-based technique for sustainability and conservation-focused information and knowledge sharing in resource-dependent communities that utilizes local leaders such as traditional rulers and leaders of trade unions or associations to disseminate information to locals on the best practices for harvesting and managing scarce resources.

The use of local leadership-based solutions for addressing natural resource conservation challenges is a nascent practice that is steadily gaining interest among policymakers and practitioners within forest conservation and resource management spheres. My own interest in this solution stems from my years of working as a procurement analyst for a forest commodities purchasing organization in Monrovia, Liberia (West Africa). From careful observation of members of the rural forest communities with whom I interacted, I noticed the level of influence that certain personalities such as leaders of farmers' unions and other similar groups wielded over the rest of the members in the communities. This resonated with similar observations I had of rural forest communities in Ghana where traditional leaders such as chiefs and queen mothers were the main influencers. Such leadership dynamics within forestry-dependent communities could have several implications for conservation policy outcomes:

- First, it could increase participation in conservation-focused programs among the local populations in forest communities;
- Second, using local leaders as information transfer agents could make up for shortages in government agents who normally provide such services.

In my work, therefore, I proposed a system of disseminating conservation information to be implemented by local influencers such as traditional rulers or business and trade union leaders. In addition to the above advantages, this system has the benefit of ensuring local ownership of the dissemination process, which could further boost interest in and commitment to conservation and sustainability practices among local members

FUTURE WORK

Several chapters and sections of my thesis have been re-written (or are being re-written) as standalone articles to be published in a peer-review journal. One of these focuses on the level of gender balance among local leaders who are chosen to disseminate conservation information. It explores the question: "are female local leaders as likely to be used to disseminate conservation information to locals as males?" Given the level of gender bias that exists and persists in local forest communities, driven by cultural traditions that favor males over females, exploring answers to this question could have important implications for natural resource conservation policy outcomes vis-a-vis female members of forest communities

NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION LEARNING PROJECT

As a corollary to my master's dissertation, I am currently working on a digital library system to support conservation information sharing among selected forest communities in Ghana and Liberia facing resource scarcity challenges. A number of works in the forest and natural resource conservation literature have lauded the important role such information systems can play in forestry, natural resource, and agricultural knowledge sharing within local forest communities.

Successful implementation of similar systems in several locations in Africa including Sudan, Uganda, and Malawi lends credence to such optimism. For instance, due to factors such as the unavailability of trained personnel for disseminating information directly to locals, coupled with the absence of requisite infrastructure such as navigable roads, the digital library project could offer a huge boost to knowledge sharing efforts to improve the adoption of conservation and sustainability practices among resource stakeholders within local forest communities.

The system will be built using The Greenstone Digital Library platform and other open-source database and web development tools such as Postgres SQL, QGIS, and for the front-end, WordPress or Bootstrap. The system is intended to complement the knowledge-sharing responsibilities of local leaders. Discussions are currently ongoing with local authorities in the implementing communities on several issues including possible funding.

SUMMARY

To recap, at the present juncture in my career, my main interest lies in information management to support policymaking, preferably within forest conservation and natural resource spheres. I pursue this interest through research to understand how human-based factors such as leadership, and technological factors such as knowledge sharing digital repositories impact conservation policy outcomes.

In the foreseeable future, I intend to explore how other human-based factors such as gender may be exploited in information management efforts to support forest conservation policymaking. In the long term, I envision expanding my expertise in areas such as digital libraries and repositories, management information systems, and database design and implementation to support forest conservation processes.