

ID: W2339032906

TITLE: Community-based mangrove forest management: Implications for local livelihoods and coastal resource conservation along the Volta estuary catchment area of Ghana

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ABSTRACT:

Even though global interest in mangrove research has increased in recent years, unveiling their immense ecological and economic roles, very little work has been done to investigate the primary driving factors motivating long-term community-based mangrove restoration and management on local scales. In Ghana, policy makers and coastal management practitioners have recently embraced the concept of community-based and co-management of coastal and marine resources. Community-based and co-management approaches require that key stakeholders, most notably the resource users themselves, play significant roles and responsibilities in the management process. However, there is little evaluation of the process in Ghana to assess the success or otherwise, particularly of the few and long standing examples of community-based approaches in coastal resource management. With special reference to an over two decade old community-based mangrove forestry programme along the Volta estuary of Ghana, this paper provides concepts for examination of the ecological and socioeconomic factors influencing mangrove restoration and management by fishers, fish mongers, farmers and their socioeconomic groupings. Participatory GIS mapping and the use of orthophotos generated for the period 1974-2011 provided additional information on temporal evolution of the extent of mangrove areas restored and managed by local stakeholders. Socioeconomic assessment of mangrove products utility was done through questionnaire interviews. The results indicate that livelihoods and economic benefits are the primary factors that motivate local stakeholders' participation in mangrove restoration and management. Mangroves provisioning services, markets and low livelihoods diversification are major drivers of mangrove resources exploitation. The study has shown that mangroves resources can be sustainably exploited, restored and managed if local customary rules are enforced and institutional arrangements put in place to mediate mangrove exploitation and regeneration rates. Such an approach if well developed, could promote coastal resources conservation with high economic returns for the users.

SOURCE: Ocean & coastal management

PDF URL: None

CITED BY COUNT: 74

PUBLICATION YEAR: 2016

TYPE: article

CONCEPTS: ['Mangrove', 'Livelihood', 'Environmental resource management', 'Geography', 'Environmental planning', 'Local community', 'Sustainable management', 'Business', 'Sustainability', 'Ecology', 'Agriculture', 'Environmental science', 'Archaeology', 'Biology']