

Chapter 23

Participatory Exclusion in Community–Based Forest Management: The Case of Semi–Arid Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The inherent benefits of community participation are sometimes used by local power holders as a façade to perpetuate non-participation in the management and use of forest resources. Guided by the concept of participatory exclusion, the study assessed the perceptions of inhabitants around the Wa Community Forest Reserve (WCFR), concerning the categories of people that benefit from the forest and the factors influencing community participation in the management of the forest reserve. Data was collected from 200 households in three communities and analysed using mainly descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression. The study found that community participation in the forest reserve management is below average. Gender, age, and livelihood options of households were significant determinants of one's participation in forest reserve management. Lack of community cooperation and logistical challenges were impediments to the effective management of the forest reserve. Local authorities should therefore encourage women to co-manage the forest reserve with men and local authorities for its sustenance.

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INTRODUCTION

Forests play an important role in livelihoods, especially of rural households given their indispensable role in the provision of ecosystem services, as timber and non-timber products the world over (Blomley, 2013; Blomley, Pflienger, Isango, Zahabu, & Burgess, 2008). The competing interests in the ownership and use of forest resources have, however, led to resource use and management-based problems such as forest resource mismanagement, litigations and conflicts in many parts of the world (Appiah, 2001; Schreckenbergh & Luttrell, 2009). As a consequence, the world's forest resources are experiencing a tremendous decline, resulting from human-induced activities. Farm spaces in the tropics have been converted into agricultural lands, thereby unleashing lots of carbon dioxide (CO₂) sequestered by forests (Sharma, Chauhan, & Tripathi, 2016). Given that humanity's subsistence is contingent on judicious use of the ecosystem, it is incumbent for humanity to stem the tide of the current spate of deforestation by bringing on board the interests of all stakeholders.

In the Ghanaian context, the nation's natural forest cover has experienced substantial degradation over the past century (Nsiah, 2010). One major implication of this alarming situation is the effect on households and forest-fringe communities, whose livelihoods are hinged on forest resources (Appiah, 2001). Barrow, Clarke, Grundy, Jones, and Tessema (2002), argue that exclusion and expropriation have alienated many rural people from forest resources close to them for a long time, resulting in local encroachment and forest degradation. Though northern Ghana is bedevilled with the challenge of creeping desertification as a result of climate change (Akudugu, Dittoh, & Mahama, 2012; Issahaku & Maharjan, 2014; Kusakari et al., 2014; Nyantakyi-Frimpong & Bezner-Kerr, 2015), the Wa Municipality, located in the North-Western part of Ghana, has 2.48 km² forest plantation with, a total perimeter of 6.24 km, with the state as a major stakeholder in its management.

Extant literature, however, shows that strict forest management approaches used by formal institutions hardly involve local communities, leading to an alienation of fringe communities from co-managing forests with formal institutions (Awung & Marchant, 2016; Bhattarai, 2011). A case in point is Awung and Marchant (2016), regarding the management of Mount Cameroon National Park. Top-down management, such as the establishment of strict conservation zones without the involvement of surrounding local communities resulted in saboteurs, arising from within fringe communities against the strict rules. To placate the locals, authorities of the National Park employed a subtle form of pseudo-participation by merely employing some community members as labourers or passive members of the community forest protection committee. Such members simply rubber-stamped decisions already taken by the authorities in charge of the Mount Cameroon National Park. Similarly, participatory exclusion has been assessed in the area of natural disaster management. Nadiruzzaman and Wrathall (2015) assessed how the power structure of communities affected by Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh, determined the extent to which victims were marginalised or supported. They found that individuals at the lower pecking order of the social structure bore the brunt of the disaster resulting from the cyclone. Apart from these and a few other similar studies, the researchers have not sighted much literature on how participatory exclusion plays out in communities.

As a result of the challenges associated with the identification of subtle forms of pseudo-participation, there is the need to involve the various categories of people in rural communities in the protection of these fragile ecosystem services provided by forests. Guided by the concept of participatory exclusion, this study examined the extent of local-level participation in the management and use of the Wa Community Forest Reserve (WCFR). It assessed the perceptions of the various categories of residents around the

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