

Public Engagement in Environmental Conservation in the Kayunga Area of Uganda and how it is influenced by Public Access to Information

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate environmental conservation in Kayunga District with an aim of establishing the contribution of the Rio Summit of 1992 and the implementation of subsequent international environmental conventions to Kayunga District's environmental conservation.

Methodology: The study used descriptive survey design. It employed both primary and secondary methods of data collection. Oral interviews and county reports provide important sources of primary data. Data from secondary sources were gathered mainly from written works and internet materials.

Findings: The findings of this study revealed the Rio Summit of 1992 and the subsequent international environmental conventions have shaped environmental conservation mechanisms in Kayunga District.

Conclusion: The study concluded that environmental awareness programs cut across all sectors of society in Kayunga District.

Recommendation: The study recommended that the departments involved in environmental conservation should therefore team up and develop a more structured environmental education programme. Also, departments should jointly coordinate the programme through a committee to make valuable use of the calendar environmental celebration days.

Keywords: *Domestic waste, eco system, effluent, environment.*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Environmental conservation is currently a subject of concern in international relations since the negative impact of activities in one country is felt in other countries. Pollutants generated in one country can move to other countries by wind or water. In addition, the protection of resources such as the high seas, the ozone layer and combating greenhouse gases which contribute to climate change, requires international cooperation. Moreover, the conservation of biodiversity, combating desertification, controlling the generation, handling, transportation and disposal of hazardous wastes, have become subjects of international conventions requiring collaborations among all the countries of the world. To address environmental conservation issues from the local levels to global levels, a number of multilateral environmental agreements have been developed; states have ratified and have become signatories to the agreements requiring them to domesticate them (Ngesa & Mutio, 2013).

Most studies undertaken on environmental conservation demonstrate the fact that governments are at the forefront of ensuring that their countries attain environmental sustainability. Most countries are the focal point of some of the Multilateral Environment Agreements and are actively engaged in International environmental diplomacy and domestication of environmental conventions and protocols through development of policies, strategies and the establishment of legal and institutional framework designed to conserve the environment. For instance, Ogola (2007) observes that in early 1960s, investors and people realized that the projects they were undertaking in western countries were affecting the environment, resources, raw materials and people. As a result of this, pressure groups were formed with the aim of getting a tool that could be used to conserve the environment in any development. The USA decided to respond to these issues and established a National Environmental Policy Act in 1970 to consider its goal in terms of environmental conservation. At present, all developed countries have environmental regulations whereas most of the developing countries are still adopting environmental regulations (Lee, 1995).

Obinna (2011) observes that in Nigeria Environmental regulations have been put in place to mitigate or prevent the threatening environmental problems which emanate from human activities in the quest for economic growth and development. These regulations which were formulated to address perceived crisis and environmental problems involved many stakeholders with varying interest and power. In addition, Glazewski (2009) observes that the Constitution of South Africa enshrines environmental rights in section 24, providing explicitly that everyone has the right in terms of the Constitution to an environment that is not harmful to his health. South Africa has also ratified several international conventions relating to environmental conservation. However, the country still faces the effects of environmental pollution which increases the costs of ensuring clean and disease-free water (Harmer, 2005).

Governments in East Africa have also established legal and institutional frameworks designed to conserve the environment. For example, Uganda had by the beginning of 1990 come up with sixty acts governing the conservation of the environment. In addition, the interface between environmental sustainability and democratic governance has gained considerable attention over the recent years (Glazewski, 2009). This is mainly demonstrated by the renewed interest among policy researchers and practitioners trying to explore and demonstrate the nexus between governance and environmental conservation. Further, many of the environmental conservation issues in Uganda are associated with poor management of water resources, loss of biodiversity, deforestation and soil degradation although it has also established institutions to address environmental conservation issues (Kasimbazi & Kibandama, 2011).

The Stockholm Conference on Environment in 1972 organized by the United Nations focused on the protection of the environment. Based on the outcome of this Conference, the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) was established in 1972 and it has been hosted in Uganda since then. However, prior to 1999 Uganda had no legislative Act on environment passed by its parliament. The current environmental regulatory regime in Uganda originated from Parliament's passage of the Environment Management and Co-ordination Act (EMCA) of 1999. Uganda is also a signatory to a number of multilateral environment agreements and as such it has established institutional framework to implement Environmental regulations.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The study investigated environmental conservation in Kayunga District from 1992 to 2015 with an aim of establishing the impact of the Rio Summit of 1992 alongside the implementation of subsequent environmental regulations on Kayunga District's environmental conservation. The study investigated the contribution of various factors to environmental management in Kayunga District. It explains the challenges that hamper effective implementation of environmental regulations and how access to information influences public participation in environmental conservation in Kayunga District. Given that the Rio Summit was held in 1992, a lot of progress has been made since then with regard to environmental conservation in Uganda including the enactment of Environmental Management and Coordination Act of 1999, creating regulations designed to conserve all of the varying ecosystems and covering important sectors. The study sought to examine the contributions of the Rio Summit of 1992 alongside the implementation of subsequent international environmental regulations in Kayunga District.

1.2 General Objective

The purpose of this study was to investigate environmental conservation in Kayunga District with an aim of establishing the contribution of the Rio Summit of 1992 and the implementation of subsequent international environmental conventions to Kayunga District's environmental conservation.

1.2.1 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives that guided this study were;

1. Examines the impact of environmental conservation mechanisms in Kayunga District.
2. Investigates the challenges that hamper effective implementation of environmental regulations in Kayunga District.
3. Establish how access to information influences public participation in environmental conservation in Kayunga District.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The state of environment is currently a major political agenda as well as a concern in international relations. Most people around the world have begun to realize that environmental damage as a result of human activities is drastic and at times irreversible. Consequently, solutions to environment problems such as the damage to the ozone layer and air pollution are considered political, with the result that philosophers and political theorists have tried to find the moral grounds for environmental-friendly policies (De-shalit, 1995).

Liberalists in their conceptualization on international relations observe that international relations is about state-state relations as well as transnational relations. They view issues of terrorism, human rights, drug trafficking, finance, technology, pollution, natural resources and

environment as important as security issues and that states and non-state actors are both important in world politics. To liberalists, the non-state actors are important entities in international relations and that International Organizations (IOs) can be independent actors in their own right. They observe that those who make decisions in organizations and bureaucrats have great influence in setting the agenda and that IOs are more than simply arenas within which sovereign states compete. To liberalists, the agenda of international politics is extensive, diversified and that social as well as economic issues are usually at the forefront of foreign policy debates.

2.2 Empirical Review

Talero (2004) in his study on environmental education and public awareness observes that Agenda 21 an outcome of the Rio summit of 1992 signals the need for partnership between the main stakeholders concerned in both the local and national governments. That all sectors of the economy should be concerned in different ways with direct environmental educational activities; since inadequate knowledge on environmental issues can be an obstacle in achieving sustainable future for human kind at international, regional, national and local levels. Talero's work demonstrates the importance of environmental education activities as an environmental conservation mechanism both at the global and local scales.

A study by Yuniato (2012) in Indonesia observes that citizen awareness on environmental protection is very alarming to the extent of causing environmental crisis. In his opinion he is certain that because of lack of environmental information and awareness programs, citizens are not taking part in decisions touching on environmental protection. He concludes that there is need to build environmental awareness through a systematic approach to education and the strengthening and development of local knowledge about environmental protection. Similarly, Yuniato's work underscores the importance of environmental education program as an environmental conservation mechanism. A study on social - economic problems experienced in compliance and enforcement in Tanzania observed that for successful implementation of environmental laws, there must be the necessary pre-conditions such as favourable economic, political and legal environment which allows the rules to be enforced and obeyed. It is observed that there has to be motivation for all people to participate in environmental protection (Mwanzei, 2013).

Jennifer (2008) in her work on public participation in the enforcement of China's Anti-Pollution Laws observes that the Chinese legal system is relatively young and most of its citizens are unconscious about environmental laws in place. Jennifer, further, observes that the then Chinese status of environmental deterioration made the Chinese government in place to incorporate environmental aspects in all its goals. Jennifer is of the view that the Chinese government incorporated environmental aspects in its goals in order to secure environmental commitment of its public administration at all levels namely businesses, corporates, organizational and individual levels (Jennifer, 2008). This work by Jennifer aids this study in looking at how legal systems and incorporation of environmental considerations in development plans can be an effective environmental conservation mechanism.

Kakonge (2006) in his work on environmental planning in Sub-Saharan Africa reviewed environmental practices across a number of countries in Africa. His work revealed a wide variation in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. He observes that EIA practice contrasts significantly from country to country, for example in Botswana EIA is done even in the absence of EIA legislations and in Angola all major projects relating to roads and oil exploration have gone through the EIA process even though the EIA information is not

accessible. He concludes that EIA practice in many sub Saharan countries is still weak, a lot need to be effected at national levels to address the development of EIA and the overall management of the environment. If well developed, EIA process can lead to the realization of a healthier environment and sustainable economic growth for the good of the current and coming generations (Kakonge, 2006). Kakonge's work guides this study in looking at the EIA process as an environmental conservation mechanism. That if well developed and appropriately managed the EIA process can lead to a healthier environment through proper environmental management practices.

While looking at the case of a sustainability-oriented environmental science curriculum, Hansmann (2009) observes that environmental awareness is the ultimate driving force that stimulates knowledge on environmental matters. The acknowledgement that an environmental problem exists entails being more cognizant of the facts about the state of the environment and a commitment to solve environmental problems. Hansmann's work demonstrates the need for access to environmental information as a conservation mechanism. That environmental awareness provides useful information for the conservation of environment and a committing to finding solutions to environmental challenges.

A report on environmental compliance and enforcement in China, OECD (2006) emphasized on empowering members of the public so that they actively participate in environmental decision-making. The organization emphasizes that this process should continue to be one of the key objectives of the state and local environmental authorities. By enhancing environmental awareness, encouraging environmental associations and providing training, the public can become an active implementing agent and extend overwhelming support to environmental enforcement endeavors. This information is important as it informs the important environmental conservation mechanisms that can be adopted in Kayunga District and Uganda in general.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive survey design. It employed both primary and secondary methods of data collection. Oral interviews and county reports provide important sources of primary data. Data from secondary sources were gathered mainly from written works and internet materials.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The findings indicate that (64%, n=231) of the respondents observed that there are organizations and/or institutions undertaking environmental education programs in their community while (36%, n=129) of the respondents have no such programs in their community. 18% of the respondents read/heard about them through media, 17% read/heard about them through school/college programs, and 11% of the respondents learned from their friends. The findings also indicate that 16% of the respondents were members of environmental organizations while 15% had been informed of environmental education programs by government officials. Most of the respondents (87%, n=201) were able to identify by name some of the environmental organizations in their community while 13% (n=30) were unable. 30% of the respondents have ever attended World Environment Day(WED) celebrations, 25% have ever attended tree planting exercise while 23% have ever attended clean up exercise organized by government officials. About 22% of the respondents have ever attended other functions related to the environment apart from WED, tree planting exercise and clean up exercise.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

4.2.1 Awareness of Environmental Organizations

Table 1: Awareness of environmental organizations

Awareness of organizations	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	224	62%
No	136	38%
Total	360	100

The findings on table 1 indicate that 38% of the respondents have ever taken actions with regard to environmental pollution in their area while 62% have never done anything regarding environmental pollution in their area.

4.2.2 Action taken on Environmental Pollution by the Respondents

Table 2: Action taken on environmental pollution by the respondents

Action taken on Environmental Pollution	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	128	38%
No	206	62%
Total	334	100

Majority of the respondents (54%, n-69) have ever reported environmental pollution related issues to the concerned department while 25% reported the same to the police. About 2% of the respondents took the initiative to clean up the mess as indicated in table 3.

Table 3: Type of action taken by the respondents

Type of action taken	Frequency	Percentage
Reported to the concerned agency	69	54%
Reported to the police	32	25%
Cleaned up the mess	3	2%
Other	24	19%
Total	128	100

The study findings in table 3 also indicate that 58% of the respondents observe that there have been actions taken on environmental pollution by government agencies in their area while 42% of the respondents were of the view that no action has ever been taken with regard to environmental pollution in their area.

Table 4: Any action taken by an agency on environmental pollution

Any action taken on environmental pollution	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	192	58%
No	138	42%
Total	330	100

On types of action taken by government agencies with regard to environmental pollution as indicated in table 4, 12% of the respondents observed that the concerned parties were arrested, 44% observed they were ordered to clean up the mess while 38% of the respondents observed that the concerned government agencies stopped the environmental pollution activities.

Table 5: Type of action taken by a government agency on pollution

Type of action taken	Frequency	Percentage
Arrested the concerned parties	22	12%
Ordered them to clean up the mess	85	44%
Stopped the activity	73	38%
Other	12	6%
Total	192	100

The study findings also indicate that 46% of the respondents are of the view that corruption is the reason that makes government officials fail to act on some of the environmental pollutions in their area. 27% of the respondents noted lack of capacity in terms of the number of staff as the reason while 13% of the respondents observed that lack of transportation means is the reason why no action is taken on some of the environmental pollutions in their area as indicated in table 6.

Table 6: Reasons why government officials don't take action(s)

Reasons for not taking action (s)	Frequency	Percentage
Corruption	155	46
Lack of capacity/few staff	95	27
Lack of transportation means	43	13
Other	47	14
Total	340	100

4.2.3 Access to Information and Public Participation in Environmental Conservation in Kayunga District

The findings in table 7 indicate that 97% of the respondents need information on environmental issues in order to participate in environmental conservation while 3% of the respondents view information as not that important.

Table 7: Need information to participate in environmental conservation

Need information	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	338	97%
No	12	3%
Total	350	100

From the findings on table 7, the study indicates that majority of the respondents (40%, n=128) got environmental information by visiting relevant government departments; 17% of the

respondents have access to library materials on environment, 10% get information from relevant departments' websites while 26% of the respondents get environmental information by attending and participating in trainings programs on environmental issues.

Table 8: Where to get the environmental information

Source of environmental information	Frequency	Percentage
Visiting relevant government departments	128	40%
Library materials on environment	54	17%
Website of relevant agencies/departments	30	10%
Training programs on environment	84	26%
Other	22	7%
Total	318	100

On challenges to access to environmental information, 81% of the respondents admitted having challenges in accessing environmental information while 19% of the respondents do not have challenges in accessing environmental information as indicated in table 9.

Table 9: Challenges in accessing environmental information

Challenges in environmental information access	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	264	81%
No	62	19%
Total	326	100

The study findings also indicate that 27% of the respondents view the amount of fees to be paid to access information as a challenge. 23% on the other hand observe that poor customer reception is the challenge in accessing environmental information while 21% do not know where to get environmental information. 25% of the respondents are of the view that the offices are quite far from them hence accessing environmental information becomes a challenge since they have to incur travelling expenses to reach the relevant offices. The results are given in table 10.

Table 10: Type of environmental information challenges

Type of environmental information challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Fees to be paid	70	27%
Poor customer reception	62	23%
Ignorance on availability of such information	56	21%
Offices are far	66	25%
Other	10	4%
Total	264	100

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that Agenda 21 has shaped and continues to shape environmental conservation mechanisms in Kayunga District. That environmental awareness programs cut across all sectors of society in Kayunga District. This has enabled most residents of Kayunga District to actively participate in environmental conservation initiatives. There are a number of institutions and NGOs already undertaking environmental awareness and education in Kayunga District. In addition, the annual World Environment Day (WED) celebration provides an opportunity for educating the public on the importance of the environment. These interventions have impacted positively in Kayunga District's environmental conservation. Similarly, the study has identified the challenges that hamper effective implementation of environmental regulations in Uganda. The study also concludes that access to information may guarantee public participation in decision-making which is essential for local level development in general and in the management of natural resources, in particular.

5.2 Recommendations

This study gives a policy recommendation that the Act needs to be reviewed to conform to the constitution and to provide provisions to address the underlying issues of planning. The department should also consider making physical planning services available to rural areas as opposed to the current situation where the services are confined only in urban areas. Urbanization is real and is taking place in rural areas and soon they will grow into urban centers. More sensitization needs to be conducted in rural areas to empower the communities to embrace the idea.

The study also, gives a policy recommendation for regular engagement forums of the lead agencies, communities and other relevant stakeholders to discuss environmental regulations and conservation issues. The government should also consider developing new funding plans for environmental agencies and departments that supplies them with adequate resources to fulfill their legislations mandates. This will serve to remove among the lead agencies the fee competition charged to the public.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declares no conflict of interest.

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