

Environmental Information & Communication Among Stakeholders: Okavango Delta, Botswana

OLEKAE THAKADU

Information diffusion interventions have often relied on the use of agents to diffuse information to their constituents. The approach has the potential of facilitating broad-based impacts in terms of information dissemination and social change. However, effective communication of information requires an understanding of the knowledge-sharing behaviors of the agents as well as the effectiveness of the communication methods used to impart knowledge to effect the desired change. Research related to knowledge-sharing behaviors is scarce in environmental/natural resources literature, though it abounds in other areas such as business, professional, IT, and public organizations.

The current research, aimed at examining predictors of environmental knowledge-sharing behaviors of community-based natural resources management (CBNRM) board members and assessing the relative effectiveness of two communication methods (visualized and conventional verbal communication), is an attempt to address this gap.

The study will enable practitioners in environmental communication and education to: (1) understand the knowledge sharing behaviors of community leaders or agents often used to diffuse environmental information, (2) design interventions based on research that target significant factors influencing Trustees or agents' decisions to share acquired knowledge, and (3) select effective communication methods that will promote maximal information acquisition by the Trustees/agents. Understanding factors that will promote knowledge sharing and effective knowledge acquisition methods will help practitioners in planning information diffusion campaigns and interventions aimed at promoting responsible environmental behaviors.

I did fieldwork from May through July 2009 in the Ngamiland District in Botswana. Fifteen groups of CBNRM Board of Trustees took part in the study



for a total sample of 150 subjects. Three of the participating Boards were used to pilot both the instrument and the two interventions. Workshops were held with each participating Board, addressing two specific environmental concerns and issues within the Okavango delta: fire management and waste management within community-managed concession areas, often referred to as community controlled hunting areas (CHAs). After each presentation, participants completed a retrospective questionnaire addressing relevant aspects of the subject matter. The questionnaires assessed participants' perceived knowledge of the environmental issues before and after the intervention, their attitudes, beliefs and intention, as well as locus of control in respect to knowledge sharing or communication.

Fieldwork also gave me the opportunity to work again with CBNRM leaders and helped me to better understand the knowledge and information needs required for effective management of community

areas, as well as promoting responsible environmental behaviors among community constituents. I was amazed by the interest shown for the issues that were presented (fire and waste management) as they related to community-managed areas. Board members indicated that the information provided them with requisite knowledge, skills and enlightenment to better manage and ensure compliance of community areas management plans. I was fulfilled as a scholar and practitioner in that I benefitted from the participation of the subjects and imparted something that was of immediate use in their day-to-day lives.

Olekae Thakadu is a doctoral student in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication and an associate in the UF NSF-IGERT program on Adaptive Management: Wise Use of Waters, Wetlands, and Watersheds (AM-W3). The summer 2009 fieldwork was carried out with funding from the University of Botswana.