

The potential of indigenous environmental knowledge and strategies (IEKS) in natural resource management: a case study of the Kipsigis Community of Kericho district, Kenya

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Abstract:

Governments, international agencies, national organizations, groups and individuals have in the past applied conventional strategies to resolve local community natural resource management problems. These strategies entail scientific interventions (technologies) with "alien" values which local populations do not fully comprehend. As a result, they have either yielded less desirable results because they excluded local values, practices, aspirations, and preferences, or have tended to be expensive and difficult to sustain as they have failed to harness local resources and active community support, or totally failed because they have incurred peoples suspicion, operated outside indigenous institutional setups and local leadership. This has resulted in accelerated natural resource degradation problems which if unchecked will sooner or later affect sustainable development and survival of man. To address this gap, Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and Strategies (IEKS) have often been considered as complementary strategies to natural resource management. Little, however, is known about their actual knowledge, strategies and expertise. Part of this ignorance and non-utilization of IEKS has been attributed to lack of research, documentation and their sufficient exposure. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to explore the potential, contribution and relevance of IEKS in natural resource management. This is particularly necessary with the realization that conventional strategies are relatively weak and cannot on their own contribute to effective natural resource management. To find out the contribution of IEKS in natural resource management, a study was carried out among the Kipsigis Community of Kericho District, Kenya, to see how their IEKS have been used to manage natural resources. This was done on the premise that the Kipsigis Community had a wealth of IEKS, which they used to sustainably manage their natural resources. The question, which the study sought to answer, then was "what were the potential, contribution and relevance of IEKS in natural resource management?" The methods used to collect data were: community time line, natural resource trend graphs, traditional seasonal calendar, interviews and questionnaire administration, listening to oral traditions, observation and review of documented information. Methods of data analysis, on the other hand, included; historical, content and structural-functional analysis techniques. The results of the study indicated that the Kipsigis Community had relevant IEKS, which contributed to effective natural resource management and whose components parts displayed economic, institutional, technological, social cultural and ecological strategies. They also had a nature of being holistic, adaptive and utilitarian. Further, there were effective methods of acquisition and disseminating them and institutional mechanisms for their enforcement and compliance. It was also found out that they had weaknesses based on their nature of being local and oral. The study concluded that IEKS contributes to natural resource management. It recommends that the results be used by other local communities with similar natural resource management problems, policy makers when reviewing natural resource management policies and also by researchers. The study also recommends that further research be undertaken on "integration of IEKS with conventional strategies" for effective management of natural resources.