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Leading Sustainability: Understanding Leadership Emergence in Community Resources Management Areas in Ghana

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Abstract

Community Resources Management Areas (CREMAs) establishment strategy in Ghana aims at putting some biodiversity rich communal lands belonging to families and traditional rulers under conservation. Community leaders play important roles in the success of the CREMAs conservation programmes to achieving the desired sustainability in the rural areas. This study applied phenomenological approach to collect qualitative data from community conservation leaders from three CREMA sites in northern Ghana. The major findings of the study showed CREMAs establishment origins vary from community initiated projects through interest group initiatives to cooperation between central government and community enterprises. Leadership emergence was found to be influenced by personal experiences, expected personal benefits and nominations from community members. Emerged leaders engaged state agencies and other external partners for technical and financial assistance in facilitating the establishment of CREMAs. Findings on decision making processes in the CREMAs suggested they were based on consultations. It is recommended that tailor made training programmes on leadership that emphasizes individual agency of responsibility to the CREMAs and their communities should be designed for those who emerge to lead.

Keywords

Collaborative Natural Resources Management, Leadership, Phenomenological Studies, Sustainability

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Leading Sustainability: Understanding Leadership Emergence in Community Resources Management Areas in Ghana

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Community Resources Management Areas (CREMAs) establishment strategy in Ghana aims at putting some biodiversity rich communal lands belonging to families and traditional rulers under conservation. Community leaders play important roles in the success of the CREMAs conservation programmes to achieving the desired sustainability in the rural areas. This study applied phenomenological approach to collect qualitative data from community conservation leaders from three CREMA sites in northern Ghana. The major findings of the study showed CREMAs establishment origins vary from community initiated projects through interest group initiatives to cooperation between central government and community enterprises. Leadership emergence was found to be influenced by personal experiences, expected personal benefits and nominations from community members. Emerged leaders engaged state agencies and other external partners for technical and financial assistance in facilitating the establishment of CREMAs. Findings on decision making processes in the CREMAs suggested they were based on consultations. It is recommended that tailor made training programmes on leadership that emphasizes individual agency of responsibility to the CREMAs and their communities should be designed for those who emerge to lead. Keywords: Collaborative Natural Resources Management, Leadership, Phenomenological Studies, Sustainability

Collaborative natural resources conservation programmes in Ghana aim at putting some biodiversity rich communal lands belonging to families and traditional rulers under conservation (Agyare, 2013; Owusu-Ansah, 2019; Roe, Nelson, & Sandbrook, 2009). Asare, Kyei, and Mason (2013) stated the collaborative natural resource conservation strategy in Ghana is to promote effectiveness and efficiency in biodiversity management as well as to meet international obligations. The Wildlife Division of Ghana is the Government agency that implement Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) programmes which are called Community Resource Management Areas (CREMAs). The Government of Ghana cede management authority to communities which establish CREMAs. A CREMA may be formed by only one community. However, usually more than one community with some similarities like having one paramount chief or clan relationship in a continuous landmass may come together to form one CREMA.

The CREMA concept seeks to achieve the dual purpose of natural resources sustainability that also promote socio-economic development. However, natural resources conservation ideals and socio-economic development principles oppose each other (Conley & Moote, 2001; Romero et al., 2012). Romero et al. (2012) again, stated the opposing interrelationship between natural resources conservation and socio-economic development has prompted scientists and policy makers to relook at how the perceived dichotomy of the two disciplines could be bridged to achieve sustainability.

Collaborative natural resources management programmes as being implemented in the CREMAs of Ghana have been seen as one of the ways to bridging the gap. Collaborative natural resources conservation concept varies in governance structures in different societies, but all seek to satisfy diverse stakeholder interests. Programmes that emerge from the CREMA policy mostly involve the setting up and strengthening of decentralized governance institutions to take over the devolved management authority (Agyare, 2013; Jones & Erdmann, 2013; Roe et al., 2009).

Devolving natural resources conservation programmes and activities to local governance institutions demands careful considerations to be made to select leaders who can play such important roles to achieving the desired sustainability in rural communities. The complexities and uncertainties in collaborative natural resources conservation requires leadership that would be able to deal with the challenges. According to Harley, Metcalf, and Irwin (2013), environmental conservation leadership emergence in communities is related to perceive injustice in the utilization rights of the resources. The authors mentioned three factors that promote environmental conservation leadership emergence are:

1. The level of involvement of the community members in the processes of establishing a conservation programme.
2. The level of access to the environmental resources available to the people and
3. The level of the expected outcomes of the environmental conservation programme.

This study purpose was to understand leadership emergence in leading collaborative natural resources conservation programmes in communities--a role which is largely unpaid and yet demanding in Ghana. Those who emerge as leaders have the arduous responsibility to ensure that the resources are not degraded but rather enhanced to promote socio-economic development (Bixler, Dell'Angelo, Mfunne, & Roba, 2015; Owusu-Ansah, 2019).

Expectations from CREMA Leadership

Community leaders are entrusted with biodiversity resources to manage for sustainable benefits after the completion of the CREMAs' establishment processes with the devolution of authority. Individuals who take up the leadership positions in the CREMAs have challenging tasks to prevent poaching and other acts that degrade the resources. Also, they are to promote sustainable socio-economic development for their communities (Owusu-Ansah, 2019). Wolfgramm, Flynn-Coleman, and Conroy (2015) defined environmental leadership as an individual who has the ability to influence his/her society or organization to achieve a long term vision of ecological sustainability. A collection of such individuals form management teams to enforce the governance structures established to manage the CREMAs in Ghana. In that stead, they are expected to act strategically to bring the needed change require to achieve biodiversity sustainability that also benefit community members (Strand, 2014).

The CREMA leaders are to manage carefully the biodiversity utilization rights that have been given to the communities. This is appropriate for leadership efficacy demand in sustainability as Harré (2011) cited in Wolfgramm et al. (2015) mentioned. That is sustainability leadership should be exhibited in a collective agency between leaders and community members where each knows their rights and responsibilities in managing natural resources. Addor, Cobb, Dukes, Ellerbrock, and Smutko, (2005) reiterated this assertion that the characteristics and the capabilities of a group is expressed in the relationship that exists between the leader and the followers. Therefore, the sustainability leaders' desire to achieve

conservation goals within the CREMA communities should be a collective undertaken (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Jones & Erdmann, 2013).

The study sought to answer these research questions on the leadership roles perform by CREMA leaders.

1. What factors promote CREMA establishment opportunities in the communities?
2. How do leaders emerge to facilitate CREMA establishment in the communities?
3. How do decisions making take place in the CREMAs?

The author of this study is an employee of the Wildlife Division of Ghana who is involve in the establishment of CREMAs. His working background could have hindered or promoted openness of responses to interview questions in this study (Meadows, 2003). However, the application of qualitative phenomenological approach to this study allowed him to bring past experiences and emotions (Finlay, 2009; Lavery, 2003; Sloan & Bowe, 2014) in the form of dialogue to allow for understanding and interpretation of participants lived experiences on the topic. This study formed part of his doctoral dissertation that was triangulated with field observations and application of satellite imagery to understand how selected CREMAs in Ghana are being managed after the devolution of authority.

Material and Methods

Study Sites

Three CREMAs located in the Upper East and West Regions of Ghana were purposively selected for this study. They are Sayinga-Kasena-Gavara-Kara (SKGK) located within 10°45' 45" N and 11°00' 12" N and 1°18' 00" W and 1° 39' 00" W. Wechiau Community Hippopotamus Sanctuary (WCHS) lies in 9° 40' 05" N and 10° 10' 47" N and 2° 20' 00" W and 2° 50' 30" W. The last is Zukpiri Integrated Wildlife Sanctuary (ZIWS) located within 10° 00' 00" N and 10° 20'00" N and 2° 30'00" W and 2° 50' 00" W. The three sites were purposively selected based on their similarities and their differences.

The three study sites occur in the same savanna ecological zone of northern Ghana and yet they have differences in origins (Owusu-Ansah, 2019). WCHS began as a community members' initiative and ZIWS began with an interest group (Agyare, 2013). The SKGK was created through a combine initiative of the Wildlife Division and the nine communities that form the CREMA. The selection of the three CREMAs for this study was also influenced by differences in longevity. WCHS was established in 1998, while ZIWS and SKGK obtained their certificate of devolution in 2011 and 2016 respectively. It is assumed that differences in origins and longevity would bring diverse perspectives to leadership emergence and experiences.

Methods

In this study, I applied phenomenological approach to collect qualitative data through interviews from community conservation leaders. Phenomenological studies deal with how people perceive the world or how the things of this world appear to them (Groenewald, 2004; Kafila, 2011). In phenomenology, the researcher is able to transcend beyond the essences of the phenomenon into a global view. Phenomenology theoretical viewpoint seeks to study human

consciousness and essences from lived experiences rather than the objective physical notion of a reality that sits outside a person (Finlay 2009; Lavery, 2003; Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

This research was exploratory seeking to understand CREMA establishment opportunities and how leadership emerges to promote the process. At the initial stages of CREMA establishment, information concerning the initiatives are not readily available making the application of qualitative methods appropriate. The application of a phenomenological approach in particular to collect data was to explore and generate knowledge that will be needful to establish and implement new CREMAs in Ghana. Themes were developed from participants' description of their lived experiences that informed their project origins. The researcher explored the participants' recollections about their CREMAs origins and how that spurred them on to participate in the conservation projects.

Sampling Procedures and Interviews

I selected participants to the study through a non-probability sampling procedures for interviews. Participants' sampled had typical cases with SKGK, WCHS and ZIWS leadership experience and they were still actively involved in their conservation projects (Devers & Frankel, 2010). The top three CREMA management executives of each of the selected sites were purposively sampled to participate in the study. Both Boyd (2001) and Creswell (1998) stated having a long interview with two to 10 participants is enough for reaching saturation point of sampling for phenomenological studies. Measures were incorporated into the sampling procedures to ensure rigor and credibility. For example, the selection of three participants each from three different CREMAs increased the study scope to bring in more insights.

A separate face to face interview was conducted with each participant on community natural resources conservation leadership in the CREMAs at their offices. The interviews started with a general overview of global biodiversity conservation perspectives and then narrowed to the CREMAs. Participants told their lived experiences and how they got involved in the project (Finlay, 2009; Lavery, 2003). All participants spoke in the English language except one who spoke in the researcher's mother tongue (Twi Language). The researcher kept notes on pertinent and interesting issues on biodiversity conservation relating to the participants' CREMAs.

Legal Issues and Participants' Rights

There was no known legal barrier to this study except that proper research ethics (Lavery, 2003; Wilcke, 2006) regarding human subject were followed. The management executives of SKGK, WCHS and ZIWS were written to formally about the study. Telephone calls and emails to confirm agreed date and venue for interview followed the letter. Participants were given consent forms to read and agreed to it content before interviews began. For one participant who was not literate in the English Language, the content of the consent form was read to him in the language of his understanding. Issues including purpose of study, confidentiality and right to opt out of the interview were explained to all participants. Participants were assured the study was for academic and practical purposes and did not have any legal implications on their role as conservation leaders. A copy of the agreed and signed consent form was given to each participant prior to commencement of an interview.

Video Recording of Interviews

Downing (2008) stated researchers have had issues with the use of videos in recording interviews because of ethical considerations and the difficult role a researcher has to play in

recording as well as conducting interviews at the same time. In particular, these can affect the reliability and validity of data. However, according to Bene (2014), videos have the ability to make researchers and participants recall and reflect on their thoughts, emotions and actions. Researchers seeking to use videos must address ethical issues as well as show dexterity in handling interviews and recording responses.

In this study, interviews were video recorded with the permission of participants to capture the essences in the dialogue and also to allow for smooth flow of the conversation (Kafla, 2011; Wood, Daley-Moore, & Powell, 2019). The researcher's assistant video recorded the interviews to enable the researcher to concentrate on asking questions and to take notes on salient points. The video recording captured participants' reflections on questions that portray their roles in establishing their CREMAs. That is their emotions indicating the kind of natural resources degradation that went on in their areas before the CREMA interventions were captured on camera which was essential in the data analysis. The researcher applied dialogue that also engaged the participants' concentration from the camera.

Data Analysis

The data were transcribed verbatim with the assistance of *easytranscript* software. This free to use software was downloaded from: <http://www.e-werkzeug.eu> on January 17th 2017. Each participant's video was uploaded unto the programme to play and the audio recordings of the videos were transcribed by the researcher. The researcher translated and transcribed directly into the English language the responses of the participant who spoke in the Twi Language.

The transcripts were then copied and pasted into Microsoft word document for editing. The edited transcripts were then transferred into Atlas.ti software (version 7.0) for coding and analysis. Atlas.ti is qualitative data analysis software and it is compatible with many different types of documents including texts and images. Nine transcripts were loaded for analysis. A code list was developed based on the research questions in Microsoft word document and then uploaded into Atlas.ti. Themes were then developed from the codes. Data evidences have been presented as quotations in text.

Researcher's Trail of Activities and Participants Confidentiality

A qualitative researcher's trail of activities in data collection, analysis and results presentation is important to ensure the study's transparency, rigor and credibility (Ghasemi, Taghinejad, Kabiri, & Imani, 2014; Wilcke, 2006; Wood et al., 2019). The researcher agreed with the management executives of each CREMA on dates and venues for interviews. Field visits were undertaken in the mornings of each agreed date and interviews were conducted in the evenings into the nights of the same date. The researcher's approach to interview sessions with participants in this study was based on dialogue to enable their (both researcher and participants) past experiences and emotions be brought into the conversation. This approach was to delimit the researcher's background effect on data quality (Finlay, 2009; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Probing questions were asked for participants to clarify issues.

The researcher kept notes on key points of participants' responses. Also, the researcher took notes on important observations that were made during field visits together with their Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates. Thus, interview data were triangulated with field observations and Satellite imagery developed from the GPS coordinates (Owusu-Ansah, 2019).

To protect participants' confidentiality, they have been labeled A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2 and C3 in attributing quotations at the results section. A1, A2 and A3 were

participants from WHCS, B1, B2 and B3 were from ZIWS and C1, C2 and C3 were from SKGK. The labeling was done not in any particular order as to participants' positions in the CREMAs.

Results

The results section presents four themes relating to CREMA establishment opportunities, CREMA leadership emergence, leadership selection process and CREMA management and decision-making process. Participants' quotations have been used to illustrate the findings.

Theme One: CREMA Establishment Opportunities

CREMA establishment opportunities elucidate the factors and conditions that promote the setting up of viable CREMA conservation projects. Findings showed that key biodiversity species presence and developing collaborative structures are essential pre-requisite for establishing viable CREMAs.

Keystone Species Essentiality for CREMA Establishment

Keystone species serve as surrogate for benchmarks to be set on the conservation projects. A1 from WCHS asserted this fact when he stated this about how the presence of the hippopotamus catalyzed the establishment of the CREMA. He said: "There was the option to give the power to the community people to protect the hippos by themselves. So there were a lot of surveys and responses showed that people wanted to manage it themselves."

WCHS was established on the premise of sizeable population of Hippopotamus on the Black Volta River in the vicinity of the 17 communities that formed the CREMA. Both social and ecological surveys were conducted by key stakeholders to understand the dynamics within which a viable CREMA could be established. The outcome of the surveys were that the local people wanted to take over the conservation of the animals due to the inadequacies of the Wildlife Division to prevent poaching incidences that were going on.

Collaboration among Key Stakeholders Required

CREMA establishment promotion also relies on strong collaboration among key stakeholders which include community leaders, the Wildlife Division and others from non-governmental sector. Collaborators roles are to provide leadership, finance, and technical assistance to facilitate the CREMA establishment. C3 from SKGK statement below show how stakeholders' collaboration is needed. "...we applied to the Wildlife Division in Bolga about our intentions. So we were here one day when they came and said they have agreed to support us under the Northern Savanna Biodiversity Conservation project if we are willing."

Another key collaborator for the successful establishment of a legitimate CREMA to function within regulatory and legislative frameworks is the decentralized District Assemblies. Take again a statement from C3: "We selected our community resource management committees and then we started going to Navrongo and Paga for our constitutions and bylaws development."

Navrongo and Paga are the district capitals of Kasena Nakana East and West District Assemblies respectively where the SKGK is located. A related District Assembly has to vet and pass CREMA constitution and bylaws before they become a legitimate entity to function hence the need for the SKGK executives trekking to the two towns.

Theme Two: CREMA Leadership Emergence

CREMA leadership emergence seeks to understand the individual aspirations that influence people to lead CREMA conservation projects which are largely voluntary. The expectations of such leadership aspirations is to seek to protect an area or plants or animals or cultural heritage for socio-economic development. Identified aspirations for leadership emergence in this study included opportunity to apply personal knowledge, preventing resources degradation for expected personal benefits, and using CREMA for socio-economic development.

Opportunity to Apply Personal Knowledge

Individuals with knowledge in biodiversity conservation concepts and its benefits tend to emerge to lead the CREMAs. For example, A2 from WCHS stated:

I think I have such potentials which I can exhibit to whoever comes to see the services we have. Personally, joining this project, I think it is good because I am a trained tour guide to handle visitors to see what we have.

It is clear A2 emerged as a leader of WCHS because he wanted to apply his professional knowledge to serve the larger interest of the CREMA. His aspiration is based on the opportunity he got to exhibit his professional knowledge to promote the unique species of the area to visitors.

Preventing Biodiversity Degradation for Expected Personal Benefits

Some of the leaders of the CREMAs also emerged to prevent resources degradation in order to advance their own personal benefits. These leaders promote the CREMA concept in order to be able to continue their trade. See B1 statement.

I am herbalist and we depend on plants for our work. We got to know that a time will come we might not find the resources. We decided to keep a place where no one can go and cut trees or burn it or do anything there.... We knew if we keep an area and it does not burn, we will get those wildlife species back. Conserving the animals means we can get some for our consumption.

B1 leadership emergence in ZIWS is to prevent resources degradation that could have adverse impacts on his herbal medicine practice. Although it can be said his aspiration is borne out of personal gains, keeping the environment from degradation through the CREMA concept benefits extend to the larger society including B1 clients.

CREMA for Socio-Economic Development

This quality describes leaders who emerge to lead CREMAs to promote conservation of flora and fauna that will ultimately bring sustainable development to their communities. Such leaders see the CREMA as a tool that can be leveraged on to get development to their communities. B2 statement below indicate this kind of leadership emergence aspiration.

As I said, we want to use conservation for development. Some development projects have been done through our CREMA and I know many development

projects are coming. ...because of this CREMA we got solar panels that got me interested and since then I have been offering my services.

CREMA leaders solicit funds from central government agencies and other donors to promote activities in education and health within their communities. Also, green businesses such as beekeeping and eco-tourism activities are generated to win support of community members for the conservation project. These activities are aimed to generate extra incomes to community members which can also deflect attention from some practices that degrade the environment.

Theme Three: Leadership Selection Processes

Leadership selection process defines the choice of leaders to represent communities to promote conservation activities and also to protect the economic interest of their communities on the CREMA management board. Selection procedures suggest is based on merit but influenced by the communities' repose of confidence in a nominee capabilities and past experiences with conservation. Also, individuals already serving in a different capacity are mostly considered.

Community Repose of Confidence in a Nominee Capabilities and Past Experiences

This nomination criteria suggest an individual is selected based on his capabilities after the community has weighed other possible candidates. That is the community reposes confidence in a nominee for him to promote conservation ideals and also to articulate the community views on the management board especially on the matters of the CREMA socio-economic development programmes. See how C1 from SKGK captured how he was nominated.

So it is not that you just propose yourself that I want to be a secretary or I want to be this member of the...I mean member of the management team. It is the community which you belong to that will select you and then you will be a member of the management team.

C1 assertion indicates that his nomination to serve was done in a transparent manner based on individual capabilities. Communities repose of such confidence in an individual demands service, because the CREMA constitutions confer leadership position to an individual for only a term subject to renewal.

Sometimes the nomination is merited on the individual past experiences with biodiversity conservation. The community assumption is that having had relationship with conservation agencies in the past will inure to their benefits in establishing the CREMA. C3 statement below capture this essence.

The interest is the interest of the whole community or the area. They saw that I am somebody who is capable of doing it. ...you know I worked with Game and Wildlife before and with that they gave me the leadership power to lead the community in the process.

The entrusted leadership power to C3 is captured in the essences of personal capabilities and past experiences. His past association with the agency that devolve authority to CREMAs is to the advantage of the SKGK in negotiating the process. His past experiences could also be useful

in providing key technical knowledge to promote the resources' sustainability in the communities.

Nomination based on an already serving Capacity

Some leaders are nominated to represent their communities because they are already serving in another capacity. Serving as a chief, an assembly member or any other opinionated leadership puts such individuals into pole positions. Take a look at C2 nomination.

When we came together, they selected leaders to go and handled the project. That time I was an honourable Assembly member for my electoral area and that is why I was selected from the community to be part of the leadership.

Many of the CREMA leaders in this study were nominated through these criteria. Five out of the nine participants were either current or previous assembly members to their local district assemblies. The advantage is that since the functionality of any CREMA depends on the respective district assemblies vetting and passing the constitutions and bylaws, having CREMA representatives who are also members of the district assemblies better facilitate the process.

Theme Four: Management and Decision Making

These are the processes with which leaders apply to take decisions to administer the CREMAs. Decision making is largely based on the constitutions and the bylaws to promote conservation ideals. Two main qualities were identified to be applied in decision making and management of the CREMAs. They are stakeholder engagement that ensure inclusiveness and adherence to regulatory frameworks that set up the CREMAs.

Stakeholder Engagement and Inclusiveness

Key stakeholders include all the communities and their members that constitute the CREMA. However, management and decision-making processes are taken on behalf of the communities by their accredited representatives. Other interested agencies provide technical and financial assistance for the CREMAs to function properly. A1 statement from WCHS shows how management is constituted and decision making is processed.

...every community is involved. We have the Sanctuary management board which is the Sanctuary's decision-making body. So we have two people each coming from each community. Representation mostly consists of a man and a woman. Besides that we have associations like cattle dealers, youth groups, women groups and farmer groups. They all have representations to make key decisions that affect them and the CREMA.

The statement above shows how all communities belonging to a CREMA are involved in decision making. The principles to constituting the decision-making body go beyond ordinary community representation to other identifiable stakeholders such as the direct users of the resources. By bringing users to the management, it enables the executives to regulate the activities of such identifiable users and this could prevent possible abuses that may lead to resources degradation. Again, democratic tenets of fairness and affirmative action in support of vulnerable groups such as ensuring women representation is seen in constituting the decision-making body.

Adherences to Constitutional Provisions

This entails applying constitutional provisions and the legislative framework of bylaws to manage the CREMAs. Adherence to these tenets brings cordiality and respect to conservation ideals. See C3 assertion on how the SKGK constitution has fostered unity among the communities.

Cooperation is very cordial because with our constitution the executives have to agree on anything we want to do. We do not take the CREMA to be for one community, it is for all the nine communities. So the constitution has brought all of us together because it was not written by one person...

The constitution provisions spell out the governance structures that are used to run the CREMAs. An adherence to the tenets of the constitutions eliminates arbitrariness from powerful communities and influential leaders. This is essential in resolving issues that confront the CREMAs that could lead to unsustainable utilization of the resources.

Discussions

This research explored a phenomenological approach (Kafla, 2011; Lavery, 2003) to generate knowledge that will be useful to establish and implement CREMAs in Ghana. The researcher explored participants' recollections about the origins of their CREMAs through interviews that were video recorded to capture participants' emotions about natural resources degradation and how CREMA interventions have halted such degradation. Qualities identified in emotions and in text aided the researcher to make right interpretation to the data (Bene, 2014).

Factors that influence CREMA establishment are not limited to only the presence of significant natural resources but also leadership emergence (Harley et al., 2013; Wolfgramm et al., 2015). Leaders are needed to take up the role of engaging the external agencies to facilitate the devolution as well as seeking financial support to run the CREMA activities. The state agencies' role has been to provide technical assistance and facilitate the acquisition of authority to function as a recognized CREMA. The implication is that state agencies and other partners should plan their support to the CREMAs very well in order to initiate the processes and complete with a clear mandate (Bandoh, 2010). Again, CREMA leaders with the rightful skills and knowledge are required to take up the natural resources conservation in their communities.

Leadership emergence was found to be influenced by individual aspirations (see theme two) and nominations from community members (see theme three). The arrangement for leadership in the CREMAs is consistent with Lockwood, Davidson, Curtis, Stratford, and Griffith (2010) called for a community representation that truly reflect all stakeholder interests to promote the new natural resource governance in collaborative natural resources conservation. This assertion notwithstanding, the findings of this study on community representation suggested the Wildlife Division (2000) fear of a possible "elite capture" of the concept happened on the basis of the type of people who got nominated to represent their communities. Nominees were mainly local politicians or influential opinion leaders (see theme three). Five out of the nine who participated in the study occupied positions in their local District Assemblies and another was a chief of his community. None of the top executives was a woman, although the CREMA constitutions have affirmative clauses that espouse the selection of the vulnerable into the management boards.

The implication to an entrenchment of the elites into positions in the CREMAs could negatively affect conservation outcomes, particularly if they are allowed to take decisions that are not reflective of the desires of the people. In that instance resources allocation rights and benefits could be skewed towards a particular group. Brooks, Waylen, and Mulder (2013) warned collaborative resources conservationists to take note about nepotism. A limit to this will be an adherence to the enacted regulatory and legislative frameworks that govern the CREMAs. Wolfgramm et al. (2015) called for leadership agency in collaborative resource conservation goals should reflect on the minds of those who become leaders of the CREMAs.

The CREMAs decision making process was found to be consultative enshrined in democratic principles of fairness, representation, equality and affirmative action (Conley & Moote 2001; Lockwood et al., 2010). Extensive discussions are made among leadership and with other stakeholders before actions are taken. Under theme four, it is indicative key decisions are taken with the consent of members of leadership. The application of the tenets of the constitution and bylaws would engender cooperation among stakeholders.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Community collaborative natural resources conservation strategies are being implemented in Ghana to reduce biodiversity degradation and to promote sustainable benefits to rural people in off protected areas. This study was conducted to understand CREMA establishment opportunities and the aspirations that influence individuals to take leadership positions in Ghana.

CREMA establishment opportunities were found to be influenced by presence of keystone species and essential collaborative structures have to be established to facilitate the process. CREMA establishment initiatives have three major origins. WCHS was solely community initiated before external agencies got involved, ZIWS was by interest groups of herbalist before it expanded to seventeen communities and SKGK was initiated jointly by the central government and the nine participating communities.

Past experiences and opportunity to apply personal knowledge influence leadership emergence in the CREMAs. Individual personal benefits also inspired those who offered themselves to serve. Community representation is emphasized by the governance structures of the CREMAs.

Decision making process in the CREMAs were largely through consultations by involving all community representatives. Major decisions processes involved all participating communities' representatives. Minor decisions were taking by lower tier committees.

These recommendations are being made to promote the CREMA concept in Ghana. Firstly, leadership nomination should be assessed on the basis of the CREMA conservation objectives. The Wildlife Division and the communities together with the other partners should set benchmarks for the leaders to be able to measure progress in achieving CREMA objectives.

Secondly, the Wildlife Division and partners should build the capacity of the CREMA leadership. Tailor made training programmes on leadership that emphasizes individual agency of responsibility to the CREMAs and their communities should be designed for those who emerge to lead.

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