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Eric Ewoh Opu.
E.Ewoh-Opu@lboro.ac.uk
eri.opu@gmail.com
Loughborough University London.
Reino Unido.
Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4785-7397

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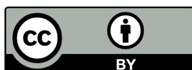

Citizen Spaces as Communicative Arenas for Environmental Justice in Climate Change Governance: The Case of the Ngoyla-Mintom Projects in Cameroon

Los Espacios Ciudadanos como Ámbitos de Comunicación para la Justicia Medioambiental en la Gobernanza del Cambio Climático: El caso de los Proyectos Ngoyla-Mintom en Camerún

Espaços do Cidadão como Arenas Comunicativas para a Justiça Ambiental na Governança das Mudanças Climáticas: O caso dos Projetos Ngoyla-Mintom em Camarões

Abstract

This paper examines the nature and role of organic citizen-led spaces as communicative spaces of change in climate-change related natural resource management; specifically the Ngoyla-Mintom sustainable forest management projects in the East of Cameroon. It examines how deliberative communicative practices stemming from organic spaces created by local communities and NGOs enabled policy advocacy through “the mobilization of dissent” in the projects. The paper highlights a growing trend in communication for social change in which ordinary citizens are becoming more adept at articulating their preferences from within self-organized spaces both offline and online. The evidence indicates that “invited spaces” implicit in the participation paradigm in development communication no longer seem to be the arenas where social change trajectories are crafted through “dialogue” and “consensus” as has been hitherto implied. Rather, social change trajectories are increasingly influenced and shaped, sometimes vigorously, by mobilized citizens from within created/organic spaces outside the traditional invited spaces. Such conclusions are significant for how we conceptualize the role of spaces in communication for social change.

Keywords: Spaces, Communication for Social Change, Cameroon, Climate Justice, Climate Governance.

Resumen

Este artículo examina la naturaleza y el papel de los espacios orgánicos liderados por los ciudadanos como espacios comunicativos de cambio en la gestión de los recursos naturales relacionados con el cambio climático; específicamente en los proyectos de gestión forestal sostenible de Ngoyla-Mintom, en el este de Camerún. Se examina cómo las prácticas comunicativas deliberativas derivadas de los espacios orgánicos creados por las comunidades locales y las ONG permitieron la promoción de políticas a través de "la movilización del disenso" en los proyectos. El documento pone de relieve una tendencia creciente en la comunicación para el cambio social, en la que los ciudadanos de a pie son cada vez más expertos en articular sus preferencias desde espacios auto-organizados tanto offline como online. Los datos indican que los "espacios invitados" implícitos en el paradigma de la participación en la comunicación para el desarrollo ya no parecen ser los escenarios en los que las trayectorias del cambio social se elaboran mediante el "diálogo" y el "consenso", como se ha dado a entender hasta ahora. Más bien, las trayectorias del cambio social se ven cada vez más influidas y moldeadas, a veces enérgicamente, por ciudadanos movilizados desde dentro de espacios creados/orgánicos fuera de los espacios invitados tradicionales. Tales conclusiones son significativas para la forma en que conceptualizamos el papel de los espacios en la comunicación para el cambio social.

Palabras clave: Espacios, Comunicación para el Cambio Social, Camerún, Justicia Climática, Gobernanza Climática.

Resumo

Este artigo examina a natureza e o papel dos espaços orgânicos liderados por cidadãos como espaços comunicativos de mudança na gestão de recursos naturais relacionados à mudança climática; especificamente os projetos de gestão florestal sustentável de Ngoyla-Mintom, no leste de Camarões. Ele examina como as práticas comunicativas deliberativas decorrentes de espaços orgânicos criados por comunidades locais e ONGs possibilitaram a defesa de políticas por meio da "mobilização de dissidências" nos projetos. O artigo destaca uma tendência crescente na comunicação para a mudança social, na qual os cidadãos comuns estão se tornando mais hábeis em articular suas preferências em espaços auto-organizados, tanto off-line quanto on-line. As evidências indicam que os "espaços convidados" implícitos no paradigma da participação na comunicação para o desenvolvimento não parecem mais ser as arenas onde as trajetórias de mudança social são elaboradas por meio de "diálogo" e "consenso", como tem sido sugerido até agora. Em vez disso, as trajetórias de mudança social são cada vez mais influenciadas e moldadas, às vezes de forma vigorosa, por cidadãos mobilizados em espaços criados/orgânicos fora dos tradicionais espaços convidados. Essas conclusões são importantes para a forma como conceituamos o papel dos espaços na comunicação para a mudança social.

Palavras-chave: Espaços, comunicação para Mudança Social, Camarões, Justiça Climática, Governança Climática.

Introduction

Communication has been a central feature of development architectures since the 1950s when it first became associated with development (McAnany, 2012). A defining attribute of debates within the field of Communication for Development (C4D) is the juxtaposition of modernization/diffusion top-down models versus the participatory bottom-up models (Morris, 2003; Waisbord, 2005; Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009; Enghel et al, 2018).

These debates are characterised by "well-entrenched and seemingly irreconcilable differences" (Waisbord, 2005, p. 78). C4D has been described as a "battlefield between the diffusion and modernization perspective to development and the participation one" (Quarry and Ramirez, 2009, p. 18). While the modernization perspective theorises communication for development as a "delivery system" for strategic organisational goals, the participation approach conceives it as an all-encompassing constitutive element of social change processes (Melkote and Steeves, 2015, p. 19).

The modernization or diffusion model privileges the instrumental dissemination of information with the intent of bringing about social change; while the bottom-up participatory model advocates social change through communication inspired and realised from grassroots with the aim of restructuring social relations. Participatory approaches in conceptualizations of C4D have largely emerged as, and stand in opposition to, the modernization paradigm (Jacobson, 2016), even though these two frameworks have been recognised as complementing each other in certain instances. As Morris (2003, p. 227) states, "the diffusion model has evolved in a participatory direction since its initial formulation, and participatory projects necessarily involve some element of information transfer".

Today re-christened as Communication for Social Change (CSC), current CSC theorizing is largely premised to varying degrees on participatory ideals, highlighting, in the process, its critical role in "fostering dialogue, ownership and the active participation of stakeholders in development programmes" (ComDev, 2014; p. 1; Servaes and Malikhao 2005). According to the World Congress on Communication for Development (2006), communication for development is:

[A] social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It is also about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change. It is not public relations or corporate communication. (World Congress on Communication for Development, 2006).

A defining attribute of this and other current references to communication for development and in development discourse in general is the emphasis on participatory methods (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). This approach, it is argued, facilitates social learning, encourages democratic citizenship, empowers local communities and ensures the sustainability of programmes (Bessette, 2004; Dagron, 2009).

At the core of this emphasis on participation is a desire to open-up spaces for citizens to contribute in shaping the trajectory of social change. However, the concepts of space(s) has received sparing analytical attention in theorizing about communication and social change. The purpose of this paper therefore is to foreground spaces in CSC, and in the process, explore new avenues for thinking on CSC from the perspective of spaces. This is all the more imperative because the much-acclaimed participation model has shown its limitations as idealistic and hard to achieve. Pioneering proponents of models of participation such as Arnstein (1969, p. 217) point to limitations of her

typology of participation and to "significant roadblocks to achieving genuine levels of participation". Others such as Dutta (2011) have arraigned participation as a conduit for Western hegemony, since it finds its roots in Western neoliberal democratic ideals. Kothari (2001) argues that the very notion of being invited to participate connotes an exercise of power.

As Wilkins (2014, p. 62) argues, participation entails a "pluralist view of communication in which individuals are assumed to have equal access to political capital and the capacity to enact change". But as we know, inequalities are a main feature of most societies; implying that individuals and groups have unequal access political capital and the capacity to enact change.

Against this backdrop of attempts to reconceptualise C4D, this article aims to move beyond conceptual dualism in C4D by foregrounding the concept of space as a key element in shaping the outcomes of development interventions. It does so by examining the spaces of communication between stakeholders in externally-led natural resource management projects in Cameroon; how such spaces are products of, and constitute, communicative practices that serve to reinforce or challenge worldviews about "development" trajectories. The following questions are addressed in this study:

1. What kinds of communicative spaces emerged as a consequence of policy actors' communicative practices, and what roles did they play in the projects?

2. What was the role of citizen spaces in influencing change in the projects if at all?

Spaces, Communication and Social Change

Space is an important metaphor for visualizing the spaces in which social change occurs through communicative interactions. The notion of spaces can be both physical and abstract places of encounter between various social actors, and by extension of various ideas and worldviews. In development discourse, the concept of space is closely aligned with attempts at mainstreaming participation in development processes. In this light, the research focus as well has examined spaces from the standpoint of participation (Cornwall, 2002 and 2004; Brock et al, 2001; Carpentier, 2011).

In his 2011 book Media and Participation, Carpentier constructs the media as a space with possibilities and constraints for citizen involvement in shaping social discourse. Carpentier describes participation as an inherently political struggle that "manifests itself in the struggles to minimize or to maximize the equal power positions of the actors involved in the decision-making processes" (Carpentier, 2011, p. 11). He distinguishes between participation in the media and participation through the media. Even though Carpentier does not directly examine media through the lens of space, he nonetheless concludes that "access and interaction remain important conditions of possibility of participation" in media spaces (p. 354).

Spaces generally refer to "the moments and opportunities where citizens and policymakers come together, as well as "actual observable opportunities, behaviours, actions and interactions [...] sometimes signifying transformative potential" (McGee 2004, p. 16). Gaventa (2006, p. 26) echoes a similar view of spaces when he describes spaces as "opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships that affect their lives and interests".

But spaces are not neutral. Spaces are embedded in power relationships. "Space is a social product [...] it is not simply 'there', a neutral container waiting to be filled, but is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control, and hence of domination, of power" (Lefebvre 1974, p. 24). Therefore power (discourse) and space are intricately linked, since space is a product of power (discourse).

As Cornwall (2004, p. 1) states, "space can be emptied or filled, permeable or sealed; it can be an opening, an invitation to speak or act". This implies that spaces can be opened or closed by social actors. Lefebvre (1974, p. 73) emphasizes this notion of space as imbued with power relations when he states that "social space is what permits fresh actions to occur [...] while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others". Consequently, examining the nature of citizen involvement in spaces requires that we pay attention to the "dynamics of power that shape the inclusiveness of participation within each" space (Gaventa, 2004, p. 37). What follows is a closer look at some typologies of spaces.

Invited Spaces

Invited spaces generally seek to align with participatory ideals. According to Gaventa (2006, p. 26), invited spaces are attempts "made to widen participation, to move from closed spaces to more 'open' ones". These attempts usually produce other spaces in which citizens partake in the policy process, e.g. public consultations. Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA), which aim "to give voice to those who are left out and to make their reality count" (Chambers 1997, p. 174) are some of the most widely-recognised forms of invited spaces.

Media, as invited spaces also afford citizens opportunities to influence social discourse. According to Carpentier (2011, p. 147) "the media sphere is one that allows citizens to participate in public debates and to deploy their discursive powers by voicing their views" and counter-hegemonic discourses. As Cornwall (2002, p. 9) states, "spaces produced to lend legitimacy to powerful interest can become a site for the expression and expansion of the agency of those invited to participate".

Hence invited spaces are efforts at giving ordinary citizens a voice in policy processes, but also potentially constitute opportunities and arenas of resistance. Invited spaces can also be what Cornwall (2002) calls "fleeting formations". These are temporary spaces opened for the sake of deliberation of some policy issues but not with the aim of taking any major decisions. Public consultations are an example of such temporary spaces,

and may "exist only as ephemeral events that dazzle with promise, then fade away" (Cornwall, 2002, p. 19). This implies that, while such spaces might present members of the public opportunities to articulate their preferences, such preferences likely do not have significant bearing on the final policy decisions.

This nebulousness of some invited spaces, as arenas for the expression of citizen voices, has led to critiques by some (Arnstein 1969; Kothari, 2001). A common charge is that final decision-making in such spaces is seldom influenced by the invited citizens. In her "Ladder of Participation" model, Arnstein (1969), categorizes participation in these invited spaces on a range from nonparticipation, tokenism and citizen control (with nonparticipation being the lowest form of participation, and citizen control being the highest form of participation). Other critiques have associated invited spaces as arenas of participation to the perpetuation and even amplification of existing unequal power relations in society. Kothari (2001, p. 142) contends that participatory approaches are liable to "encouraging a reassertion of power and social control not only by certain individuals and groups, but also of particular bodies of knowledge". In her view, participatory approaches (invited spaces) can lead to "inclusionary control and the inducement of conformity" with hegemonic discourses by including people who might otherwise benefit most by challenging existing power relations. Thus, despite its alleged empowering objective, invited spaces can sometimes be disempowering.

Organic/Created Spaces

On the other hand, there are spaces that emerge from "below", created through citizen action out of a shared common set of goals or interests. Cornwall (2002, p. 24) describes these as "organic spaces" which come into being "out of sets of common concerns or identifications" or "as a result of popular mobilisation, such as around identity or issue-based concerns". These spaces which may range from local community groups, to community media, protests and online platforms to civil society organisations are created to promote or defend shared interests of its members. Organic spaces bear similarity to what Freire (1970, p. 88) alludes to when he states that, in order to fend off hegemonic powers, "those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right". This form of space-creation has grown considerably over the last two decades, fuelled by the dawn of "empowered deliberative democracy" (Fung and Wright, 2001).

Empowered deliberative democracy has recast the relationship between the state and citizens by engendering the creation of new spaces for citizens. Similarly, the exponential development and democratisation of means of communication, the growth of civil society and the mushrooming of national and transnational social movements has altered the character of civil discourse in areas such as health, human rights and the environment worldwide. These new developments have injected new actors and "multi-vocal narratives [...] that have moved beyond traditional political claims for representation and instead touch on a fundamental emotional need to feel included in

processes of change, especially processes that affect peoples' own lives" (Tufte, 2017, p. 24). Farmers' protests across Europe in early 2024, The Occupy Movement and the Arab Spring are examples of multi-vocal citizen-created spaces. Sporting events have also become sites of activism (Agyemang et al, 2020).

These movements, like many others, employ diverse communication tools and strategies to create spaces or enter spaces where their discourses can be heard and influence change. The "multi-vocal narratives" are today sustained due in large part to the internet, which has immensely democratized the production, dissemination and consumption of media content. Castells (2012) presents an account of how social movements and citizen movements have successfully employed the internet as a tool to counter power. This again provides grounds for us to rethinking how we conceptualize CSC.

Implicit in the creation of spaces is advocacy, which is essentially an activity in communication using diverse strategies and tools. Although Waisbord (2015) does not illustrate policy advocacy in terms of space-creation, his characterisation of policy advocacy as "the actions of mobilized citizens to raise public awareness about social problems, engage and convince policy-makers about policy changes" (p. 150) implies an expansion of spaces beyond the local, beyond invited spaces. Given this new reality, how can we qualify the role of spaces in social change processes today?

Climate Change Governance: Discourses and Implications

The drive to tackle climate change risks and its associated effects on the planet's life support systems has led to global convergence in what Beck et al (2013, p. 2) label "cosmopolitan communities of climate risks". This cosmopolitanism is evidenced by "new transnational constellations of social actors, arising from common experiences of mediated climatic threats, organized around pragmatic reasoning of causal relations and responsibilities, and thereby potentially enabling collective action, cosmopolitical decision-making and international norm generation" (Beck et al, 2013, p. 2).

This cosmopolitanism in global environmental governance is reflected in the numerous international treaties, conventions and institutions (UNREDD, Green Development Mechanisms, COPs, the Paris Climate Accords) that permit globally-binding or multilateral arrangements for climate change governance. According to Brand (2010, p. 137), in the cosmopolitan community of global environmental governance, "there is little conflict among different governments that nature has to be appropriated". Rather, conflicts stem from the "how".

Thus, contrary to the diversification and democratization of media and communication, cosmopolitanism in global environmental governance is characterized by international convergence regarding the causes and responses to climate change. This convergence is illustrated by the international embrace of sustainable development

or what Martinez Alier (2002) calls the “gospel of eco-efficiency”. Eco-efficiency as the bedrock of global environmental governance, is rooted in Western technocentric, reductionist and instrumental rationalism (Cohen et al, 1998). In this light, discursive stances such as ecological modernization and sustainable development have contributed to discourses that tend to emphasize certain aspects of environmental problems as “our common problems”, thus requiring common responses (Brand, 2010; Hajer, 1995).

According to Hulme (2007, p. 9) “the dominating construction of climate change as an overly physical phenomenon readily allows climate change to be appropriated uncritically in support of an expanding range of ideologies”. In the same vein, Bäckstrand et al (2006) contend that expert-driven climate science tends to favour certain knowledge, institutions and discourses that create and maintain certain policy dispositions while excluding others. Global governance of the natural environment is thus dominated by global pacts which find their roots in neoliberal environmentalism.

Understanding this is important for understanding how climate change-related policies are deployed and received at local level.

The forerunning points to the fact that global environmental governance today involves the construction of dominant framings that are highly resistant to alternative worldviews, are discursively powerful and have become institutionalized. The forms of discourse and policies they produce take on different characteristics at the global, national and especially local levels. This study examines how this discursive power is mirrored in communicative practices of policy actors in climate governance at local level and the sorts of spaces they produce.

Examining this question is important because despite the technocentric framing of climate and cosmopolitan convergence on climate and environmental governance, policy interactions at the local level occur in value-laden contexts. Such value-laden contexts include localized conceptions of climate and the environment, including livelihoods and cultures. Local epistemologies and ontologies around climate and the environment have been constructed, reinforced and institutionalized over centuries. These epistemologies and ontologies, or “traditional ecological knowledge” (Colding et al, 2003), accumulated from historical interactions, defines how local communities interact with and perceive the natural environment and its associated risks.

As Beck et al (2013, p. 3) state, despite global characterizations of climate change risks, “risk conceptions retain distinctive political-cultural features as their respective meanings are prefigured by path-dependent pasts”. Such cultural realities can be linked to cultural cognition, which in most cases means that local interpretations of nature and climate differ from the Western reductionist conceptions of climate and environmental governance (Adger et al, 2001). Such discrepancies in discourses around climate change and the environment have been the source of disagreements in the implementation of externally-directed climate change programmes and therefore constitute a good instance for examining the questions in this paper.

Research Context

This research is concerned with understanding how spaces influence C4D processes and outcomes. I examine this question in climate change-related natural resource management in East Cameroon, where the government of Cameroon alongside WWF and the World Bank have undertaken what has been dubbed the Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Ngoyla-Mintom Forest Project. This project was rooted in the global environmental discourse touched on earlier. WWF described it as “one of the last chances to protect relatively intact primary forests in the western part of the Congo Basin” (WWF, 2007, p. 47).

The Ngoyla-Mintom forest is part of the Congo basin: a biologically rich expanse of rainforest covering five countries in Central Africa. The Ngoyla-Mintom forest massif is a pristine forest that covers an expanse of about 1 million hectares (about one third the size of Belgium) on the Eastern edge of Cameroon at the boundary between Cameroon and the Republic of Congo. Its rich biodiversity makes it a potential harbour for carbon stocks if left untouched.

But due to perceived threats -which WWF (2007) identified as arising from rapid industrialisation, unsustainable agricultural practices, poaching and demographic pressures- conservation and other sustainable forest management projects have been initiated jointly by the government of Cameroon, WWF and the World Bank. The Ngoyla-Mintom project was constituted of two separate projects: the World Bank-Cameroon Ngoyla-Mintom project and the WWF-EU-Ngoyla-Mintom project. However, both projects overlapped, sometimes cooperated and generally had the same objectives. For this reason, I will treat them as one throughout this research.

Demographics

The Ngoyla-Mintom forest bloc is inhabited by about 12, 000 people, according to data available at the time of this study. These are mainly Bantu tribes (Fang, Djem, Nzimé) and the indigenous Baka (about 2300) spread within 60 villages in and around the massif (World Bank 2012). The local populations around the Ngoyla-Mintom forest are said to rely extensively on the forest for their livelihoods through activities such as subsistence farming, artisanal fishing, hunting and collection of other forest non-timber products (WWF, (2007).

The World Bank-Cameroon Ngoyla-Mintom Projec

The World Bank-Cameroon Ngoyla-Mintom project ran for five years from April 2013 to June 2017. It was launched with a $3.5 million grant from the Forest Carbon Partnership, the World Bank’s Climate Finance facility. The aim of this project was

"to improve the conservation and management of the Core Area (of the three forest units earmarked for conservation purposes) and improve access to income-generating activities for local communities" (World Bank, 2012), according to the World Bank document of the project.

The WWF-EU Ngoyla-Mintom Project

In 2007, WWF made a proposal to the government of Cameroon for a new land use plan for the forest massif. The land use plan was conceived based on what WWF identified as threats to biodiversity in the massif. These included increased poaching, commercial hunting, unsustainable agricultural and logging practices, illegal artisanal mining and other population pressures (WWF, 2007).

The new land use plan created protected areas and two community forests: one in Ngoyla and one in Mintom. It also proposed the creation of agro-forestry units wherein local communities could farm and hunt within the community forests. These programmes were initiated as a means to reduce human pressure on the local biodiversity, since local populations relied extensively on the forest for their livelihoods.

Data Collection

The purpose of this enquiry is to examine how communication shapes spaces and the role of these spaces in the project. A qualitative case study approach is employed to examine this question. I employ the case study approach because "a phenomenon and context are not always distinguishable in real-life situations" (Yin, 2009, p. 13), and case studies serve the purpose of uncovering contextual conditions and their connections to the phenomenon under study. The following questions are addressed.

1. What kinds of communicative spaces emerged as a consequence of policy actors' communicative practices, and what roles did they play in the projects?

2. What was the role of citizen spaces in influencing change in the projects if at all?

Data for this study was collected through 36 semi-structured interviews over a three-month period between January and early April 2017 with various stakeholders of the projects. Other methods included participant observation and review of documents related to the projects.

In line with the main research questions interviews were conducted with three sets of actors involved in the projects, namely: policy actors, community members and civil society organizations (CSOs). Snowball sampling was employed to recruit participants for the study. Interviews where semi-structured, face-to-face and lasted forty minutes on average. About 90 percent of interviews were conducted in French. Three were conducted in English and I used a translator in one, since it was conducted in the local Dzem

language of the Ngoyla-Mintom area. In addition to the 36 interviews, ten documents and field notes from participant observation served as sources of data. A breakdown of interviews of different participant groups and documents consulted is presented in the charts below.

Table 1
List of Interviewees I

Implementing Policy Actors	Subject Matter of Interviews
1. WWF Field Officer, Ngoyla 2. WWF Communications Officer 3. National Coordinator, World Bank-MINFOF Ngoyla-Mintom Project 4. WWF PES Field Officer 5. World Bank Ngoyla-Mintom Field Technical officer 6. Forestry Chief, Mintom 7. WWF Field Officer Mintom 8. Head, National REDD+ Technical Secretariat 9. Comms Officer, National REDD+ Technical Secretariat	• Rationale for the projects. • Conceptions of the role of communication • Actual communication strategies and practices and rationales underpinning these strategies (media use). • Community engagement • Project knowledge generation and community contributions to project knowledge generation • Relationship between policy implementing organizations and the state. • Perceptions of community experiences with the projects • Conflicts and conflict management with communities • Allegations of community frustrations and community resistance to the projects • Treatment of subgroups within communities.

Table 2
List of Interviewees II

Implementing Policy Actors	Subject Matter of Interviews
1. Local Chief 1, Ngoyla 2. ADEBAKA President, Mintom 3. Female Eco-guard 4. Female Nursery school teacher 5. Local Chief 2 6. Etekessang Village Committee (President and 8 members including OCBB facilitator) CODEVI 7. 1st Assistant Mayor, Ngoyla Municipal Council 8. Community Radio broadcaster, Metoung FM, Abong Mbang 9. Community radio broadcaster, Kúl Mélab FM, Lomie 10. Female Municipal Counsellor, Ngoyla 11. Baka Chief, Mabam village, Ngoyla 12. Former Mayor of Ngoyla 13. Head of local female farmers' group, Ngoyla	• Community experiences of projects • Community views of the environment, conservation and climate change • Collaboration with civil society actors and views of the role of NGOs • Community involvement in project knowledge generation and implementation • Involvement of subgroups within communities • Perceptions of policy actors' communication • Access to information and communication problems • Intra-Community mobilization

Data Analysis and Coding

Collected data was analyzed thematically in line with the research questions. Coding of transcripts of interviews was undertaken according to themes of the research questions. Documentary evidence was coded in the same method. The coding exercise

was conducted in two phases using NVIVO software. Initially, codes were developed to capture various themes emerging from the transcribed interviews. These codes were varied and extensive, capturing descriptions, anecdotes and phrases frequently appearing in the data.

After this initial coding, similar or overlapping categories where further grouped for emerging themes in relation to the research questions: (i) Spaces and policy actors' communication, (ii) Community discourses on climate and experiences of the projects, (iii) Citizen spaces and policy advocacy.

This process of moving from primary codes to thematic codes is similar to the process of moving from basic themes to organizing themes in thematic network analysis as depicted by Attride-Stirling (2001). In the case of this analysis in relation to the research questions, the following organizing themes emerged: Policy Actors' Communication, Local Experiences of the Projects, Local Discourses on Climate Change and Conservation, Policy Advocacy, Citizen Spaces.

These categories became the basis of linking and interpreting the data to the research questions. Furthermore, interview data was triangulated with data from participant observation, field notes and documents. This was important for enhancing the validity of findings. As Yin (2009, p. 116) states, "the most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of enquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration". Chart 3 below shows the initial thematic coding categories.

Table 3

Coding Categories/Basic Themes

Implementing Policy Actors	Subject Matter of Interviews
• Advocacy by civil society • Communication by community • Communication by NGOs • Communication by policy actors • Community as powerless • Community experiences of conservation	• Discursive power • Rationale for World Bank Ngoyla-Mintom project • REDD+ • Relationship between big INGOs and community • Relationship between state and civil society

Implementing Policy Actors	Subject Matter of Interviews
• Community experiences with World Bank projects • Community perceptions of climate change • Community views on deforestation and conservation • Disparity between theory and practice • Distrust in the ruling class • Information flow problems • Lack of community involvement • Local NGOs as community backers • Use of media	• Secrecy in decision-making • Spaces of Engagement • The role of civil society • The role of the "big" international NGOs • Views on the importance of communication • Wildlife conservation and poaching • WWF project actions and rationale • Logging companies and the communities • Obstacles to communication and communication problems • Participatory communication

Findings

Policy Actors' Communication and Spaces in the Ngoyla-Mintom Projects

Policy actors' communication practices embody discursive power with significant consequences on the kinds of spaces these practices engender. First, the role of communication in the Ngoyla-Mintom projects is viewed by policy actors in modernization terms such as information dissemination: to inform and justify the projects to the local community.

The diffusion or "telling" form of communication deployed by policy actors can be linked to the discourses they espouse about conservation and climate change, which for the most part is based on positivist knowledge identical to the discourse of global environmental governance. Ferrari (2010, p. 1551), highlighted this aspect when he talked of "authoritarian and instrumental communication" in communicating climate change mitigation NRM programs. Policy actors view communication as important insofar as it can be used instrumentally to inform about and promote the "good" work that the project is accomplishing for the communities.

Doing good and looking good is indeed a growing tendency among development organizations which employ communication to promote their work to various audiences, local, national or international (Enghel and Noske-Turner, 2018). But considering that "good" is a subjective qualification of the projects, it could be inferred that policy actors were espousing the "good" in conservation and sustainable development discourse which underpins the project.

Although communication is primarily conceived in modernization terms, policy actors also view communication as collaborative engagement with the local population. Policy actors indicated that involving the local community in the projects was important, hence they considered participatory communication of importance for different project objectives.

As the WWF Communications Officer asserted: "we pay a lot of attention to the communities who will be impacted by the activities we intend to implement within the framework of the projects we intend to carry out. So, community involvement is very important". In theory, this supposes that community involvement is a priority; it is not clear what form or extent of such involvement, considering the levels of participation as explained by Anstein (1969) and Burns et al, (1994).

Judging by the community experiences of these projects (which I examine later), these participatory overtures by policy actors hovered on the lower rungs of Arnstein's ladder: therapy, informing, manipulation and consultation.

Policy actors' participatory actions engendered invited spaces in which policy actors' discourses dominated deliberations and decisions. What policy actors described as "participatory" seemed to echo what Kothari (2001) characterizes as a reaffirmation of social control and power by dominant discourses in participatory approaches.

Public Meetings as Invited Spaces

Public meetings in the projects were the easiest way to communicate with the local population due to the total absence of media in the massif (signals from the community radio stations in nearby localities of Abong Mbang and Lomie do not reach Ngoyla or Mintom) and serve as information dissemination forums. These meetings as invited spaces also constitute arenas of discursive dominance.

Although policy actors claim these spaces are participatory, public meetings are primarily intended as information sessions whereby the community concerned is informed about a certain aspect of the project. This usually pertains to explaining the reason for the project and how the community will benefit from the project.

WWF uses these kinds of meetings to "sensitize" the local populations about aspects of its project such as the need to protect wildlife and biodiversity.

Policy actors therefore exercise discursive power in these spaces. A policy actor from WWF described the way these meetings were set up thus:

> Everybody would be part of the meeting [...] it wasn't a secret. But the chief usually rallied the people [...] they go around, and they rally the people and then we meet in the village [square]. And we shared the information we had with them [...] took some questions from them and then we moved to the next village.

Public meetings also feature at the start of a project to communicate the project' aims and to gather the communities' view on the project objectives and workings. This chimes with Cornwall's (2002) characterization of invited spaces as public consultations whereby citizens are invited to provide their input on some policy. As an example, the start of the World Bank Ngoyla-Mintom project in 2012 was preceded by such meetings in Ngoyla and another in Mintom.

The World Bank Project Coordinator described the meetings as aimed toward informing and getting inputs from the community. He noted during our interview that, "from when the project was being conceived, we had missions to the field [..] to inform the populations, to get their suggestions [..] their requests etc."

I examined the minutes of one of such meetings that I obtained from the World Bank's web page. The meeting was held in Ngoyla municipal hall on August 29, 2011, about a year before the official start of the project. According to the minutes of this meeting, discussions touched on several aspects including "support mechanisms for ensuring the involvement of local populations in project implementation", "local skepticism about the project and the definition of guarantees for local involvement in project implementation", "human-wildlife conflict", "strategies for uptake and continuation of project achievements after project ends".

A major decision was that the population gave its accord for the project to commence. The minutes were signed by all representatives in attendance. It also reveals that these different stakeholders argued their various positions and obtained concessions, even if in theory only during the meeting.

The above demonstrates how we can view policy actors' communication practices as producing spaces. Such meetings constitute "invited spaces" (Gaventa, 2006) whereby local actors are called upon by policy actors to be informed and sometimes to get their input on project-related issues. Furthermore, meetings such as the ones described above are also what Cornwall (2002, p. 19) refers to as "fleeting formations": the one-off consultations between policy actors and the public often at the start of projects.

The momentary nature of these meetings as spaces casts doubts as to the extent to which citizen concerns may be integrated into final decisions regarding the project. Such consultative meetings according to Cornwall (2002) serve to foster "inclusionary control and the inducement of conformity" from hegemonic discourses, which in this

case would be the dominant “gospel of eco-efficiency” (Martinez Alier, 2002) which underpinned the projects. In summary, public meetings as communicative practice by policy actors, are deployed in a number of ways: as invited spaces for top-down information dissemination, and as low-level participatory communication strategies.

Evidence also points to the fact that while some of these meetings are cited as public and open to all community members, some meetings are restricted to certain members of the local communities for strategic reasons defined by policy actors’ goals. This implies that policy actors’ spaces of communicative engagement are sometimes open and sometimes closed.

Closed Spaces within the community

Apart from having predetermined decisions prior to its meetings, some meetings organized by policy actors with selected members of the community created closed spaces, thereby restricting other voices. This practice, built on and reinforced local power, divides between different groups.

Thus, highlighting the notion that localization or local participation may reinforce existing power structures instead of redistributing power as it theoretically ought to (Kothari, 2001). Some locals believed the nature of some of these meetings kept out other community voices, especially women, as two women whom I interviewed in Ngoyla told me, when I asked them about communication in the conservation projects.

One of them, an eco-guard (wildlife protection officer) said “the problem is that whether WWF or the World Bank project, they have already decided what they want to do [...] who they want to talk to [...] there at the top before they come here”. The other interviewee, a kindergarten teacher added:

> They have a particular group of people with whom they do things. When they come [with projects] they invite only the village chiefs, they send cars to pick up the Chiefs for meetings where the chiefs are offered food and drinks and per diems.

It can be construed that WWF policy actors were necessarily seeking to, based on local power divides, co-opt local actors who would facilitate the implementation of policy objectives. Therefore, policy actors’ alleged discriminatory communicative practices built on and reinforced local power configurations and had the effect of creating closed spaces for some groups in the community.

This echoes Kothari (2001, p. 142) who states that “participatory development can encourage a reassertion of control and power by dominant individuals and groups”.

Environmental Justice: Local Constructs of Conservation and Climate Change

Going by Weedon's (1987, p. 108) characterisation of discourse as the "ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them", local constructs of their natural environment and the meanings they associate to it were the discursive standpoints from which they perceived the projects. Colding et al, (2003) alternatively describe it as "traditional ecological knowledge".

Such knowledge or discourses denote localized understandings of the natural environment which, as Beck et al (2013, p. 3) state, "retain distinctive political-cultural features as their respective meanings are prefigured by path-dependent pasts". It is therefore through such historically-constructed localized conceptions of the natural environment that local communities came to experience the Ngoyla-Mintom projects and perceive risks associated with climate change.

"We Are Conservationists, Others Destroy the Forest"

Conservation and sustainability, community interviewees argued, are engrained in local traditions. According to them, their way of life is sustainable and preservationist in nature. Blame for the destruction of biodiversity is heaped on other actors such as government and logging companies, including the "white man". As Chief B in Ngoyla argued during our interview:

> The Djem [local ethnic group] are indeed conservationists […] and are very fond of their forest and its resources […] The Djem have never cut down a sapeli [prized logging species] with their axes. It is the state that is destroying these forests […] through its logging concessions awarded to companies.

Chief B's views forces of modernity such as markets and technology as partly responsible for corrupting the community's lifeworld. The argument that these forest communities are by tradition conservationists surfaced in almost all interviews with community members. The Vice president of ADEBAKA, a local community group for ethnic the Baka, argued in our interview in Mintom that:

> If we want to talk about caretakers of the forest […] the Baka are at the top. The Baka are the true caretakers of the forest. Because they are born in the forest […] they grow up in the forest […] they don't cut any trees. They don't destroy anything in the forest.

These representations of the community as conservationists is indicative of discursive splits between these communities and conservation policies fostered by the WWF and World Bank projects.

Furthermore, the question of rights and responsibilities for climate change mitigation and adaption characterizes community perceptions of the projects. Although these communities believe in and have experienced climate change, they perceive its cause as being the result of the actions of other entities: national and international. This perception of climate change as the fault of others seems to be the lens through which local communities (at least from my interviewees) perceive the climate change related conservation projects. Chief B, stated that:

> You have been here for 3 days or so, have you seen any factory here that releases carbon into the atmosphere? It is the white people who have destroyed the ozone layer [...] and continue to destroy it. We are simply suffering the consequences.

The same line of thought was expressed during my interview with the CODEVI CSO in Etekessang village, in Ngoyla. They acknowledged the reality of climate change but also pointed to "the white man" as being responsible for and even more vulnerable to climate change. The president remarked, when I asked them whether they believed in climate change: "we know that climate change does not threaten us as much as it does the white people over there, who are now suffering, who have already exploited their resources" and consequently created climate change.

Hence for these communities, even though climate change is real, it has come about as a result of the actions of the rich Western countries. And according to them, these countries are more vulnerable to climatic variations. While such local perceptions defy everything that is known so far about the distribution of global climate change vulnerability, it nonetheless raises the important issue of perceptions of climate change risks.

This resonates with Ferrari (2010) who notes that one of the difficulties with communicating climate change is the local-global interface of the phenomenon: while climate change is a global phenomenon, its perceptions are locally constructed. It also ties with the assertion that perceptions of climate change and its associated risks differ across different socio-economic and geographic regions (Hulme, 2010).

These divergences in perceptions according to Rosenau (2003) are partly responsible for the difficulties in harmonizing climate change governance agendas and strategies between diverging standpoints including global and local, developed and developing countries, and even between urban and rural.

Local Disillusionment and Apathy in the Projects

In addition to local views on culpabilities for climate change, the actions and non-actions of policy actors in invited spaces as well as in relationships with local communities seeded community cynicism towards the projects.

These attitudes towards the projects are reflected in the way some community members talked of the public meetings as spaces of encounters with policy actors. Community disillusionment came as a result of their interpreting these meetings as spaces of manipulative participation or "empty ritual" as Arnstein (1969) put it.

As I pointed out earlier, these public meetings were open invited spaces wherein policy actors and local communities engaged in discussions regarding some aspects of the project, and thus consequently helped shape community expectations of the projects. This sentiment of disillusionment was expressed by Chief B in Ngoyla who lamented:

> WWF promised us a lot of things [..] we are disappointed [...] because we are forced to accept conservation; that is fine [..] but in return we don't get what is promised us.

The Chief's allusion to them being "forced to accept conservation" is indicative of a tension between worldviews or discourses between policy actors and the local community that I highlighted earlier. Moreover, there was a strong sense that community members felt that their voices were not being reflected in major WWF project procedures and decisions.

The perceived failure of the conservation projects to deliver on these material benefits which communities expected, and which had been promised the community caused the community to become hostile and unsympathetic towards the projects' conservation efforts in the area.

Chief A of Ngoyla summed up community disillusionment, noting that people have lost interest in attending the WWF-organized meetings because "we feel like it is yet another meeting that will change nothing". The above reinforces the notion that public meetings were perceived as spaces where policy actors disseminated pre-packaged information to the locals, and accepted community suggestions, thereby giving the impression that the process was participatory; whereas key decisions had been already made in other spaces to which the community did not have access.

Chief B summed it up wryly "the community exists just in name. The community is not taken into consideration when decisions are made".These accounts highlight again the fact that these meetings constituted temporary spaces, or fleeting formations (Cornwall (2002), which served to legitimize policy actors' discourses by employing the strategies of hidden power, or the rules of the game, to produce "inclusionary control and the inducement of conformity" (Kothari, 2001, p. 142).

Thus, while policy actors qualify their meetings with local communities as participatory activities, the outcomes of these meetings, from the point of view of local communities is not concordant with this characterization. Participation, in the case of the WWF projects as recounted by local interviewees mirror Arnstein's (1969) "tokenism" and "nonparticipation", which describes policy actors' half-hearted attempts to involve the public in governance scenarios, meanwhile they (policy actors) retain real power

over decision-making. It is likely that invited spaces of "inclusionary control" created by policy actors caused the emergence of organic spaces, to better represent community interests in the projects.

Organic Spaces: Local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community Mobilization

This section demonstrates how the deliberate communicative practices stemming from organic spaces created by local communities and CSOs enabled resistance through "the mobilization of dissent" and policy advocacy in the projects. The view espoused by the policy advocacy concept is that it transcends the dichotomy of participatory versus modernization debates characteristic of C4D literature.

Thus, this section examines how civil society organizations engaged in policy advocacy both locally, nationally and even internationally with the aim of influencing natural (forest) resource management policy in Ngoyla-Mintom.

Local CSOs and their collaborative interaction with local communities constituted organic spaces, from which resistances to perceived injustices were articulated. These local CSOs form part of a wider national network or "alternative interfaces" (Cornwall, 2002), in which they coordinate with bigger CSOs to elevate policy advocacy to the national level. Their communicative activities were multifaceted, led to the formation of different kinds of organic spaces and had significant ramifications in affecting power relations in the Ngoyla-Mintom projects.

In so doing, these civil society organizations have given voice to local populations in spaces where these voices were hitherto absent. There seems to be a thriving civil society in the Ngoyla-Mintom area characterized by networks of different associations both locally and nationally. Some of these CSOs have been directly or indirectly involved in attempting to influence policy around the Ngoyla-Mintom area. These CSOs justify their existence as defenders of the interests of local populations in diverse spheres, but especially in natural resource management.

Like local communities, these CSOs generally believe that local communities ought to have voice in how these natural resources are managed, since they are the custodians of these resources. It is on this premise that some of these organizations became actors seeking to influence the process of the Ngoyla-Mintom projects. Some of these CSOs are located within the Ngoyla-Mintom area.

Others are based in Yaoundé, and although these do not directly carry out activities in the Ngoyla-Mintom forest massif, they form part of a network of NGOs which includes those with direct involvement in Ngoyla-Mintom, that seek to influence natural resource management policies. This network, which can be considered "created space" (Gaventa,

2006) often works together jointly in engaging policy actors for the purpose of influencing policy. And as I will show later, this created or “organic space” (Cornwall, 2002) was instrumental in policy advocacy endeavors.

I interviewed the leaders of six prominent CSOs who have been very active in engaging policy actors and local communities in the policy process of the Ngoyla-Mintom projects. These CSOs described their mission as fighting for the rights of the local communities to be respected in the Ngoyla-Mintom process. The perceived lack of community involvement in the policy process around Ngoyla-Mintom and a desire to safeguard the interests of local communities seemed to be a motivation for these local CSOs.

This implies that there was not only a perception of asymmetrical power relationships, both discursive and political capital, between policy actors and the communities in the Ngoyla-Mintom project process, but also that this asymmetry was working to the detriment of local communities. In the view of these CSOs, this imbalance constituted a contravention on the legitimate socio-economic, cultural and livelihood prerogatives of the local communities in the Ngoyla-Mintom forest. As the interviewee from OKANI (CSO) who referred to themselves as “playing the police role” reasoned.

Two things were evident from the data. First, that CSOs and local communities have parallel viewpoints of the projects in many respects; and these viewpoints differ significantly from the perspectives held by policy actors. Second, the similarity of views between CSOs and local communities implies some collaborative interaction between these two entities. This is significant for two reasons with regards to spaces. On the one hand, the collaborative interaction between CSOs and local communities is tantamount to organic space-creation, which as Cornwall (2002, p. 24) states, emerge from below “out of sets of common concerns or identifications” or “as a result of popular mobilization, such as around identity or issue-based concerns”. These of organic spaces engendered communicative practices which were significant for the trajectory of the Ngoyla-Mintom projects.

In line with Cornwall’s hypothesis above, organic spaces in the Ngoyla-Mintom projects constituted arenas where local actors sought to “gain a sense of the legitimacy of their concerns and a sense of their own power” (Cornwall, 2002, p. 26). This process was spearheaded by local CSOs who sought to strengthen local communities’ ability to respond to and engage with policy actors in the Ngoyla-Mintom process and in natural resource management in general.

It was a communication process characterized by grassroots information and education campaigns on various aspects of natural resource management. The head of APIFED (a local CSO) explained their activities in this regard that “our work thus includes analyzing the capacity-building needs of different groups and improving these capacities. In some cases, we serve as facilitators, connecting these groups [local inhabitants] with the expert actors for this capacity building”.

The communicative activities between local CSOs and local populations constituted organic spaces of interaction and engagement where intra-community community dialogue unfolded. Such spaces afforded community members the opportunity to share and learn amongst themselves, with the facilitation of CSOs, whom community members regarded as sharing their views and interests. Thus, participatory communication was characteristic of this grassroots space. Further evidence of organic space-creation is the fact that CSOs in around the Ngoyla-Mintom massif have also constituted themselves into a network to facilitate information-sharing, learning and coordinate their activities, according to the head of APIFED, another CSO in the area.

This demonstrates that organic space created by communicative interactions mainly spearheaded by CSOs served the purpose of strengthening community responses to the Ngoyla-Mintom project. The nature of interactions within this space fits with Gaventa's (2006) characterization of such spaces as formed by less powerful actors "to discuss and resist, outside of the institutionalized policy arenas" (p. 27). These spaces constituted participatory arenas whereby local communities engaged with each other in their social context to shape engagement strategies with policy actors. As the head of OKANI reflected:

> When the field was empty [when we were not present] they [policy actors] acted as they pleased [..] but now that we exist and that we hold them accountable, they are more conscious and are improving their approach.

While this interviewee does not cite particular instances in which their actions engendered change, his stance is an indication that organic spaces were influencing policy trajectories in the projects. Participatory communicative interactions within and between community members, as were evident in these spaces, are some of the hallmarks of policy advocacy (Waisbord, 2015). According to Wilkins (2014, p. 58) policy advocacy espouses "clear political positions" and aim at "resisting hegemonic dominance". Building on their work with local communities, CSOs expanded the space of engagement to policy actors and other centers of power outside the projects.

These endeavors generally were aimed at influencing policy trajectories and procedures in ways that would accommodate the interests of local inhabitants in the Ngoyla-Mintom projects. In so doing, these CSOs sought to resist the dominant discourses of the project by taking clear political positions, i.e. the consideration of local communities' interests.

Conclusion

This research established that modernization-type communication and low-level participation are characteristic of the Ngoyla-Mintom projects. From the standpoint of the overall argument of this research, role of organic spaces in CSC, findings show how local communities and CSOs employed communication through policy advocacy and

self-organized spaces, to counter the dominant discourses of the projects.

Taken together, the emerging conclusion is that although modernization-type communication and participation are still helpful for characterizing CSC, there is evidence that organic spaces constitute a significant feature of CSC processes.

Apart from the invited spaces and closed spaces which policy actors created, other spaces, "organic spaces", emerged out of a need to resist the domineering discourses of the projects. These organic spaces were the CSO networks and the community mobilization activities which these CSOs initiated in the communities as referenced earlier. Organic spaces, wherein CSOs and local communities collaborated were sites of mobilization and strategizing for policy advocacy aimed at resisting the dominant discourses of the projects.

The implication is that organic citizen-led spaces are crucial for the expression of community citizen voice and in affecting policy trajectories. These spaces were instrumental in mobilization and organization between CSOs and local communities that drove policy advocacy efforts. These citizen-led spaces emerged as a result of the fact that community interests or voices were not being effectively articulated in the invited spaces created by policy actors on the ground in Ngoyla-Mintom.

For CSC, such conclusions suggest that attention needs to shift from modernization and or participation to how spaces shape social articulations of preferences in the negotiation of futures. This is significant because around the world, ordinary citizens are becoming more adept at articulating their preferences from within self-organized spaces both offline and online.

Hence, invited spaces implicit in the participation paradigm no longer seem to be the arenas where development trajectories are crafted through "dialogue" and "consensus".

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