

COMMUNICATING WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FINANCE: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND POLICY ADVOCACY STRATEGIES IN NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

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Abstract: This study examined the communicating wildlife conservation finance: public engagement and policy advocacy strategies in Niger Delta, Nigeria. The stakeholder theory of PR was anchored in this study. This study adopted a qualitative research approach, utilizing the documentary research method. The study population study comprised government policies, reports from international conservation organizations, academic literature, media publications, and NGO documents related to conservation finance and communication strategies. Since documentary research does not require a direct sample of individuals, the study's sample size consisted of a carefully selected collection of relevant documents, reports, and scholarly articles that provide insights into conservation finance and its communication in the Niger Delta. Purposive sampling ensures that only documents with significant relevance to the research objectives are analyzed. The analysis involved categorizing data based on key themes, such as public engagement strategies, policy advocacy efforts, and financial mobilization mechanisms. The findings revealed that strategic communication significantly enhances public engagement in Niger Delta's wildlife conservation finance by increasing awareness, fostering local participation, and aligning conservation messages with local communities' socio-economic interests. Tailored communication strategies that use various media platforms, including community radio and social media, can effectively inform the public about the benefits of conservation finance, thereby encouraging support for sustainable conservation efforts. The study concluded that strategic communication plays a crucial role in engaging the public in wildlife conservation finance in the Niger Delta, with targeted media campaigns and culturally relevant messaging being essential for building awareness and encouraging active participation in conservation efforts. The study recommended that conservation organizations should develop targeted communication strategies that use both traditional and digital media to effectively engage local communities effectively and foster a deeper understanding of the finance of wildlife conservation.

Keywords: Communicating, Wildlife Conservation Finance, Public Engagement, Policy Advocacy Strategies

Introduction

Conservation of Wildlife is a critical aspect of environmental sustainability, particularly in ecologically rich but vulnerable regions such as the Niger Delta, Nigeria. This region is home to a variety of endangered species, including the Niger Delta red colobus monkey (*Piliocolobus epieni*), forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), and manatees (*Trichechus senegalensis*), whose survival is increasingly threatened by habitat destruction, illegal hunting, and industrial activities (Oates et al., 2020). However, financing conservation initiatives in the Niger Delta remains a significant challenge due to competing socioeconomic demands, a lack of policy enforcement, and limited public awareness. Effective communication strategies are crucial in fostering public engagement and policy advocacy to enhance the finance of wildlife conservation.

The concept of conservation finance involves mobilizing funds and investments to support biodiversity conservation efforts. Globally, conservation finance is estimated to require between \$722 billion and \$967 billion annually to bridge the biodiversity financing gap (Deutz et al., 2020). However, conservation efforts in Nigeria, particularly in Niger Delta, are often underfunded due to weak institutional frameworks and limited private sector involvement. Addressing these financial gaps necessitates strategic communication efforts aimed at increasing awareness, mobilizing stakeholders, and advocating for robust policy implementation. Public engagement plays a pivotal role in conservation finance as it fosters collective action toward sustainable environmental practices. Studies indicate that community-driven conservation initiatives are more effective when local populations are involved in decision-making and benefit-sharing (Berkes, 2021). In the Niger Delta, traditional knowledge systems and indigenous community participation are critical in designing conservation finance mechanisms that align with local values and realities. However, a significant gap remains in integrating these stakeholders into mainstream conservation finance strategies due to poor communication channels.

Another crucial component of conservation finance communication is policy advocacy. Effective advocacy influences decision-makers by providing scientific evidence, economic rationale, and public opinion to drive policy reforms. In Nigeria, conservation-related policies such as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and the Endangered Species Act exist but are often poorly implemented (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2016). Enhancing policy advocacy through strategic communication can help bridge the enforcement gap, and ensuring that conservation financing becomes a national priority.

Media and digital platforms are instrumental in amplifying conservation finance messages. Social media campaigns, investigative journalism, and community radio programs have proven to be effective in influencing public perception and mobilizing resources for conservation efforts (Zeng et al., 2022). In the Niger Delta, indigenous media, environmental documentaries, and digital storytelling can be harnessed to drive conservation funding and policy advocacy. However, despite the potential of these communication tools, their adoption in conservation finance remains minimal due to inadequate investment in media-driven conservation campaigns.

Corporate engagement and private sector participation are critical in expanding conservation finance. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, impact investing, and green bonds are emerging trends that can be leveraged to finance conservation in the Niger Delta (World Bank, 2021). However, weak regulatory frameworks and the absence of clear communication strategies hinder corporate entities from aligning their financial investments with conservation priorities. Clear and persuasive messaging that highlights biodiversity conservation's economic benefits can enhance corporate involvement in conservation finance.

Furthermore, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international conservation agencies have played significant roles in conservation finance across Africa. Organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) have provided financial and technical support for conservation initiatives. Partnerships between local NGOs and international agencies in Niger Delta can be strengthened through strategic communication to enhance fundraising, donor engagement, and policy advocacy (Elliott et al., 2019).

Misinformation and apathy are one of the major challenges in communicating conservation finance in the Niger Delta. Many communities remain unaware of the economic, social, and ecological benefits of conservation financing due to the lack of targeted communication strategies. Additionally, there is often resistance to conservation policies due to the misconceptions that conservation efforts undermine local livelihoods (Redford et al., 2020). Addressing these concerns requires culturally sensitive communication approaches that emphasize the mutual benefits of conservation and sustainable development.

This study seeks to explore effective communication strategies for enhancing public engagement and policy advocacy in the wildlife conservation finance within the Niger Delta. By examining case studies, stakeholder perspectives, and media approaches, the research aims to provide insights into how conservation financing can be effectively communicated to different audiences. This study also aims to identify the barriers to effective conservation communication and propose evidence-based strategies for overcoming them. Ultimately, an integrated communication approach that leverages media, policy advocacy, corporate partnerships, and community engagement is required to ensure sustainable wildlife conservation finance in the Niger Delta. As conservation efforts evolve, strategic communication will remain a fundamental tool for mobilizing resources, influencing policy, and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility. This study contributes to the broader discourse on conservation finance and sustainable development in Nigeria by addressing these issues.

This study is significant as it explores effective communication strategies for enhancing public engagement and policy advocacy in wildlife conservation finance within the Niger Delta, Nigeria, a region facing severe biodiversity loss due to environmental degradation, illegal wildlife trade, and weak conservation policies. The study provides valuable insights for policymakers, conservation organizations, media practitioners, and corporate stakeholders on how to mobilize resources, influence policy reforms, and foster community-driven conservation initiatives by identifying gaps in conservation financing and proposing strategic communication approaches. Additionally, it contributes to the broader discourse on environmental sustainability by demonstrating how targeted messaging, stakeholder collaboration, and digital media tools can bridge the communication gap in conservation finance, ultimately promoting ecological preservation and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Despite the region's rich biodiversity and the growing threats of habitat destruction, illegal poaching, and industrial pollution, wildlife conservation finance remains a critical challenge in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. Although conservation policies and international environmental agreements exist, inadequate funding, weak institutional frameworks, and limited public awareness often hampered their implementation. Many conservation initiatives fail to secure sustainable financial support due to poor communication strategies that do not effectively engage key stakeholders, including government agencies, corporate entities, local communities, and international donors. The lack of a structured communication framework has resulted in a general apathy toward conservation financing, making mobilizing the necessary resources for long-term ecological preservation difficult. Without strategic communication that highlights the socioeconomic benefits of

conservation finance, policymakers and the public remain uninformed or uninterested in supporting sustainable environmental initiatives.

Policy advocacy for conservation finance in Nigeria has been largely ineffective due to weak media representation and inadequate public discourse on the subject. Many conservation efforts rely on scientific and technical jargon that alienates local communities and potential investors rather than employing accessible and persuasive messaging tailored to different audiences. In the Niger Delta, where economic activities such as oil exploration, logging, and fishing significantly impact biodiversity, there is an urgent need to develop communication strategies that frame conservation finance as a shared responsibility with economic and social benefits. The failure to integrate digital media, corporate engagement, and grassroots advocacy into conservation finance communication has further widened the policy formulation and implementation. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how strategic communication can enhance public engagement and policy advocacy in conservation finance, ultimately contributing to sustainable wildlife protection and environmental resilience in the Niger Delta.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the role of strategic communication in enhancing public engagement in Niger Delta wildlife conservation finance.
2. To analyze the effectiveness of policy advocacy in promoting sustainable conservation finance in the region.
3. To identify the challenges hindering effective conservation finance communication and propose improvement strategies.

Research Questions

1. How does strategic communication influence public engagement in Niger Delta wildlife conservation finance?
2. How effective is policy advocacy in driving sustainable finance for conservation in the region?
3. What are the major challenges in communicating conservation finance and how can they be addressed?

Wildlife conservation finance: An overview

Wildlife conservation finance refers to the mobilization and allocation of financial resources to support biodiversity protection and ecosystem management. This includes funding mechanisms such as government allocations, private sector investments, international grants, and community-driven financial initiatives (Deutz et al., 2020). Effective conservation finance is essential for sustaining wildlife habitats, controlling poaching, and mitigating the effects of climate change on biodiversity. However, conservation finance remains underdeveloped in regions like the Niger Delta due to competing socio-economic priorities, weak institutional support, and limited funding opportunities (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2016).

Globally, conservation finance is estimated to require an annual investment between \$722 billion and \$967 billion to close the biodiversity financing gap (Deutz et al., 2020). Innovative financing mechanisms, such as green bonds, payment for ecosystem services (PES), and conservation trust funds, have been used to address these gaps in various countries (World Bank, 2021). However, these approaches have not been fully explored in Nigeria, where conservation initiatives are predominantly donor-funded and lack long-term financial sustainability. To strengthen wildlife conservation finance, more structured and diversified funding approaches that integrate public and private sector participation are needed.

Despite the critical role of conservation finance inadequate policy enforcement, corruption, and a lack of public engagement hinder its implementation in the Niger Delta (Redford et al., 2020). Due to weak communication strategies, many local communities remain unaware of the financial and ecological benefits of conservation. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes effective communication, stakeholder involvement, and strong policy advocacy to ensure sustainable financing for conservation efforts in the region.

Public engagement in the finance of wildlife conservation

Public engagement is essential for the success of conservation finance, as it fosters community participation, behavioral change, and long-term commitment to environmental sustainability (Berkes, 2021). Engaging the public in conservation finance involves raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity protection, encouraging financial contributions, and integrating local communities into decision-making processes. In the Niger Delta, where the dependence on natural resources is high, conservation initiatives must align with the economic and social realities of local populations to gain public support (Elliott et al., 2019).

Successful conservation projects often incorporate participatory approaches that empower local communities through education, livelihood alternatives, and benefit-sharing mechanisms (Zeng et al., 2022). For instance, community-based conservation models in Kenya and Tanzania have demonstrated that local ownership and financial incentives can significantly improve conservation outcomes (Berkes, 2021). However, in Nigeria conservation programs often face resistance due to a lack of community inclusion and misconceptions that conservation finance limits local economic activities. Effective public engagement requires targeted messaging, culturally appropriate communication strategies, and transparent financial accountability.

The media plays a crucial role in enhancing public engagement in conservation finance by providing education, advocacy, and dialogue platforms. Digital media, environmental documentaries, and community radio programs have been instrumental in shaping public perceptions of conservation worldwide (Zeng et al., 2022). However, conservation-related media content remains limited in Nigeria, and public discourse on conservation finance is minimal. Expanding the role of media in conservation communication can help increase awareness, mobilize financial support, and strengthen community involvement in biodiversity protection.

Policy advocacy for conservation finance

Policy advocacy is a strategic process that seeks to influence decision-makers, legislation, and institutional frameworks to support conservation finance (World Bank, 2021). Effective advocacy relies on scientific research, economic evidence, and public mobilization to push for policy changes that priorities biodiversity conservation. Policies such as the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) and the Endangered Species Act provide legal frameworks for conservation in Nigeria. However, weak enforcement and limited political will have hindered their implementation (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2016).

Conservation finance advocacy efforts have been successful in many countries where policymakers are actively engaged through research-based campaigns, lobbying, and international collaborations (Redford et al., 2020). For example, South Africa and Brazil organizations have used strategic advocacy to secure increased government funding for biodiversity protection (Elliott et al., 2019). Conservation advocacy remains fragmented in Nigeria, with limited coordination between civil society organizations, researchers, and government agencies. Strengthening policy advocacy requires collaborative efforts that involve multiple stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia, and the private sector.

Furthermore, effective policy advocacy should leverage media platforms to amplify conservation finance messages and generate public pressure for policy reforms. Investigative journalism, policy dialogues, and

digital campaigns can play a significant role in holding policymakers accountable for conservation commitments (Zeng et al., 2022). Robust policy advocacy is essential to securing sustainable funding for conservation and ensuring that existing laws are effectively implemented in the Niger Delta, where biodiversity loss is accelerating.

Stakeholder Theory

The Stakeholder Theory, propounded by Edward Freeman in 1984, provides a relevant theoretical foundation for analyzing wildlife conservation finance and the role of communication in public engagement and policy advocacy. This theory emphasizes that organizations, including conservation initiatives, must consider the interests of all stakeholders, government agencies, private investors, local communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the media in decision-making processes (Freeman, 1984). The tenets of the theory include the recognition that businesses and institutions do not operate in isolation but depend on various stakeholders for legitimacy, sustainability, and success. It also advocates for ethical responsibility, transparency, and stakeholder engagement in achieving organizational objectives (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The fundamental assumption of the Stakeholder Theory is that financial and social value can be maximized when stakeholders' needs and concerns are integrated into decision-making. However, the theory has been criticized for its broad and sometimes ambiguous definition of stakeholders, making it challenging to prioritize conflicting interests (Jensen, 2002). Additionally, critics argue that balancing multiple stakeholder demands can be impractical, particularly in contexts with limited resources.

Despite these criticisms, the Stakeholder Theory is highly relevant to this study as it highlights the necessity of engaging diverse actors in the finance of wildlife conservation. Understanding the interests and motivations of stakeholders including government institutions, private investors, and local communities is crucial for effective financial mobilization and policy advocacy in the Niger Delta, where conservation efforts often face funding shortages and policy inefficiencies. The theory supports the argument that strategic communication can facilitate better alignment between conservation goals and stakeholder expectations, thereby improving funding streams, promoting sustainable conservation policies, and fostering greater public participation. Applying the Stakeholder Theory, this study underscores the importance of inclusive and transparent communication strategies in enhancing conservation finance and policy advocacy efforts in Nigeria.

Empirical Review

Deutz (2020) conducted out a study on “Financing Nature: Closing the Global Biodiversity Financing Gap.” This study assessed the financing gaps in global biodiversity and propose sustainable conservation finance mechanisms. This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining financial data analysis and expert interviews to examine funding challenges in biodiversity conservation. The study found an estimated annual financing gap of \$722 billion to \$967 billion for global biodiversity conservation. Innovative finance strategies such as green bonds and conservation trust funds were also identified as viable solutions. Both the reviewed and current studies focus on conservation finance and explore strategies for mobilizing financial resources to support biodiversity conservation. While the reviewed study focused on global biodiversity finance, the current study specifically examines conservation finance in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, with an emphasis on public engagement and policy advocacy communication strategies.

Zeng et al. (2022) conducted a study titled “Media and Conservation Finance: Case Studies from Africa.” This study investigated the media role in promoting conservation finance across African countries. This study used content analysis of environmental news reports, social media campaigns, and interviews with conservation

advocates. The study found that media campaigns, particularly those leveraging digital platforms, have significantly influenced African public attitudes and policy decisions regarding conservation finance. However, challenges such as misinformation and limited access to digital media in rural areas remain. Both the reviewed and the present studies emphasize the role of communication in conservation finance and explore how media can shape public engagement and policy advocacy. While the reviewed study focused on the influence of general media in Africa, the current study specifically analyses strategic communication approaches tailored to the socio-political landscape of the Niger Delta.

Elliott et al. (2019) conducted a study on “Conservation Finance: Insights from Global Case Studies.” This study analyzed case studies of successful conservation finance initiatives worldwide. This study used comparative case study analysis to examine different conservation finance models implemented in countries such as Brazil, Kenya, and Indonesia. This study found that community-based conservation finance models, such as ecotourism and payment for ecosystem services (PES), have been effective in generating sustainable funding for conservation efforts. However, the success of these models depends on strong institutional support and collaboration among stakeholders. Both the reviewed and the pioneer studies explored financial mechanisms for conservation and emphasized the importance of stakeholder involvement in conservation finance. While the reviewed study examined global case studies, the current study is localized to the Niger Delta and incorporates a strong focus on public engagement and policy advocacy communication strategies.

Despite the growing body of literature on conservation finance, existing studies have primarily focused on global and regional financing mechanisms (Deutz et al., 2020; Elliott et al., 2019) or the role of media in conservation awareness (Zeng et al., 2022), with limited emphasis on the unique socio-political and environmental dynamics of the Niger Delta. While some studies have explored policy advocacy for conservation, they often lack a comprehensive analysis of how strategic communication can enhance public engagement and influence policy reforms in Nigeria. This study fills this gap by examining the interplay of communication, public engagement, and policy advocacy in mobilizing sustainable conservation finance within the Niger Delta, providing localized insights that can inform more effective conservation strategies in the region.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, utilizing the documentary research method to examine the Niger Delta’s communication strategies for public engagement and policy advocacy in wildlife conservation finance. The study population comprised government policies, reports from international conservation organizations, academic literature, media publications, and NGO documents related to conservation finance and communication strategies. Since documentary research does not require a direct sample of individuals, the study's sample size consisted of a carefully selected collection of relevant documents, reports, and scholarly articles that provide insights into conservation finance and its communication in the Niger Delta. Purposive sampling ensures that only documents with significant relevance to the research objectives are analyzed. These included government policy papers on biodiversity conservation, financial reports from organizations, such as the World Bank and the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, academic studies on conservation communication and media reports on environmental advocacy in Nigeria.

Data collection involves gathering secondary data from credible sources, including official government documents, peer-reviewed journals, and reports from conservation-focused organizations. Content analysis is the primary method of data analysis, allowing for a systematic review and interpretation of textual information

to identify themes and patterns related to conservation finance communication and advocacy. The analysis involved categorizing data based on key themes, such as public engagement strategies, policy advocacy efforts, and financial mobilization mechanisms. This approach ensures an in-depth understanding of how conservation finance is communicated in the Niger Delta, offering valuable insights into gaps and potential improvements in advocacy and public engagement strategies.

Data presentation and analysis

Themes were deduced deductively following the research objectives. The following themes were deduced: Public Engagement in Wildlife Conservation Finance; Policy Advocacy Strategies for Conservation Finance, and Challenges and Opportunities in Communicating Conservation Finance. These were presented and discussed below as follows:

Public Engagement in Wildlife Conservation Finance – This theme explores how communication strategies influence public awareness, participation, and support for conservation funding in the Niger Delta. Strategic communication plays a critical role in influencing public engagement in wildlife conservation finance by shaping public perceptions and encouraging positive behavioral changes toward environmental issues (Zeng et al., 2022). Effective communication strategies must align with the interests and needs of local communities in the Niger Delta, where there is a high dependence on natural resources for economic survival (Elliott et al., 2019). Documentary research reveals that communication efforts, such as environmental awareness campaigns, informational outreach through community radio, and social media engagement, are key tools for increasing public understanding of the importance of conservation finance (Redford et al., 2020).

In many parts of the world, including East Africa and parts of Asia, successful conservation finance initiatives have utilized media as a platform for public education, advocacy, and fundraising (Berkes, 2021). Similarly, documentary reports indicate that Nigerian media channels, such as television programs, documentaries, and social media platforms in Nigeria have the potential to mobilize both local communities and policymakers toward sustainable conservation finance models (World Bank, 2021). However in the Niger Delta, public engagement remains limited, partly due to insufficient media coverage of conservation issues and a lack of targeted messaging that speaks to local priorities. Strategic communication can be significantly enhanced by tailoring content to highlight the economic and social benefits of conservation efforts, particularly in communities that rely heavily on the exploitation of natural resources for their livelihood (Zeng et al., 2022).

Moreover, by framing conservation finance as a shared responsibility as a shared responsibility, public engagement can be strengthened. According to Deutz et al. (2020), involving local stakeholders in the decision-making and funding allocation processes can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility for conservation initiatives. Documentary research shows that conservation organizations in Africa have successfully implemented participatory approaches, where communities contribute to decision-making processes and have access to financial incentives tied to conservation success (Elliott et al., 2019). Similar approaches could be employed in the Niger Delta to enhance the effectiveness of communication strategies in conservation finance by ensuring that local communities feel directly invested in both the process and the outcomes of conservation programs.

Strategic communication in the Niger Delta can enhance public engagement in wildlife conservation finance by using diverse media platforms, fostering local involvement in conservation initiatives, and presenting the financial and ecological benefits in a manner that resonates with local communities. However, for these

strategies to be truly effective, they must be culturally relevant and address the immediate socio-economic concerns of the Niger Delta's population (Zeng et al., 2022).

Policy Advocacy Strategies for Conservation Finance – This theme examines how communication tools and stakeholder engagement impact policy development and government support for sustainable conservation financing. All documents sourced showed that policy advocacy plays a pivotal role in influencing government action and ensuring that national and regional development plans prioritized conservation finance (Berkes, 2021). In the Niger Delta, where policies aimed at biodiversity protection are often underfunded or poorly implemented, advocacy is critical in securing funding for conservation initiatives. Documentary research reveals that advocacy efforts, particularly those led by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and environmental groups, have been key in driving policy changes related to conservation finance (Deutz et al., 2020). These groups often use evidence-based arguments to influence policymakers by showcasing the economic and ecological value of biodiversity protection.

In Nigeria, successful examples of policy advocacy in conservation can be found in cases where civil society organizations lobbied for the establishment of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) in collaboration with international agencies, (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2016). However, while such initiatives have achieved some policy changes, they have often struggled with implementation due to factors such as corruption, political instability, and lack of coordinated efforts between the various levels of government (Redford et al., 2020). Documentary research indicates that these challenges persist, and for advocacy to be truly effective, it must be coupled with strong institutional frameworks, effective policy enforcement, and continuous monitoring (Elliott et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the involvement of local communities in the policy advocacy process can significantly improve the effectiveness of conservation finance policies. Documentary analysis of successful global case studies (such as in Brazil and Kenya) shows that community-driven advocacy efforts, tend to result in more sustainable and well-supported conservation policies, where local populations actively participate in policy dialogue and decision-making (Elliott et al., 2019). This approach fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, ensuring that policies are better adapted to local needs and realities. A more inclusive advocacy model that integrates the voices of local communities could help overcome the barriers to successful policy implementation in the Niger Delta.

While policy advocacy has proven effective in driving conservation finance policies in some instances, addressing systemic governance challenges and enhancing stakeholder participation in the policymaking process are required for its success in the Niger Delta. Documenting and analyzing these challenges is crucial to improving future policy advocacy efforts aimed at sustainable conservation finance in the region.

Challenges and Opportunities in Communicating Conservation Finance– This theme identifies the barriers to effective communication in conservation finance and explores opportunities to enhance advocacy and public participation. One of the primary challenges in communicating conservation finance is the general public lack of awareness and understanding of the concept, particularly in regions like the Niger Delta. Documentary research reveals that many local communities are not familiar with the financial mechanisms that support conservation efforts or the long-term benefits that these investments can bring (Zeng et al., 2022). This lack of awareness often leads to resistance to conservation initiatives, especially when they are perceived as limiting local economic opportunities. As such, an essential aspect of communication strategy must focus on educating

the public and building trust by clearly explaining the benefits of conservation finance in terms of economic development, job creation, and sustainable resource management.

In addition, the challenge of overcoming misinformation and conflicting narratives about conservation finance is prevalent. Research shows that conservation communication in many regions is undermined by negative portrayals of conservation efforts that are often driven by misinformation, political biases, or vested interests (Zeng et al., 2022). In the Niger Delta, where local communities may feel excluded from the decision-making process, these misconceptions can fuel distrust and hinder the success of conservation finance programs. Addressing this challenge requires a strategic communication approach that involves transparent, consistent messaging and the active involvement of local stakeholders in the decision-making and financial aspects of conservation projects (Deutz et al., 2020).

Another challenge is the limited access to communication infrastructure in the Niger Delta's rural areas. Although digital media has become an essential tool for advocacy, many remote communities still face internet access barriers, limiting their participation in online conservation campaigns and fundraising activities (World Bank, 2021). Documentary research shows that communication strategies should include a mix of media channels, including traditional methods such as community radio, public meetings, and educational outreach programs to overcome this challenge. These methods have been shown to be effective in regions with limited technological access, helping bridge the gap between policymakers, conservation organizations, and local communities (Berkes, 2021).

Major challenges in communicating conservation finance in the Niger Delta include a lack of awareness, misinformation, and limited access to communication infrastructure. A multifaceted communication approach is needed, one that incorporates education, transparency, and the active involvement of local stakeholders is needed to address these challenges. Documentary research highlights the importance of tailored strategies that are culturally appropriate and utilize a diverse range of communication platforms to effectively reach all sectors of the population.

Discussion of the Findings

Strategic communication significantly enhances public engagement in wildlife conservation finance in the Niger Delta by increasing awareness, fostering local participation, and aligning conservation messages with the local communities' socioeconomic interests. Tailored communication strategies that use various media platforms, such as community radio and social media, can effectively inform the public about the benefits of conservation finance, thereby encouraging support for sustainable conservation efforts. The findings on the influence of strategic communication on public engagement align with the work of Zeng et al. (2022), who highlighted that effective media campaigns tailored to local contexts can boost public participation in conservation efforts. Similarly, Deutz et al. (2020) emphasized that media outreach and public education are essential for fostering support for conservation finance, particularly when messages are aligned with the economic interests of local communities, as seen in successful cases globally. The stakeholders theory emphasizes the importance of considering all parties affected by a decision or action, and it underscores the need to involve local communities, government agencies, and conservation organizations in communication efforts in the content of public engagement organizations in communication efforts in the context of public engagement in wildlife finance. This aligns with the finding that strategic communication must address the needs and interests of diverse stakeholders to foster support for conservation initiatives. The implication of the finding that strategic communication enhances public engagement is that conservation organizations and

policymakers must prioritize targeted, culturally relevant communication strategies to effectively engage local communities and generate broader support for wildlife conservation finance. This will involve utilizing both traditional and digital media channels to ensure that key messages resonate with diverse audiences, fostering a deeper understanding and commitment to conservation efforts.

The findings indicate that policy advocacy plays a crucial role in driving sustainable conservation finance in the Niger Delta, although its effectiveness is often hindered by governance challenges, such as political instability, corruption, and weak institutional frameworks. Successful advocacy requires robust evidence, local community involvement, and coordination across government levels to ensure that policy reforms are implemented and supported by sufficient financial resources for conservation initiatives. The importance of policy advocacy in driving conservation finance is supported by Berkes (2021), who argued that policy reforms require active participation from both civil society and local communities to be effective. Moreover, Elliott et al. (2019) found that successful advocacy strategies are grounded in strong, evidence-based arguments and the involvement of all stakeholders, including local communities, in the decision-making process, which is essential for ensuring the long-term success of conservation policies. The stakeholders theory highlights the role of various actors in influencing policy decisions, making it relevant to the finding that policy advocacy requires the active involvement of both local communities and policymakers. The theory supports the idea that a collaborative approach is required for successful advocacy for sustainable conservation finance, where all relevant stakeholders have a voice in the policymaking process to ensure that conservation policies are comprehensive and effectively implemented. The implication of the finding that policy advocacy is essential for driving sustainable conservation finance implies that a concerted effort must be made to strengthen advocacy strategies through inclusive stakeholder involvement and evidence-based arguments. The finding that policy reforms should be designed to actively involve local communities, environmental NGOs, and other key actors to ensure that conservation finance policies are not only well-supported but also effectively implemented and enforced across different levels of government.

The findings revealed that the major challenges in communicating conservation finance in the Niger Delta include limited public awareness, misinformation, and insufficient access to build trust and increase engagement, these barriers can be addressed through a mixed communication approach that combines traditional media (e.g., community radio) with digital platforms, transparent messaging, and active local stakeholder participation in conservation initiatives. The challenges of communicating conservation finance, particularly the issues of limited awareness and misinformation, are consistent with the finding of Redford et al. (2020), who identified misinformation as a significant barrier to successful conservation communication. Furthermore, Zeng et al. (2022) highlighted that addressing these barriers requires the use of a combination of communication methods, including both traditional and digital media, to reach diverse audiences, especially in areas with limited access to digital infrastructure. The stakeholders theory is relevant to addressing the communication challenges identified in the study, as it suggests that communication strategies should be tailored to the specific needs and concerns of all involved stakeholders. In the case of conservation finance, this means overcoming barriers such as limited awareness and misinformation by ensuring that all affected groups, including local communities and conservation organizations, are engaged in transparent and inclusive communication processes that account for their diverse needs and contexts. The implication of the finding that challenges in communicating conservation finance stem from limited awareness, misinformation, and access barriers implies that overcoming these obstacles requires a more integrated and diverse communication

approach. To build trust, increase awareness, and promote informed participation in conservation finance programs, this means developing communication initiatives that incorporate both local and global perspectives, engage multiple media platforms, and ensure that information is accessible to all stakeholders, particularly in rural areas.

Conclusion

This study concluded that strategic communication plays a crucial role in engaging the public in wildlife conservation finance in the Niger Delta, with targeted media campaigns and culturally relevant messaging being essential for building awareness and encouraging active participation in conservation efforts. Effective communication that resonates with local communities can foster a strong sense of ownership and support for sustainable conservation practices.

This study established that policy advocacy is a key driver of sustainable conservation finance, as it ensures the inclusion of diverse stakeholders in the decision-making process. For conservation policies to be successful, they must be built on collaborative efforts, evidence-based strategies, and strong local involvement, addressing the unique challenges and opportunities of the Niger Delta region.

Finally this study justified that a comprehensive and inclusive communication approach is required to address the challenges in communicating conservation finance, such as misinformation, limited awareness, and infrastructure barriers. Effective communication can help overcome these obstacles, foster trust, and promote greater engagement in conservation finance initiatives by utilizing a mix of media channels and ensuring that information is accessible to all stakeholders.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a deeper understanding of the role of strategic communication and policy advocacy in promoting finance for wildlife conservation in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. This study highlights the significance of tailored communication approaches that resonate with local communities, using both traditional and digital media, to enhance public engagement in conservation initiatives. By examining the socio-cultural context of the Niger Delta, the study emphasizes the importance of aligning conservation messages with local values and economic interests, which can foster greater support for sustainable conservation finance. The research also reveals that when policy advocacy is effectively implemented through inclusive stakeholder participation, it plays a critical role in shaping policies that ensure long-term financial sustainability for conservation projects in the region.

This study also provides valuable insights into the challenges and barriers that hinder effective conservation finance communication, such as limited awareness, misinformation, and access to communication infrastructure. The findings underscore the need for an integrated communication approach that includes a combination of media platforms to address these challenges and promote diverse stakeholders' informed participation. The study's contribution lies in its emphasis on overcoming these communication barriers by ensuring transparency, collaboration, and local community involvement in conservation finance efforts, which is crucial for enhancing public support and achieving sustainable environmental outcomes.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made.

- 1) Conservation organizations should develop targeted communication strategies that use both traditional and digital media to effectively engage local communities and foster a deeper understanding of the finance wildlife conservation.

- 2) Policymakers should strengthen advocacy efforts by involving diverse stakeholders in the decision-making process and ensuring that solid evidence and local community engagement support policy reforms.
- 3) To promote broader participation in conservation initiatives, communication strategies for wildlife conservation finance should incorporate diverse media platforms, address misinformation, and focus on improving access to information in rural areas.

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