

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the findings of a study on indigenous management systems of marine resources among the Giriama people of north coastal Kenya. The central problem of the study was the link between Giriama indigenous knowledge and the management of marine resources. The study was also concerned with how Giriama ecological knowledge can be used to harmonise marine resource management in view of the divergent worldviews held by the indigenous communities on the one and the government and ecological scientists on the other hand. Therefore, the general objective of the study was to explore the ways in which the indigenous system of practices and cosmology of the Giriama community provides a basis for sustainable management of the marine resources. The study was guided by the theory of neo-structuralism.

The study was carried out among the residents of the area between Kisauni in Mombasa County and Matsangoni in Kilifi County along Kenya's north coast. A majority of the residents are Giriama, a sub-group of the larger Miji-Kenda community. The study design was both exploratory and cross-sectional. Data were collected using in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, observation, transect walks and informal interviews. There were 40 in-depth interviews, six focus group discussions and 15 key informant interviews. Most of the data collected were qualitative and, therefore, were analysed through content and thematic analysis, and the findings presented in the form of anecdotal quotes and personal descriptions of the situation under consideration.

The study findings indicate that the Giriama people have a rich and diverse body of indigenous knowledge pertaining to marine resources. This knowledge is based on detailed observations by experts of various aspects of the marine ecosystem. The knowledge also governs resources' extraction decisions and strategies. This indigenous knowledge system is empirical, time-tested and used for practical purposes. The findings further indicate that the Giriama environmental knowledge domains characteristically include much valuable information about resource behaviour, location, distribution, indicator species and availability of species. It also includes information on taxonomies and habitat classifications, including food items and non-food items in the marine ecosystem. The classification of edible and non-edible species is based on both biological and symbolic aspects of interaction with nature. The symbolism reflects the cultural

dichotomy of ritual and biological purity, where ritual purity is central in food choices. The findings also reflect the Giriama people's association and connections with the spiritual world, for example, demarcation of sacred sites in the sea, mangroves and corals through proverbs, taboos, myths and story places. Thus, this knowledge reflects a metaphorical kinship system about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and their environment. This relationship is based on lived experiences and is expressed in symbolic and semiotic planes.

It can, therefore, be concluded that there is a link between the culture of the Giriama and the evolution of conservation ethics for the sustainable management of mangroves, fisheries and corals. Another conclusion is that this knowledge is instrumental in the conservation of marine resources due to its time-tested techniques. However, this knowledge is threatened by the changing socio-economic and political circumstances. The introduction of formal education, the monetary system and industrial culture combined are leading to the disappearance of this vital component of natural resource management regime.

In view of the findings, the study recommends systematic anthropological studies to capture and evaluate indigenous knowledge on early warning systems, indigenous natural resource and ecosystem monitoring and evaluation. Scholars also need to conduct further studies into indigenous knowledge systems in the context of sustainable livelihood initiatives and appropriate technologies. The study further suggests that it is important to include the local communities such as the Giriama people, through their indigenous knowledge, in future plans to manage natural resources.