



## Lived Experiences of Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Remote Areas

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### ABSTRACT

Natural resource management in remote communities is a crucial area of study within environmental science, as it reflects the intersection of cultural practices, social structures, and sustainability efforts. While existing research has explored technical aspects of resource management, little attention has been paid to the subjective experiences of the community members involved in these practices. The knowledge gap lies in understanding how these individuals perceive and experience resource management, and how external pressures, such as climate change and policy interventions, influence their practices. This study addresses that gap by applying a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of individuals in remote communities, offering a perspective that has been largely overlooked in prior research. Using in-depth interviews with community members, we identified key themes related to cultural practices, community solidarity, and challenges arising from environmental changes. The results suggest that resource management is deeply embedded in the community's cultural identity, with traditional practices providing resilience in the face of external pressures. However, the ongoing influence of climate change and external policies presents significant challenges to the sustainability of these practices. The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on the subjective and cultural dimensions of resource management, revealing how traditional knowledge and lived experiences shape adaptive strategies. These insights contribute to environmental policy by underscoring the importance of integrating local knowledge systems into sustainability frameworks, ensuring that interventions are both culturally sensitive and resilient to external pressures. The study also opens avenues for future research to explore the integration of traditional knowledge with modern sustainability strategies.



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## INTRODUCTION

Natural resource management in remote communities is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon influenced by a variety of social, cultural, and environmental factors (Stojilovska et al., 2023). These communities, often situated in isolated areas, rely heavily on the sustainable management of local resources such as land, water, and marine life for their livelihoods. Traditional practices, passed down through generations, are deeply intertwined with the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the people, forming the foundation for their resource management strategies (Adebara, 2025). However, in recent years, these communities have been increasingly confronted with external pressures, such as climate change, economic development, and governmental policies, which threaten their traditional ways of life and the sustainability of their resource use.

The importance of understanding how these communities navigate the challenges of resource management lies not only in the practical aspects of conservation and sustainability but also in the subjective experiences of those involved (Young & Mooney, 2024). For many individuals in these communities, the management of natural resources is not just a matter of survival but a fundamental

part of their cultural identity and social cohesion (Hirchak et al., 2023). These lived experiences reflect a profound connection to the land and the environment, which shapes how they interpret and respond to external changes. Despite this, prior studies have rarely examined the subjective and cultural dimensions of resource management in depth, leaving a critical research gap in understanding how community members themselves perceive and interpret these challenges. The need for a phenomenological approach to this issue is rooted in the desire to uncover the meanings that participants attach to their experiences (Holloway et al., 2023). Unlike traditional research that may focus solely on measurable outcomes or external factors, phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of how individuals experience the world around them. In this context, the goal is to explore the personal and collective experiences of community members in managing their natural resources, and to understand how these experiences are shaped by broader social, cultural, and environmental influences (Liyanage, 2022). This approach emphasizes the importance of subjective perception in understanding the complex dynamics of resource management, which is often overlooked in more conventional studies.

Research into the lived experiences of individuals within specific phenomena has increasingly become an important field of study, particularly within the realm of phenomenological research (MHumNut et al., 2021). This approach has proven to be essential in understanding how individuals perceive and make sense of their surroundings, experiences, and actions (Andrews, 2020). In the context of natural resource management, the experiences of communities in remote areas offer invaluable insights into how they interact with, perceive, and manage their natural environments (Booth et al., 2023). While numerous studies have examined aspects of resource management, they often focus on the technical or quantitative aspects of sustainability, neglecting the deeper, subjective experiences of those directly involved in resource practices. This limitation is especially critical in remote communities, where cultural beliefs and traditional knowledge play a central role in resource management practices. Thus, the central research gap lies in the absence of studies that link these lived experiences with the broader pressures of climate change and policy interventions.

One of the primary challenges in exploring such deep, subjective experiences is the methodological difficulty in capturing the nuanced meanings participants attach to their activities and behaviors (Chen et al., 2023). Traditional quantitative approaches, while valuable for measuring outcomes, often fail to provide a rich, detailed understanding of the personal and collective experiences of individuals (Nelson et al., 2023). These methods are limited in their ability to explore the underlying emotional, social, and cultural factors that influence decision-making processes. The use of surveys or statistical analyses, for instance, might provide insights into broad patterns or behaviors, but they cannot offer the depth of understanding necessary to capture the lived experiences that shape resource management practices in these communities.

Given these challenges, much of the existing research on resource management in remote areas has been insufficient in addressing the essence of these phenomena (Walpita, 2023). While studies might examine the effectiveness of policies or the economic impact of resource use, they often overlook the complex, subjective dimensions of how community members experience and interpret their roles in the management of natural resources (Kihika, 2024). Consequently, many of the methods employed in prior studies fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics at play. Phenomenology, by contrast, provides the tools necessary to delve into the lived experiences of individuals, offering a deeper and more holistic view of how they navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by their environments. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How do individuals in remote communities perceive, experience, and adapt their natural resource management practices in the face of cultural traditions, environmental changes, and external policy pressures?

While existing research on natural resource management in remote communities often adopts practical, solution-oriented approaches, these methods are limited in their ability to capture the subjective experiences and deeper meanings associated with the practices involved (Atherton et al., 2023; Matlabe-Danke, 2024). Traditional models tend to focus on quantitative measures, such as resource usage patterns, economic outcomes, or policy impacts, which provide valuable data but fail to reveal the nuanced, personal experiences that shape resource management behaviors. These

approaches, though effective in certain contexts, do not adequately address the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions that influence how individuals in these communities engage with their environment.

This gap in understanding calls for a more holistic approach one that acknowledges the complex interplay of personal, cultural, and social factors in resource management (Ulm, 2025). Phenomenological research offers a powerful alternative, as it focuses on exploring the lived experiences of individuals, delving into how they perceive and make sense of their relationships with the land and resources (Holsapple, 2023). By embracing phenomenology, researchers can uncover the underlying meanings and emotional connections that traditional methodologies overlook, providing a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This approach allows for an exploration of individual and collective experiences that reveals not just what is done, but why and how it is done, grounded in the unique perspectives of community members.

Ultimately, the adoption of a phenomenological framework provides a means to explore the essence of resource management in remote communities in a way that practical, data-driven approaches cannot (Luo & Watts, 2024). By focusing on the subjective experiences of the participants, phenomenology enables a deeper insight into how these communities navigate the complex challenges they face, contributing to a more robust and nuanced understanding of their practices.

Previous research has explored various aspects of resource management, particularly in remote communities, often focusing on the practical and policy-driven dimensions of the phenomenon. Studies have addressed the effectiveness of traditional knowledge systems in managing local resources, as well as the role of external factors such as climate change and government interventions (Mlotshwa & Tsakeni, 2024). However, much of this literature overlooks the subjective experiences of community members and the meanings they attach to their resource management practices. For example, research by Badhwar (2024) and Trasmundi et al (2021) highlights the importance of community-driven models but focuses primarily on operational outcomes rather than the emotional and cultural dimensions that influence how these practices are carried out. To address this gap, the current study uses a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of individuals involved in natural resource management in remote areas, offering a deeper understanding of their practices and beliefs.

The chosen phenomenological approach is grounded in interpretative phenomenology, which is well-suited to uncover the meanings behind individuals' experiences (Nkosi et al., 2023). This approach was selected because it allows for a rich, detailed exploration of how participants perceive and make sense of their involvement in resource management (Bashir et al., 2024). By focusing on first-person accounts, phenomenology provides insights into the emotional, cultural, and social factors that shape these practices, which conventional methods often overlook. In this study, the phenomenological method will help answer the knowledge gap identified earlier by offering a more holistic understanding of the subjective dimensions of resource management, grounded in the experiences of the community members themselves.

The structure of this article is designed to guide the reader through a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon under study (Saldívar et al., 2023). The introduction provides an overview of the context and relevance of the research, highlighting the significance of understanding the lived experiences of individuals involved in resource management (Poelina, 2024). Following this, the methodological approach section details the phenomenological framework, data collection process, and the steps taken in analyzing the data using techniques such as thematic analysis (Daly et al., 2022). The discussion will synthesize the findings, linking them back to existing literature, while the conclusion will offer a summary of the study's key insights and implications for future research and practice in the field of natural resource management.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

This study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of local communities in managing natural resources in remote areas (Murphy & Dingwall, 2017). Phenomenology, with its emphasis on understanding the subjective experiences of individuals, was selected as the design for this research to uncover the meanings that participants attribute to their resource management practices. The core aim of this approach is to gain a deep, descriptive understanding of how individuals make sense of their world, focusing on the essence of their experiences. In this study, interpretative phenomenology was used, which is rooted in the works of Heidegger and aims to interpret participants' lived experiences within their social and cultural contexts. This approach allows for a detailed exploration of how local communities experience and make sense of resource management practices in their daily lives, especially in the face of external pressures such as environmental changes and government policies.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were selected using a purposive sampling method to ensure that individuals with relevant knowledge and experiences were included (Longhofer et al., 2012). The criteria for inclusion focused on community members who had actively participated in natural resource management practices and had lived in the remote areas of the study region for at least five years. Participants were required to have direct experience with traditional and/or modern resource management techniques. Exclusion criteria included individuals without direct involvement in resource management activities or those who had resided in the area for less than five years. In total, 12 participants were selected, including 7 men and 5 women. Their ages ranged from 35 to 65 years, with an average age of 50 years. These individuals represented a cross-section of the community, including local leaders, farmers, and fishermen, all of whom had varying levels of engagement in community-based resource management. Beyond these initial inclusion criteria, refinement of participant selection was achieved through community recommendations and snowball sampling, ensuring that individuals with diverse perspectives and varying levels of authority within the community were represented. Recruitment continued until data saturation was reached, defined as the point at which no new themes or insights emerged during successive interviews. This criterion for saturation was applied systematically, with the research team reviewing data after each round of interviews to determine whether additional participants were necessary.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, which were conducted face-to-face in participants' homes or community meeting spaces. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and were guided by an interview protocol designed to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and practices related to natural resource management. The protocol included open-ended questions about participants' involvement in resource management, the role of cultural practices, their experiences with external interventions (such as government policies), and the challenges they faced in maintaining sustainable practices. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable, familiar setting to ensure that participants felt at ease and could freely share their experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and detailed field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual information. During the data collection process, the interview guide was refined iteratively, allowing the researchers to probe emerging themes and adjust questions in subsequent interviews to capture greater depth of insight.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which is particularly suited for exploring how individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds. The analysis followed a systematic process, beginning with transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews verbatim. The transcriptions were then read and re-read to immerse in the data and gain a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences. The data were coded for significant statements or phrases that highlighted key themes. These codes were then grouped into emerging themes, and the relationships between these themes were explored to reveal the underlying meanings of the participants' experiences. The process of coding and theme development was iterative: initial codes were compared across interviews, refined collaboratively by the research team, and re-checked

against the raw transcripts to ensure consistency and depth. When discrepancies arose, they were discussed until consensus was reached. This recursive movement between data, codes, and themes enabled the refinement of analytical categories and ensured that the final themes were firmly grounded in participants' accounts. Throughout the analysis, an iterative process was followed, allowing for ongoing reflection and refinement of the themes. NVivo software was used to assist in organizing the data and ensuring a systematic approach to theme identification, although the primary focus remained on the interpretative process.

### **Ethics**

This study adhered to ethical guidelines set by the relevant research ethics committee, and ethical approval was obtained prior to the start of data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to confidentiality. Participants were assured that all data would be anonymized and stored securely to protect their privacy. Written consent was obtained from each participant, and the study followed international ethical standards in the conduct of research. The study also emphasized the importance of voluntary participation, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence.

## **RESULTS**

### **The Role of Cultural Practices in Resource Management**

Participants consistently emphasized the integral role of traditional cultural practices in their approach to managing natural resources. For many, these practices were not only a form of livelihood but also a deeply ingrained part of their social and spiritual lives. One participant, an elder from the community, stated:

"Our ancestors taught us that the land and the sea are sacred. We only take what we need, never more, to ensure that future generations will have enough."

This sentiment was echoed by several other participants, underscoring the strong cultural connection to land and resources. Cultural rituals, such as seasonal hunting and fishing ceremonies, were seen as vital in maintaining ecological balance and reinforcing community solidarity. However, contrasting perspectives also emerged. Some younger participants expressed skepticism about the continued relevance of these traditions, noting that economic pressures sometimes forced them to prioritize short-term survival over cultural rituals. One younger fisherman remarked, "Sometimes we have no choice but to fish outside the traditional seasons, because otherwise we cannot provide enough for our families." This highlights a tension between preserving cultural practices and addressing immediate livelihood needs.

### **Challenges in Adapting to External Environmental Pressures**

The impact of external environmental changes, particularly climate change, emerged as a second critical theme. Many participants described significant alterations in weather patterns, including more frequent storms and unpredictable rainfall, which had a direct impact on agriculture and fishing, two major sources of livelihood. A local farmer shared:

"The rains used to come at the right time for planting crops, but now we never know when they will come. It's harder to grow what we used to. We used to rely on our knowledge, but now we have to learn new things."

This shift in climatic patterns was also seen as a threat to traditional agricultural practices, which were finely attuned to predictable weather cycles. Participants expressed a growing sense of uncertainty and frustration in adapting to these unpredictable environmental shifts. Yet, not all participants viewed this change negatively. A few acknowledged that learning modern farming techniques and diversifying crops had provided new opportunities. For instance, one respondent noted, "We can no longer rely on old methods alone, but new techniques have helped us grow

vegetables that we never planted before." These contrasting viewpoints illustrate both the vulnerability and adaptability of the community in responding to environmental challenges.

### **Community Resilience and Collective Action**

Despite the challenges posed by external factors, participants highlighted the resilience of their communities. Many spoke of their collective efforts to adapt, demonstrating a sense of solidarity and resourcefulness. A community leader described:

"We don't just wait for help from the outside; we organize ourselves. When the floods came last year, we worked together to build barriers, and we shared food and water. We have learned to support each other."

This collective action was particularly prominent in the face of environmental threats such as floods or droughts. It was evident that while external interventions were sometimes necessary, the community's ability to mobilize and take action was a core strength. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining strong social ties and local governance structures, which facilitated these collective responses to crises. However, a few participants also pointed out limitations in collective action, especially when younger generations migrated to urban areas for work, leaving fewer people to contribute to community initiatives. This contrast suggests that while resilience remains strong, it is not uniform across all households and may be strained under certain demographic changes.

### **The Role of Government Policies and External Support**

Finally, the role of government policies and external support was a recurring theme. Participants expressed mixed feelings about government interventions. While some appreciated the provision of resources and training, others felt that policies often ignored local customs and realities. One participant, a village chief, stated:

"The government brings us training and materials, but they don't always understand how we live. The solutions they offer are often too complicated for us to apply in our daily lives."

This sentiment was shared by others, who emphasized that top-down approaches often failed to account for the specific needs and conditions of remote communities. In contrast, several participants noted positive aspects of government support, particularly in providing access to markets and introducing disaster preparedness programs. One farmer explained, "Even though some policies don't fit, we have benefited from training that taught us how to protect crops from pests more effectively." These differing perspectives illustrate that government interventions are perceived both as enabling and constraining, depending on their alignment with local realities. The results demonstrate that cultural practices, environmental pressures, community resilience, and government interventions are deeply interconnected. The contrasting viewpoints—between elders and youth on traditions, between skepticism and optimism regarding modern techniques, and between criticism and appreciation of government policies—reveal the complexity of community-based resource management. By situating these diverse perspectives within the identified themes, the findings show not only points of consensus but also tensions that shape decision-making and adaptation strategies. This thematic connection underscores that resource management in remote communities cannot be understood through a single narrative, but rather through the interplay of cultural continuity, adaptive innovation, and negotiated external support.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal that the experiences of community members in remote areas are deeply influenced by their cultural beliefs and traditions surrounding natural resource management (Harkin, 2021; Harper & Kayumova, 2023). Through phenomenological analysis, it was found that the community's resource management practices are not only vital for their survival but are also inseparable from their cultural identity and social cohesion (De Los Ríos et al., 2021). This study provides a rich understanding of how local knowledge, cultural rituals, and communal practices play a central role in shaping their relationship with the environment. The study also emphasizes the impact of external pressures, such as climate change and government policies, on these practices, further complicating the management process. At the same time, the findings suggest that cultural continuity

and resilience coexist with tensions and contradictions, especially between older and younger generations and between traditional and modern practices, highlighting the layered complexity of adaptation.

The results contribute significantly to the research question posed in the introduction: How do individuals in remote communities experience and make sense of their involvement in natural resource management? The findings highlight the essential role of cultural practices and community-based decision-making in shaping how natural resources are perceived and managed (Calderon-Berumen, 2021). The lived experiences of participants reveal that resource management goes beyond a mere economic activity; it is deeply embedded in their social fabric, where maintaining balance with nature is seen as a spiritual and communal responsibility (Chan, 2022). The community's ability to adapt to external environmental pressures, while maintaining traditional practices, speaks to their resilience and the importance of social solidarity in overcoming these challenges. However, it is important to recognize that this resilience is not uniform across households or generations, a nuance that complicates overly idealized portrayals of community adaptation. When compared with existing literature, these findings both support and expand upon previous studies on community-based resource management. For example, (Nakhid & Farrugia, 2021) and (Grant et al., 2023) discussed the effectiveness of community-driven models, focusing primarily on operational outcomes. While these studies acknowledge the role of local knowledge, they do not delve deeply into the subjective experiences of the community members. In contrast, this study, through its phenomenological approach, emphasizes how these experiences are not only shaped by local knowledge but are also influenced by social bonds, cultural values, and emotional connections to the land. Furthermore, the study's findings resonate with the work of (Mukavetz, 2023), who noted the importance of cultural rituals in managing resources, though this study expands on those ideas by showing how these practices are under threat from external environmental and political pressures. This contrast points to a gap in much of the literature, where cultural practices are often celebrated but less often interrogated in terms of their fragility under external pressures. The findings therefore provide a more critical lens, suggesting that while traditions are central, they are neither static nor universally effective in responding to new challenges.

### **Implications of Findings**

The findings of this study offer important implications for both academic understanding and practical approaches to resource management in remote communities (Thomas, 2022). From an academic perspective, this research provides valuable insights into how subjective experiences shape the ways in which individuals interact with their environment (Coninx & Stilwell, 2021). The study underscores the importance of cultural practices and community solidarity in sustainable resource management, which traditional models often overlook. Practically, these findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving resource management in such communities must recognize and integrate local knowledge systems and cultural values, rather than imposing external solutions that may not align with community norms. For policymakers, these results emphasize the need for context-specific approaches that acknowledge the unique social and cultural dynamics within each community, which can enhance the effectiveness of resource management initiatives. Additionally, the community's resilience in the face of external pressures, such as climate change and government policies, highlights the importance of supporting local governance structures and community-based decision-making in resource management. At the same time, caution is needed: external interventions that over-romanticize resilience may overlook structural inequities or power imbalances within the communities themselves.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While this study contributes valuable insights into the lived experiences of individuals in remote communities, several limitations must be acknowledged (Van Raemdonck, 2019). First, the study's sample size (12 participants) is relatively small, which may limit the ability to generalize the findings to other communities or regions. Additionally, the study was conducted in a specific cultural and geographical context, which means the findings may not be fully applicable to other remote areas with different socio-cultural dynamics. Another limitation lies in the phenomenological approach

itself: because the method relies heavily on participants' self-reported accounts, the findings are shaped by how individuals articulate their experiences, potentially leaving certain practices or viewpoints underrepresented. Researcher interpretation also introduces the risk of bias, as the process of coding and theme development depends on subjective judgment, even with iterative checks. While these are inherent challenges in phenomenological research, reflexivity and transparency in the analytic process were employed to mitigate such biases. Future studies could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample, as well as incorporating multiple methods of data collection, such as participant observation or focus groups, to enhance the depth and breadth of the findings.

### **Prospective Statement for Future Research**

Building on the findings of this study, future research could expand on how community-driven models can be integrated with modern technological solutions to improve resource management practices in remote areas (Kabatanya & Vagli, 2021). Further investigation into the interplay between traditional knowledge and new technologies could provide valuable insights into sustainable development in marginalized communities. In particular, comparative studies across different cultural contexts could test the transferability of these findings, while longitudinal designs would allow examination of how resilience and adaptation evolve over time. Additionally, exploring the experiences of younger generations in these communities would be valuable to understand how cultural transmission of resource management knowledge is evolving and how younger individuals perceive the future of their environment. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could help to track the long-term impact of community-based resource management strategies on both environmental sustainability and community resilience. By focusing on these areas, future research could continue to build on the contributions of this study, offering more comprehensive solutions to global sustainability challenges.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of individuals involved in natural resource management in remote communities, focusing on how cultural beliefs and external pressures shape their practices. The findings revealed that resource management in these communities is deeply intertwined with cultural identity, social solidarity, and local knowledge systems, which have been largely overlooked in previous research. It was found that while traditional practices remain central, communities face significant challenges due to climate change and government policies. This research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of community-driven resource management by highlighting the subjective experiences that traditional models fail to capture. The practical implications of these findings are significant. For policymakers, the study underscores the importance of designing context-sensitive policies that integrate local knowledge systems and cultural practices, rather than imposing uniform solutions that may conflict with community realities. Programs that build on community solidarity and traditional governance structures could enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of resource management interventions. For practitioners, the results suggest that external support should not replace but complement community-led initiatives, ensuring sustainability while respecting cultural values.

In terms of future research, the findings highlight the need for comparative studies across different cultural and geographical contexts to test the transferability of these insights. Longitudinal research could also provide valuable evidence on how cultural practices and adaptive strategies evolve under continued environmental and political pressures. Furthermore, examining the perspectives of younger generations will be essential to understanding how intergenerational knowledge transfer shapes the future of natural resource management. By linking cultural identity, resilience, and external pressures, this study not only advances academic debates but also provides actionable insights for policy and practice, paving the way for more inclusive and sustainable approaches to resource management in remote communities.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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