8

Africans and their Environment: Challenges and Possibilities of Restoring the Link Strained by Resource Conflict

Marsiale Kamugisha

Introduction

This chapter first and foremost acknowledges the fact that Africa has a pronounced and complex history of rich as well as valued natural and socio-cultural heritage (Ogungbein 2011). It also recognises that traditionally, Africans strongly identified themselves with nature whereby they transcended physical objects to find meaning of their existence in what is superhuman or divine reality (Chemhuru and Maska 2010). Whether this kind of cultural, moral and spiritual attachment and identification with nature still stands the same in contemporary Africa is what should interest the academia and rigorous research-minded people to reflect on. This can help to diagnose the current ecological situation so as to map out why there is generally a transition in African people's perceptions, attitudes, behavioral patterns and interaction with their natural ecosystems. This, absolutely, would help the current generation to get a gist of this fundamental reality: what was, what is, and what is it likely to be in future; and what foreseen consequences are likely to face the future generations if no action is taken now to mitigate the current environmental crisis.

This does not mean that we have in totality to embrace the original status of the environment since it may not be possible due to the changes that have already occurred. Such changes include demographic patterns, consumption habits and terrific advancement in technology and modern science. What matters here is how humanity can interact with nature harmoniously and sustainably without causing more damage on the planet.

The chapter also considers the phenomena of urbanisation and globalisation among other factors such as foreign modern science and technological application that have continued to have a

negative bearing on natural resources in Africa. The abusive practice of these developments has not only heavily impacted on the balance of natural ecosystems (Nyambod 2010) butalso contributed significantly to the existing violent conflicts on the African soil. Much as the continent is famously known to be having the widest biodiversity (biological diversity) and eco-diversity, it has been and is still alarmingly losing this natural heritage at a high rate due to anthropogenic interference precipitated by the global economic order (Musoro 2001) as relayed through globalisation.

The chapter further focuses on how human society has been relating with nature and the outcome of their interaction. There has been an unbalanced relationship between society and nature, as society extracts much from nature compared to what it shares back (Ianos *et al.* 2009). Further, a lot of evidence still shows that the problem of human failure to respect the environment, in particular forests, on which we and other species thrive is on increase due to commercial and industrial activities (Kipalu *et al.* 2016). This consequently is posing a direct long-term threat to the forests in most African countries. The above narrative necessitates us to envisage a robust innovative, holistic and multidisciplinary approach to the whole question of African identity and interface with the environment as an entry point towards finding a sustainable solution.

This chapter makes an effort to highlight how Africans can re-establish their closeness to nature and strengthen it further for a sustainable future. It calls upon us to revisit our current ways and practices of relating with nature, which are not environmentally friendly, and discard them through behavioral change and environmentally ethical practices. I argue that successful efforts in helping Africans restore their identity with nature and interact with it sustainably depend on how each individual is empowered to value and perceive the planet. Understanding it, respecting its intrinsic value and approaching it with friendly practices as the most supporting homestead is fundamental. Considering the current ecological trends, unless Africa rises and speaks with one voice to denounce practices that continue to compromise environmental integrity, Africa and the rest of the world should

not expect to be at peace.

Methodology

This chapter is in four parts. The first part focuses on the traditional African context, the relevance of traditional informal practices and primarily on how Africans in the traditional African society viewed nature and related to it. It examines the philosophy of Ubuntu which appears to be at the cross roads due to changes in socio-economic and political domains. In doing this, it tries to show where the current ecological crisis is deeply root-seated. Chibvongodze (2016) brings it to our attention that the intimate relationship between humanity and environment has been intentionally weakened from the time African ecologies were colonised by Western powers. This view is fundamental to this chapter since it helps us to trace the source of Africans' alienation with nature. The second part interrogates urbanization and the extent to which it has caused harm to the environment and African identity. In this part, westernisation and urbanisation are apparently highlighted as playing a key role in alienating Africans from environment. In this context, Chibvongodze (2016) presents to us continuous efforts of capitalism and urbanisation in alienating Africans from their environment and disregarding the religious link they share with nature. The third part looks at the effects of compromising African identification with nature and how this continues to plunge the African continent into further problems. The last part attempts to look into the possibility of reconciling human beings with nature and the process entails.

The methodology employed in this chapter, in addition to the above highlighted procedure, involves comprehensive review of related literature and critical reflection on the topic under focus.

Traditional African and colonial contexts

Traditional African context and relevance of traditional informal practices

This section focuses majorly on the period before the onset of colonialism and what stood on the ground in terms of the relationship between the African natives and the environment on which they thrived. On one hand, this part brings to the attention

of the readers how Africans highly respected nature and why they had to do it. However, on the other hand, it tries to present the fact that there cannot be a society with no traces of environmental degradation on the planet as long as its people have to meet their basic needs. It seeks to show that much as traditional African Society is upheld for having respected nature, it is not totally dissociated from some traces of environmental degradation. The historicisation in this section is based on reviewing secondary sources.

Pre-colonial Africa portrays a picture of strong cohesion, identity and unity with natural ecosystems. Over centuries, African societies have experienced and shared the same societal environment characterised by harmony, peace, and respect for the natural ecosystems and above all informed by a sound ethics. In fact, traditional African society is presented as a society characterised by enormous reverence to natural resources and the entire environment. African spirituality, which constitutes deep human values, attitudes, beliefs and practices hinged on various African worldviews, played a big role in the preservation of natural resources such as forests and water sources (Jean-Pierre 2013).

Certainly, not all went well with human interaction with the environment. In his discussion on the nature of environmental crisis in Africa, Ogungbein (2011) critically argues that not allAfricans respected nature. To some extent, some Africans contributed to environmental degradation though, compared to what is happening today, there is much difference. What would be most important for us though is not to labour much in making a comparison between traditional African and contemporary environmental degradation, but to search for what is fundamentally escalating the current ecological crisis.

The people who lived in pre-colonial Africa were bound by the moral responsibility and obligation to take care of natural resources for the benefit of the community. They existed in an inviolate state of nature which only came to be infiltrated by the external colonial forces that suppressed and overshadowed the deep meaning as well as values that nature housed for the African natives (Gogoi 2014). One fundamental question is whether the traditional view of environment would be still the same, if colonial

forces had not superimposed themselves on the utilisation of African natural resources to negate traditional means, which were used to sustain the natural wealth.

It is hard to separate/alienate Africans from the environment in the traditional African context. African religion, nature and people themselves happen to form one inseparable and interwoven community like a cobweb. In African cosmology, the geological features (mountains, rivers, water, lakes, rocks, forests) served the function of intermediaries between mankind and God, which made the communication between the two possible (Jean Pierre 2013). According to Ssentongo (2012), these physical features were believed to be habitants of the gods, and degrading them would provoke the gods' anger. Basically, this drove Africans into respectingtheenvironment. This demonstrates a high degree of reciprocity as well as symbiotic relationship between African humanness and naturalness in the context of the wholeness of life.

Pre-colonial Africans employed a set of traditional means enshrined in indigenous knowledge systems in order to guarantee conservation of natural resources. Traditionally, for instance forests were given prominent recognition and due respect because of various services they rendered in supporting livelihoods and peace. The way the environment, forest cover in particular, is cared for, determines the degree of societal stability in terms of peace and livelihoods. By the use of African values, forests in indigenous African communities have been put to use as conservators for rainwater, a source of livelihood but also as an arena for unity or social cohesiveness, peace-building, as well as ensuring economic gain (Kilonzo *et al.* 2009). Africans utilised taboos, totems and folktales to conserve the environment and promote sustainable utilisation of natural wealth. These traditional practices were meant to instil discipline in order to relate ethically and responsibly not only with their fellow human beings but also with the environment (Ssentongo 2012; Mwere 2013).

According to Ssentongo (2012), there is a mystified aspect of the environment accompanied by some stories regarding it. From his interaction with some respondents, similar to many other African cultures, he shows that in Ganda culture there were forests from which it was forbidden to fetch firewood or cut a tree. Failure

to abide by thetaboo, it was held, would lead to losing direction in the forest or life. This reaffirms why the land of which the elements of nature are part was perceived as a divinity with sacred qualities and given high reverence in various African communities. Any profanation or transgression of it would require a public ritual purification through the sacrifice of an animal (a cow or goat) in order to maintain the intimate relationship.

The observance of taboos and norms was for ensuring sustainability of the environment and living in harmony. This helped in protecting rare indigenous species. Below, Mwere (2013) highlights some taboos linked to nature which could still be relevant to the process of pursuing sustainable environmental conservation:

a)   Do not cut down or knock down unripe wild fruits
b)   Do not excrete in a well
c)   Do not kill a frog
d)   Do not fish in a well
e)   Do not kill a pangolin

Each of these taboos has a special meaning and educative aspect attached to it. These regulatory mechanisms were culturally put in place to safeguard human identity with nature. However, today these mechanisms are no longer given value as it was traditionally, and the purpose for employing them to forbid people to approach natural resources anyhow has been given less attention (Jean-Pierre 2013). This scenario is not helping young generations who seem to be cut off from the traditional African culture which emphasises access to indigenous knowledge and its utilisation. According to Golden & Comaroff (2015), taboos in Africa, for stance, in Madagascar are no longer stable and adhered to strongly like in the past. It is also an undisputable reality that many people, especially young ones, are losing focus of the relevance of these traditional means and strategies of passing on awareness on how to promote and respect nature. This has been largely a result of social change and cultural dissolution due to increased migration and social contact.

Among other drivers of taboo non-adherence in Madagascar are changes in environmental policy, closely aligned to political

change; changes from cultural and religious syncretism, socialism to global capitalism; and periods of political upheaval which may have affected African identity with nature. This is part of the reality happening generally in African countries. For instance, according to National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) (2008), it is on record that Uganda's traditional system of governance is not clearly studied. This same system is also largely not documented, not really recognised, thus not mainstreamed within the modern system of environmental governance.

This is partially due to the continuous infiltration and influence of external influences and the crisis of African leadership that tends to pronounce the Western culture/practices over the African culture, which has been perceived as inferior.

The increasing loss of momentum in the use of traditional means to sustain the link between Africans and nature has put the spirit of Ubuntu at crossroads as a result of the emergenceof the now dominant individualistic spirit.The philosophy of Ubuntu which has gained prominence in African intellectual discourse not only expresses concern about human interaction with nature but also non-human beings (Chibvongodze, 2016).

Contrary to the above worldview, people in the western culture/world are conceived of having a sense of being separate from nature. This came along with Enlightenment which carried along with it the feeling of domination over nature. The approach rhymes with the philosophy advanced by Descartes in 1637, which presents us the separation of human minds and bodies, culminating into the idea that humans and nature are separate entities, with the human domain being dominant (Vining *et al.* 2008). Juxtaposed to the Western thinking and philosophy of individualism which dichotomises the relationship between humanity and nature, the African philosophical view of Ubuntu transcends the western in respecting nature. Ubuntu attempts to explain why the death of Chinua Achebe, the great African novelist, was linked to that of a fallen tree termed as *iroko*. What is

seemingly exposed to us is the assumption that such closeness of a tree and the personality of Chinua Achebe depict inseparability, interconnectedness and interconnectivity of an African life and nature. This ultimately expresses the intimate relationship the contemporary Africans ought to have in order to sustain friendly practices on the natural environment. The argument therefore, is that both human and other beings (living and non-living) inherently exist in the same space and time, depend on each other for giving true meaning to their existence, have the same ultimate origin and that each being is teleological in character.

The philosophy of Ubuntu is also explained by Mbiti (1969), who talks of a community whose members depend on each other. The defining spirit is: 'I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am'. Much as the aspect of nature does not vividly feature in Mbiti's expression, it remains vital that Africans live in harmony with the environment because of the services it provides them. Murithi tries to show that in territories belonging to these countries of Africa, a person is expected to have ubuntu qualities of openness, generosity, sharing and hospitality. These values have to be respected and practiced if African connection with nature is to be restored and maintained (Murithi 2006). In Murithi's view, to be human means to possess these qualities and to practice them.

Peoplein traditional Africa are known to have been notoriously religious (Mbiti 1969). Wherever an African was, there was his/her religion. He/she carries it to the fields where he/she is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop. He/she takes it to everywhere he goes. Gumo *et al.* (2012) also recognise the importance of African spirituality and its contribution towards respecting the environment. Although this spirituality permeated the life of Africans and acted as an inner motivator for one to relate well with nature, today, due to colonial invasion and colonisation of the African mind, the ecological situation is increasingly taking a different trend.

Environment per se constitutes the basis of people's diverse cultures, beliefs, aspirations and livelihoods, which is an expression of ecological linkage and interconnectedness. This implies that no

single African person can dissociate his or her identity from the environment and continues to live. The tendency to create dualism and separateness of humans and natural environment only leads to a life not worth living as it may be characterised by conflicts, misery and helplessness. This implies that if human beings are to live in peace and harmony, they have to struggle to realise their existence through self-identification with the environment.

The philosophy of Ubuntu is at crossroads. The spirit of individualism has permeated the African society, severing the view of nature as belonging to all and as a natural gift that needs to be shared by every being on the planet. This has created and is exacerbating a situation of individual competition and scramble for natural resources which are shrinking daily.

The failure to seriously recognise the philosophy of Ubuntu and make it work in approaching nature is one of the factors responsible for the widening gap between humans and nature. Analytically, there is a fundamental and ideological problem that needs to be uprooted and this struggle must begin in the mind of every African who lives on the African soil today. It can be argued that there is no way Africans can appreciate their unique identity with environment as long as external influences that alienate them from the physical world they live in still stand. One would be justified to say that the mind of an African has been disoriented not to view himself/herself and nature as part of one living community. This explains and justifies why environment is being approached arrogantly in Africa.

As Socrates states in his Credo, an unexamined life is not worth living (K'odhiambo; Gunga and Akaranga 2013). It is worthwhile, therefore, for the contemporary Africans to examine their poor relationship with nature purposely to reinvigorate it. This brings us to interrogate and examine the cause of the continued wounding of the relationship between humans and nature. This task cannot be executed outside the colonial context of what consequently happened to the Africans' relationship with nature on and post the advent of colonialism and imperialism on the African continent.

Colonial context

This sub-section discurses the colonial factor and other aspects associated with it that have influenced the traditional African means of relating and treating nature in terms of perception, attitude and practices.

Several scholarly sources show that the African identity and environmental crisis is basically a manifestation of the effects of the deep-seated and long- term effects of colonial suppression, dominance, and distortion of natural boundaries (Adams 2009; Arwolo 2010; Kochalumchuvattil 2010).

There is no way colonialism can escape from being blamed for the current environmental abuse. According to Ikuenobe (2014), colonialists undermined Africans by calling them uncivilised people in a 'dark continent' whose natural resources must be exploited by the Europeans for export and as support to their industries. In order to accomplish their mission of using Africa as a rich base for raw materials, they established colonial social structures that consequently created environmental problems in Africa. Therewas a difference between Africans and Europeans in terms of their world view of nature. While Africans' cosmological and ontological views and religious practices supported their attitude towards nature conservation and preservation, Europeans cherished different forms of exploiting environment as key indicators and models of development.

Ideally, although there is no single factor responsible for the current ecological crisis, colonialism remains the basic and arch factor responsible for the confrontation and loosening of Africans' relationship with nature. The colonial context suggests colonialism as the genesis of the contemporary ecological scenario characterised by environmental degradation, resource scarcity and conflicts. Colonialism is responsible for this kind of situation since it disoriented the African mind and spirit. It can be argued as it is already asserted by Mapuva & Chari (2010), that it is colonialism that has indeed led to the birth of other factors such as poor governance, which have continued to act upon the African attachment to nature by weakening it.

Chibvungozde (2016) explains how colonialism succeeded in removing the element of Ubuntu from African ecology. He notes that there has been an unbalanced interplay between the two cultures. The racial supremacy planted by Europeans through colonialism, capitalism, institutionalized racism (Plumbwood 2003 cited in Chibvungozde 2016) and the new waves of globalisation has overwhelmed Africans' capacity to maintain their traditional attachment to nature.

Colonial practices and tendencies have created a situation where Africans fail to appreciate themselves, their values, and traditional practices. With the onset of colonialism, African indigenous knowledge and systems were devalued and demonised. It is this kind of situation that has led to the negation of skilled Africans such as 'rainmakers', 'herbalists', 'traditional healers', and 'elders guarding forests' and substituted them with the 'experts' in the modern sense such as 'climatologists', and 'botanists'.

In the processes of conservation, expert professionalisation has alienated Africans from their fellow Africans and nature (Chibvungozde 2016). In fact, the success of colonial masters in bringing about this disconnection has daunted the African mind to perceive nature as something distanced from human beings in time and space. Consequently, this has created room for ruthless conquering of nature in order to meet human needs. This is a big error which puts the life of an African at cross roads, a worsening trend that continues to influence the decision making process of Africans in the pursuance of sustainability.

It would however be unjust to keep a blind eye on post-colonial African leaders who should also be held accountable for what is hovering around the African continent in terms of resource exploitation and robbery. By and large, most African leaders have always walked in the shoes of their former colonial masters (Mapuva & Chari 2010). Many African leaders have personalised resources at the expense of the poor. What was expected of them by their subjects after independence in terms of utilising both natural and human resources was shattered (Ebegbulem 2016). Those who took over leadership inherited colonial leadership elements and traits which are persistently

reflected in the way current leaders often indifferently relate to nature.

There has been debate by two political schools namely; Afrocentrists and Euro-centrists, on who is responsible for the ongoing identity question and ecological crises in Africa. Some scholars who belong to the Afrocentric school of thought such as Souare, and Adeleke (2015) argue that economic and political crises bedevilling Africa can be attributed to colonialism. On the contrary, the Eurocentric school of thought argues that African political leadership is responsible for governance failure and lack of respect for human rights and rule of law. However, Mazrui blames this situation on the above two factors (Mapuva & Chari 2010). On account of the above discussion, Mazrui's view is more convincing. Both factors are strongly at play and therefore need to be simultaneously interrogated, but also acknowledging their interrelatedness.

The above factors are closely linked with urbanisation, which has also had a negative bearing on ecosystems such as wetlands, water bodies, and forests.

Urbanisation, environment, and African identity
The impact of urbanisation on natural resources and African identity cannot be denied. It should be noted that the modern concept of urbanisation with its effects on the environment is not as old as the people of Africa but has its roots in colonialism. The emergency of colonialism and capitalism brought along with it the concept of urbanisation into Africa. It is this concept that continues to make Africa face the problem of poor self-identification with nature through such practices as horticulture, industrialization, and expansion of urban centers (Özden and Enwere 2012). Its misapplication has rendered harmful practices not only on the African identity but also on the ecosystems, and reversing this trend is very difficult and painful. Chibvungozde (2016, p.165) states:

> Urbanising Africa consequently shunned traditional livelihoods on eking the land. This disconnection of

Africans from the land and the larger environment particularly in a rapid urbanising society threatened the understanding, tolerance, and respect they have for nature. Under such conditions of metabolic drift and alienation of Africans from their natural environment, transferring the practice of *Ubuntu* to the environment is compromised. In conditions that Africans have been distanced from the environment that once formed part of their identity, it is thus not surprising that *Ubuntu* is understood only within the context of human relations, for the intimate relationship with nature in a capitalist and urbanised society is minimal.

Currently Africa is facing an increasingly high rate of urbanisation. According to Lwasa (2014), the rate of urbanisation has steadily increased for the last period of three decades and it is estimated that by 2030, more than half of the African population will be dwelling in urban areas. The many mushrooming urban centers and their attendant concentration of too many people in one place exert a lot of pressure on the environment in terms of demand for construction space, fuel energy, and water. Lwasa further points out that urbanisation in Africa is increasingly linked with economic growth which targets production of high volumes of goods, growth of mega cities such as Kinshasa, Cairo, and Lagos. In this same vein, it is portrayed that this kind of urbanisation rate and expansion does not only create opportunities, but also poses challenges in environmental management, climate change adaption and mitigation, as well as disaster and risk reduction.

Ajibola *et al.* (2012) explain the complex situation facing Lagos in Nigeria due to the effects of urbanisation on wetlands. Lagos, which is generally perceived to be the largest city in sub-Saharan Africa, has attracted migration of large numbers of people whose demands overwhelmingly outpace the existing urban management system. There is a clear manifestation of the effects of socio-economic activities conducted in urban centers on the

environment where, for instance, there is terrific as well as gradual loss of vegetation cover, suspended solid substances, hydrological changes, increased risks of flooding and poor garbage disposal.

Generally, looking at the situation in most African urban areas, urbanisation plays a big part in alienating city dwellers from nature as illustrated by phenomena such asdumping waste into rivers/lakes, overdependence on charcoal, and substituting it with construction projects. However, urbanisation per se is not bad. The problem lies in how it is planned and managed.

Over centuries and decades, African people have depended on wood-based biomass (fuel wood and charcoal) for cooking. The charcoal industry has gained economic value in Sub-Saharan Africa and may go beyond US $ 12 billion by 2030, with a possibility of employing 12 million people (Sander *et al.* 2011). Much as it is indicated that there is a paradigm shift from the rural habits and traditional practices due to the influence of the concept of modernity, which manifests itself in the nature of urban housing and time management (Cirard 2002), heavy use of biomass still holds. With the mounting urbanisation, coupled with high migration influx into cities and urban centers, it is true that some African people tend to adopt new cooking techniques and consumption patterns but this has not stopped majority of African people to abdicate fuel wood and charcoal.Since pre-historic times, fuel wood has largely remained the key energy source for billions of people globally.

Currently, an estimate of 2.7 billion people in poor countries survives primarily on wood. What makes the difference in Africa today is the indiscriminate harvesting of wood unlike in the pre-colonial era. Most people who have resorted to fuel wood find it favourable most probably due to other factors such as rising liquid fuel cost, poverty, unemployment, population pressure etc (Waris and Antahal 2014). Alarmingly, as Waris and Antahal contend, while the demand for fuel wood is persistently scaling up, there is a decline in the supply curve of fuel wood in some parts of developing countries. This is attributed to the expansion of land under cultivation and the attendant shrinkage of forests.

In Sub-Saharan Africa alone, it is reported that some 700

million people use traditional biomass for cooking. The lamentable aspect of this is that while some regions are registering a decline in the use of traditional biomass, in Africa it continues to skyrocket (Limbe *et al.* 2015). The influx of people to cities comes along with rural cooking practices which lead to the extinction of trees in indigenous communities (International Expert Forum Group Meeting, 2010). In addition, poverty and lack of access to alternative environment friendly sources of energy for cooking plays a key role in keeping people stuck to the use of fuel wood hence causing further alienation (Waris and Antahal, 2014; Zidago and Wu 2015). This has brought changes in the way Africans relate and communicate with nature. Rural areas, where people have been strongly and culturally attached to nature and respecting it because of the identity, values and services it shares with humanity, are now targeted by the town dwellers and money-minded people for charcoal extraction and commercial projects.

It is also true that as a result of urbanisation, there is an influx of people attracted to urban areas and cities in Africa in search for space and employment. This exerts too much pressure on the environment which may end up in conflicts over natural resources which are increasingly becoming scarce. A good example of this is Lagos and Kano in Nigeria where there has been significant loss of wetlands as a result of urbanisation (Ajibola *et al.* 2012). Uganda itself is having a problem of shrinking water resource in both urban and rural areas, which becomes a source of conflicts to communities (Twesingye 2009).

The consequence of this is compromising the identity of Africans with nature and not creating an opportunity for them to feel proud of what they are in their continent's environment.

Effects of compromising African identification with nature

Some sources associate the current environmental crisis and resource conflicts and their effects in contemporary Africa with colonialism as well as imperialism (Özden and Emwere 2012). Ever since they achieved their independence, as a result of failure to respect nature and lack of justice in resource use, most African countries have never attained peace. This can be seen in Uganda,

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Southern Sudan and Central African Republic (CAR). According to the Friends Committee on National Legislation, it is stated that:

> Since independence in 1960, following over 100 years of French colonial rule, CAR has suffered from colonial insecurity, multiple coup d'états and poor governance. This gap in poor governance and general instability has created increasing tensions over natural resources that remain a significant underlying cause and contributor of the ongoing conflict… Conflict itself is adding to further degradation and tensions over natural resources. The influx of displaced refugees into host communities has strained and deteriorated an already water supply, sanitation and hygiene conditions. Internal displacement has also increased through deforestation and inadequate waste management (2014, p.5).

This is not news to the African people, it is a reality that has been happening in the majority of African countries. There are many pronounced examples about this. Like many other African countries, since her independence in 1962, Uganda has been suffering from civil unrest and violent conflicts. Due to her weak environmental governance, it continues to face environmental-conflicts (USAID 2011). It has been argued that poor leadership is one of the factors that should be held accountable for the conflict situation whose harmfulness extends to the living earth, leaving human relationship with nature wounded. This is partly a result of lacking the spirit of stewardship and care for sustaining nature (ACCORD 2006).

In his article, *African Approaches to Building Peace and Social Solidarity*, Murithi states:

> At the core of the crisis within Africa's war-affected countries and regions is the desire to acquire power and secure resources for one group of elites or one ethno-national group at the expense of others. In Coted'Ivoire for example, the country has become virtually split in half with government and armed resistance movements on opposite sides. The issue of identity has mixed with

culture, heritage and the control of economic resources, to create a cauldron of political tension and violence. In the Darfur region of the Sudan, ethnic militia are now [then] beginning to fight each other, after having fought since early 2003 against Janjaweed militia, which is alleged to have ties to the government… In Somalia, clan-based militia are now confronting each other. Somalia has effectively become a proxy battlefield for the so-called 'war on terror (ACCORD 2006, p.10).

Murithi further presents us with countries which have encountered violent conflicts whose effects have generated the influx of refugees into neighboring countries and the occurrence of internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Democratic Republic of Congo; Rwanda which experienced genocide in 1994; Chad and Sudan which tasted a long period of violent conflict;Guinea, specifically in the Muno River Union region; have suffered from the effects of violent conflicts, and some of the conflicts are linked to the heightened competition and scramble for natural resources. There is no violent conflict or war that goes without disrupting a society's environment and social network.

The issue of natural resource-based conflicts is a clear manifestation of loosening what bounded Africans with nature.The land factor in Zimbabwe has always sparked off violent conflicts among the Zimbabweans and the white settlers as a result of the Land Appointment Act of 1930, and the Land Tenure Act of 1969 which replaced it that gave rise to inequality and inequity (Donald 2005). These legal systems have led to the marginalisation of Africans, making them aliens on their own motherland. It is such a situation characterised by vulnerable legal systems deeply rooted in colonialism that has continued to create misunderstandings, hatred and sometimes bloody scenarios among Africans. This situation impoverishes the poor who find it too difficult to access economic opportunities. Generally, the question of natural resources remains a big thorn in Africa. Donald notes:

Zimbabwean history seethes with struggle about land, although the country has been independent for years. The

Land Appointment Act of 1930, and its successor, the Land Tenure Act of 1969, allocated fixed 'Reserves' for the Africans dispossessed of their fertile land by the settlers. These were located in areas of poor soils, characterised by difficulty of access and overcrowding. The former lands became 'European lands'… Purchase areas were available to a few (richer) African commercial farmers to buy (2005, p.31).

The question of land conflict is rooted in humans' individualistic mentality. This kind of situation has not only left behind in Africa a history daunted with a distorted identity, loss of selfhood, hate of one's culture, deprivation of patriotism, loss of self-appreciation but also lack of courage to counteract those factors that cause bloodshed on the African land.

It may be argued that there are some model countries in Africa which are peaceful with minimal conflicts. But the idea that what affects one part of an entity also affects the whole cannot be negated. Similarly, if one African country is suffering from violent conflicts over natural resources deeply rootedin a destabilised ecological ecosystem, this affects the normal functioning of other countries. This is what Blumenfeld (2009) tries to confirm when he portrays how the ecological linkage between water, wetlands and forests demonstrates the interdependence and interconnectedness of the ecosystems and the planet. This can also be based on the argument that no country lives in isolation. As Mbiti (1969) puts it, we all need each other, which defines an understanding that my existence is fulfilled in the existence of a community and depends on proper functioning of ecosystems.

This calls for Africans' concerted efforts in reviving and protecting their common natural heritage to avoid unnecessary conflict situations that pose a threat to life in general.

The African people have been bound to nature, while perceiving it as a fountain of their livelihoods. Contrary to this, contemporary Africa has been confronted with a changing scenario where the elements and feelings of reciprocity, dialectical and symbiotic relationship between her people and environment

are being overshadowed and constrained by a new foreign culture. It is such culture that imposes unfriendly actions on nature emanating from an anthropocentric perspective. This is characterized by selfish human tendencies and pride of considering other beings as conquerable, and all anchored in the argument that other species are irrational.

Generally,it is apparent that the effects of a distorted African identity with nature cannot be contained in a country that is affected. It is by natural flow that for instance polluted water and air will have to spill over and affect life in other countries (Machoki 2013). Upon this basis, Africa does not have to take the current ecological situation for granted but must rise and take action to reinvigorate her connection with nature.

Conclusion

We generally notice that due to foreign influence, Africa has increasingly lost and continues to lose the remaining elements of her identity. Due to the influence of urbanization and neo-colonialism, there is detachment from totems, taboos, proverbs and folktales which have been used in indigenous communities to seal people's relationship with nature. This is unfortunate, as some of these traditional means are still relevant to the current situation. Ignoring such traditional means of conservation and preservation of nature is denial of one's identity and relationship with other beings in the ecosystem.

The question of how contemporary Africans are relating to nature continues to raise debate on whether Africans know the fundamental issues underlying the current identity crisis. What is needed is for Africans to understand their situation and draw lessons, other than exclusively lamenting and blaming this situation on European slavery and Colonialism.

The question of governance and leadership is also contributing to the alienation of African identity to the environment. Some leaders who want to overstay in power because of their personal interests very often interfere with the work of institutions which have the mandate to protect and promote environment for peace and harmonious living. This kind of

attitude by the leaders demoralises those who have been put in charge to care for nature.

We also note that corruption on the African continent has become endemic and a serious barrier to sustainable living and sustainable development. There are many countries in Africa where political leadership is there to serve personal aggrandisement and self-glorification.

Weak policies and failure to abide by the supreme laws of the land as well as operating outside the environmental frameworks brings into force weak environmental governance. This is what most African countries are suffering from. Not until African countries have strong and respected environmental regulatory frameworks, they will not be able to restore the lost relationship with nature and enjoy peace.

Lack of investment in critical mass awareness projects for the people to be able to hold their leaders accountable under the framework of governance and to take individual action responsibly is still a bottleneck. Vigorous and collective rediscovery of African identity with nature is very essential.

Possibility of restoring the traditional connection to the environment

The starting point rotates on one thing, namely, whether there is hope for Africa to rediscover the lost values but above all her identity with nature. It would be in order for the Africans to admit that whereas the problem is rooted in the colonial era, they are also responsible for the currently increasing ecological crisis.

In light of the above discussion, in order to revive the link between Africans and environment, African people need to recognize and do the following:

a) Acceptance that some African elite have continued to collaborate with external agents in plundering African natural resources, which is creating an environmental horror in the global ecosystem. However, African citizens need to transcend this level of acceptance and take a rubout action in demanding accountability from the elite who are responsible for such environmental abuse. This should be based on the

lessons drawn from the environmental catastrophes in some countries as a result of anti-nature activities, conflicts, and interference from other countries.

b) Conceptualization of human relationship with nature. African people need to understand that much as there is demand on the restoration and reapplication of the element of Ubuntu, it makes sense if this is not only conceptualized within the context of human relations. This should also extend to include nature. Moreover, African Traditional Religion's interest is to have African's existence and nature treated equally, without placing human beings in a position that is used to subjugate and conquer nature anthropocentrically (Chibvungozde 2016).

c) Re-awakening African consciousness should be part of the strategy to use by the Africans in order to refocus on how best they can restore their identity with nature.

d) Not until Africans have realized that they are only stewards but not masters of creation will they be able to rediscover their identity with nature. Therefore, there is need to give due respect to the Supreme Being (Known as God, the Creator) who is the owner, governor of all creation and constantly be aware that they are held accountable, charged with a responsibility to care for creation but not to destroy as it is shown in the book of Revelation 11: 18 that, "God will destroy those who destroy the earth" (Hyneman & Shore 2013, p.12).

e) African people need to change their thinking, individual attitudes and practices towards nature. But where should this change start from? One African proverbs goes that "a fish rots from the head" (Memo & Muleya 2014). If Africa is to claim back her values and identity, Africans must decolonize their minds and the best tool is the use of education for sustainable development. Education is one of the best tools we can ever use to transform the relationship between Africans and nature. However, Africans need to be careful on selecting the type of education that is suitable for bringing about the desired change. The current formal education

system in Africa is largely colonial-based and void of what suits African conditions. It does not put emphasis on traditional values and strategies of sustaining an African identity with nature. Proverbs, totems, and folktales are being abandoned yet it is in these that elders and parents in the traditional African society packaged values to pass on to young people deliberately to instil discipline before nature and fellow people. There is, therefore, need to orient education curriculum right away from the primary level to incorporate informal education to come up with a hybrid curriculum that marries what is good from both African and Western cultures in view of re-establishing a good relationship with nature.

f) Majority of the young people in contemporary Africa lack knowledge of certain species, most of which have become endangered. They do not deserve to be blamed for this lack of knowledge since this has been dictated upon by certain circumstances beyond their control. It should be the role of elders and old people in society to educate them both formally and informally about endangered but valuable species and why they should be preserved. This requires combined efforts of older African citizens for continuity and a better future.

References

ACCORD 2006. African Approaches to Building Peace and Social Solidarity. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution,* Vol. 6 (2), 9-18.

Acheson, B. 2001. The Tanzanian Invasion of Uganda: A Just War? *International Third World Studies Journal and Review*, Vol. XII, http://www.unomaha.edu/itwsjr/ThirdXII/AchesonBrownTanzaniaVol12.pdf.(Accessed August 12, 2016).

Adams, W. M. 2009.*Green Development: Environment and Sustainability in a Developing World*, 3rd edn. New York: Routledge.

Adeleke, T. 2015. Africans and Afroncentric Historicism: A

critique. *Advances in Historical Studies* 4, pp.200-215.

Adu-Gyamfi, Y. 2011. Indigenous Beliefs and Practices in Ecosystem Conservation: Response of the Church. *Scriptura*, 107, pp.145-155. http://scriptura.journals.ac.za/pub/article/viewFile/132/140 (accessed May 7, 2016).

Ajibola, M. O; Adewale, B.A; Ijasan, K.C. 2012. Effects of Urbanisation on Lagos Wetlands. *International Journal of Business and Social Science.*Vol. 3 (17), 310, pp.310-318.

Akake, T. 2011. *A Path to Degenerative Development: Mabira Forest Giveaway.* Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc.

Anyaehie, C. M. 2013.Appraisal of African Identity for Sustainable Development. *Open Journal of Philosophy,* Vol.3 (1), A, pp.150-154.

Arowolo, D. 2010. The Effect of Western Civilisation and Culture on Africa, *Afro-Asian Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 1 (1), pp.2229-5313.

Chemhuru, M. and Masaka, D. 2010. Taboos as Sources of Shona People's Environmental Ethics, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Vol. 12 (7), pp.520-5509.

Chibvongdze, D.T. 2016. Ubuntu is Not only about the Human! Analysis of the role of African Philosophy and Ethics in Environmental Management.*J HUM Ecol*, Vol. 53(2), pp.156-166.

Cirard, P. 2002. Charcoal production and use in Africa-What future? *Unasylva*, Vol.53, pp.2-11.

Blumenfeld, S., Lu, C., Christophersen, T. and Coates, D., 2009.Water, Wetlands and Forests.*A Review of Ecological,*

Economic and Policy Linkages.Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity and Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, Montreal and Gland.CBD Technical Series No. 47.https://www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-47-en.pdf. (accessed September 4, 2016).

Golden, C. D., and Comaroff, J. 2015.Effects of Social Change on Wildlife Consumption Taboos in northern Madagascar.*Ecology and Society*, Vol.20 (2), p.41.http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol20/iss2/art41/ (accessed June 14, 2016).

Ebegbulem, C.J. 2012. Corruption and Leadership Crisis: Nigeria in Focus, *International Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, Vol. 3 (11), pp. 1-9.

FAO. 2011. Economic and Social Significance of Forests for Africa's Sustainable DevelopmentNature and Fauna, Vol. 25, Issue 2.

Friends Committee on National Legislation. 2014. Shared African Republic Crisis: Managing Natural Resources for Peace. *A Quaker Lobby in the Public Interest.*

Gogoi., G. 2014.An Ecological Approach to Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science,* Vol. 19, Issue 11, pp. 01-04.

Gumo, S; Gisege S.O; Raballah, E & Ouma, C. 2012.Community African Spirituality through Ecology: Challenges and Prospects for the 21st Century. *Religions,* 3, pp.523-543.

Hyneman, J. and Shore, C. 2013. *Why Are We Stewards of Creation? World Vision's understanding of How We Relate to Creation.* Natural Environment and Climate Issues.http://www.wvi.org/sites/default/files/World%20Visi on%E2%80%99s%20Biblical%20Understanding%20of%20H

ow%20we%20Relate%20to%20Creation_Full_0.pdf
(accessed September 20, 2016).

Ianos, I., Peptenatu, D., and Zamfir, D. 2009. Respect for Environment and Sustainable Development. *Carpathion Journal of Earth and Environmental Sciences*, Vol 4 (1), pp. 81-93.

International Expert Forum Group Meeting 2010. *Indigenous Peoples: Development with Culture and Identity. Articles 3 and 32 of the UnITED Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, pp.12-
14).https://encrypted.google.com/#q=International+Expert +Forum+Group+Meeting.+2010.+Indigenous+Peoples:++ Development+with+Culture+and+Identity.++Articles+3+an d+32+of+the+UnITED+Nations+Declaration+on+the+Ri ghts+of+Indigenous+Peoples+(New+York%2C+12-14). (accessed October 7, 2016).

Jean-Pierre, K. B. 2013. The Contribution of the Sacred in Traditional African Societies to Environmental Ethics, *Anthropology*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, pp.1-110.

Kanu, A. 2013. African Identity and the Emergence of Colonisation (OSA). *American InternationalJournal of Contemporary Research*, Vol. 3, (6), p. 15.

Kilonzo, S. M., Kurgat S. G., and Omare, S. G. 2009. The Role of Taboos in the Management of Natural Resources and Peace-building: A Case Study of the Kakamega Forest in Western Kenya. *African Peace and Conflict Journal.* Vol.2 (1), pp. 40-54.

Kipalu, P; Kanσ, L; Bouchra, S; Vig, S. & Loyombo, W. 2016.*Securing Forest Peoples' Rights and Tackling Deforestation in The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): Deforestation drivers, Local Impacts and Rights -based Solutions.*Moreton-in-Marsh, FPP.http://www.forestpeoples.org/sites/fpp/files/publicatio n/2016/05/fppdrcreportinternet-2.pdf (accessed September

10, 2016).

Kizza, J. 2013. 'Kasese mining causing floods'.*The Observer.*http://observer.ug/business/79-businesstopstories/28157-kasese-mining-causing-floods (accessed June 2, 2016).

Kochalumchuvattil, T. 2010. The Crisis of Identity in Africa: A Call for Subjectivity, *Kritike*, Vol. 4 (1), pp.1-4.

K'odhiambo, A. K., Gunga, S. O. & Akaranga, I. S. 2013. Analysis of Socrates' Credo, "The unexamined life is not worth living" in relation to learners who fail the Kenyan certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) Examinations, *International Journal of Humanities and Science*, vol. 3, (21), pp.159-160.

Lwasa, S. 2014. Managing African urbainisation in the context of Environmental Change.*INTERdiscplina*, vol. 2 (2), pp.2263ff.

Mapuva, J., and Chari, F. 2010. Colonialism No longer an Excuse for Africa's Failure.*Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Vol. 12, No. 5, pp.1520-5509.

Mawere, M. 2012. 'Buried and Forgotten but Not Dead': Reflections on 'Ubuntu' in Environmental Conservation in South Eastern Zimbabwe,*Global Journal of Human Social ScienceGeography & Environmental GeoSciences,* Vol. 12, Issue 10.

Mbiti, J. 1969. *African Religion and Philosophy,* 2^(nd) edn. Johannesburg: Heinemann Publishers Limited.

Muleya, D. February 7, 2014. A fish rots from the head. *Zimbabwean Independent.*http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2014/02/07/fish-rots-head/ (accessed August 15, 2016).

Murithi, T. 2006. African Approaches to Peace and Social

Solidarity. *African Journal on Conflict Restoration*, Vol. 6 (2), pp.9-34.

Musoro, L. 2001. *The Impact of Globalisation on Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in African Economies.*Western Michigan University.http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1009&context=africancenter_icad_archive (accessed August 10, 2016).

Mwere, M. 2013. Traditional Environment Conservation Strategies in Pre-Colonial Africa: Lessons for Zimbabwe to Forget or To Carry Forward Into The Future? *Afro Asian `Journal of Social Sciences,* Vol. 4 (4), pp.2229–5313.

NEMA 2008. *State of Environment Report 2008*, Kampala: National Environment Management Authority.

Nyambod, M. E. 2010. Environmental Consequences of Rapid Urbanisation, *Journal of Environmental Protection*, 1, pp.15-23.

Ocheni, S. and Nwanko, C.B. 2012.Analysis of Colonialism and its Impact in Africa.*CsCanada.* Vol. 8 (3), pp. 46-54.

Ogobeidi, M. M. 2012. Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria since 1960: A socio-economic Analysis, *Journal of Nigeria Studies*, Vol. 1 (2), pp.1-10.

Omotosho, I. F. 2014. A Critique of the Question of African Philosophy,*IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Sciences (IOSR-JHSS)*, Vol. 19, Issue 7, pp.61-66.

Özden, K., and Enwere, C. 2012. Urbanization and its political challenges in Developing Countries, *Eurosian Journal of Business and Economics,* 5(10), pp.99-120.

Pope Francis - May 24, 2015. *Laudato Si:* On the Care for our

Common Home.

Pope Paul VI - March 26, 1969. *Popularum Progressio:* Encyclical on the Development of Peoples.

Sander, K., Hyseni, B., Haider, W.2011. *Wood-Based Biomass Energy Development for Sub-Saharan Africa: Issues and Approaches.* Washington, DC: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank Group. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTAFRREGTOPENE RGY/Resources/717305-1266613906108/BiomassEnergyPaper_WEB_Zoomed75.pdf (accessed October 12, 2016).

Ssentongo, J. S. 2012. *Inquiry into a Weathering Heritage: The Relevance of Traditional Baganda Approaches to Sustainable Environmental Conservation.* Kampala: Uganda Martyrs University Book Series.

Twesingye, M. 2009. How Effective are Uganda's Environmental Policies? A Case Study of Water Resources in 4 Districts, With Recommendations on How to Do Better.*Mountain Research and Development*, Vol. 29 (2), 121-127. http://www.bioone.org/doi/abs/10.1659/mrd.1092. (accessed October17, 2016).

University for Peace 2004. *Environmental Degradation as a case of Conflict in Darfur.* Khartoum: REUTERS.

USAID 2011. *Climate Change and Conflict in Uganda: The Cattle Corridor and Karamoja.* CC Discussion Paper, No. 3. ttp://www.fessglobal.org/Publications/Other/Climate_Chan ge_and_Conflic_%20in_Uganda.pdf. (accessed September 5, 2016).

Usuman, T. A. 2006. Old Conflict, New Complex Emergency: An Analysis of Darfur Crisis, Western Sudan. *Nordic Journal of*

African Studies, Vol. 15 (3), pp.406-427.

Waris, V. S. and Antahal, P. C. 2014. Fuel wood, Scarcity, Poverty and Women: Some Perspectives, *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 19, Issue 8, pp.21-33.

Zickgraft, C; Vigil, S; Ozer, P.& Gemenne, F. 2016. *The Impact of Vulnerability and Resilience to Changes on Mobility Patterns in West Africa.*http://www.knomad.org/docs/working_papers/KNO MAD%20WP%20The%20Impact%20of%20Vulnerability%2 0and%20Resilience%20to%20Environmental%20Change%20 and%20Migration.pdf (accessed May 12, 2016).

Zidago, A.P. and Wu, Z. 2015. Analysis of Fuel wood and Charcoal Sector in Code d'lvoire, *International Journal of Science and Technology,* Vol. 4 (1), pp.9-12.