

CHOOSING BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Chinedu S. Ifeakor, PhD

Philosophy Department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

cs.ifeakor@unizik.edu.ng

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Eze Romanus Chinedu

Philosophy Department, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

ezechineduromanus@gmail.com

Abstract

*Choosing between environmental conservation and economic development, the paramount challenge of our time lies in resolving the conflict between prioritizing environmental conservation and the forces driving economic development. African governments and policy makers appear perpetually forced to reconcile the legitimate aspiration of majorities to achieve standards of living taken for granted in the economically developed world (like electricity and running water, good roads and a living wage) with the need to preserve and protect what is left of our irreplaceable flora, fauna, and to protect the vitality of the entire natural ecosystem upon which all our wellbeing depends. Examining this dilemma from an African perspective entails understanding that (i) Africa's underdevelopment is not a result of prioritizing environmental conservation; and that (ii) environmental degradation in Africa is neither a necessary nor an inevitable consequence of making robust developmental strides. The way to resolve these apparent dilemmas emerges by taking an approach that I label obligatory anthropoholism. On this view, humans (*anthropos*) have an obligatory role (given duties, in contrast to given rights) to conserve and tend our environment, in order to sustain the balance of our whole terrestrial ecosystem. Yet this ethic of duty cannot be pursued independently of human capacity building through economic development. African environments will be adequately conserved when human welfare is secured and aspirations are enlightened through the achievement of economic development goals.*

Keywords: conservation, development, obligatory anthropoholism, ecosystem.

Introduction

The debate that blames the West for African underdevelopment today after over fifty years of freedom for the most of African countries except few, is weak, after

all, Singapore became self governed by 3rd June 1959 yet far more developed than many African countries. Africa is fully responsible for their current predicament and should start taking responsibility for their development. Today, Africa is still one of the poorest continents in the world, with many people living below one dollar per day, low child mortality, inadequate education and even in some cases poor drinking water. African perspective to the question of Conservation of the ecosystem and development of their continent has to put these factors into consideration.

In the midst of these realities is the question how we bridge the gap between environmental conservation and development in Africa? Which one should come before the other? Should we carry the two along? What are the implications of integrating the two? What if we go first for development? These are few of the questions this paper intends to examine. At the end, it may not completely exhaust the answers, ours is only a contribution to the ongoing debate. Let us put them in perspective thus:

The environmental perspective

The environment actually represents a higher order than development and the status quo seriously threatens the earth's eco-systems. Developing countries try to protect themselves against costly environmental demands. In contrast, the wealth created by trade will not necessarily result in environmental improvements. Development is deemed to cause greater harm, leading to exports of natural resource allocation to other countries and thereby causing increased environmental degradation.

The development perspective

Developing countries' top priority should be to reduce poverty. Openness to trade (development) and investment may be a key to doing so by increasing exports, even though the link between development and economic growth does not happen automatically. Developed countries protect their industries with subsidies, special trade rules and tariff systems which place exporters at a disadvantage in developing countries. Demands that developing countries comply with the environmental standards of developed countries are unfair, particularly if they are not accompanied by technical or financial assistance. Priorities differ; in Africa, for example, clean water is paramount and, historically, developed countries caused most of the environmental damage in the first place.¹

Sustainable development: the answer to the dilemma?

Principle 11 of the 1972 Stockholm Declaration states that

[t]he environmental policies of all States should enhance and not adversely affect the present or future development potential of developing countries, nor should they hamper the attainment of better living conditions for all, and appropriate steps should be taken by States and international organizations with view to reaching agreement on meeting the possible national and international economic consequences resulting from the application of environmental measures.

In its 1987 report *Our Common Future*, the Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Since the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the principle of sustainable development has influenced a broad number of international instruments.²

The Dilemma

If we pursue conservation and reserve so much land for biodiversity and parks, it will recycle clean air in the form of oxygen and help preserve our environment both for the ecosystem, for our health too and for the future generation. This may however also require that many citizens be homeless, some businesses like mining, logging, grazing and other businesses dependent on the forest may close down and poverty will increase. Road networks, electrification and other developmental indices may be reduced at some points so as to conserve the environment. To what extent can Africa cope with this reality as a developing continent is disturbing. The answers to these questions depends on the side of the divide one finds herself.

Environmental conservation and rural development contemporary efforts to protect biodiversity internationally are beset by multiple problems. Growing consumption pressures are contributing to ever faster declines in species and the systems they depend on. Available funds for conservation have declined. High visibility issues such as global climate change have attracted significant attention in the past decade, and perhaps contributed to lower interest in biodiversity conservation. Accusations regarding a lack of synergy between conservation and other social goals such as poverty alleviation, disease eradication, economic

growth, and social equity have been advanced by many different scholars puts it, 'Global losses in biodiversity and wild places are not the stuff of environmental alarmism; they describe our world today. All these impending losses have a human origin. Economic expansion, population growth, urbanization, and development lead to greater consumption. In turn, growing consumer demand, competition for fresh water, energy, arable land, forest products, and globalized production permits the harvesting of nature at ever more rapid rates'.⁴

Faced with these constant challenges, the response of international conservation organizations has been to try to occupy a higher ground by arguing, among other things, that biodiversity conservation is an ethical necessity, that the operational obstacles the above threats pose to conservation need to be addressed by sharpening the message of conservation and persuading others of the importance of biodiversity, that conservation can be accomplished together with poverty alleviation, that biodiversity conservation is important in utilitarian terms for human well-being in the long run and that an exclusive concern with human development often leads to undesirable impacts on biodiversity conservation. These protestations vary in the evidence, conviction, and passion with which they are made.

The criticism that blunts the moral and ethical focus on biodiversity conservation is that which highlights the misery conservation programs impose on people. If conservation strategies distress human populations, especially those who are less powerful, politically marginalized, and poor, little that conservationists argue on behalf of biodiversity makes sense.⁵ Conservation, the argument goes, has led to the displacement of tens of millions of people who formerly lived, hunted, and farmed in areas now protected for wildlife, watersheds, reefs, forests, or rare ecosystems. The critiques compare the magnitude of human evictions and suffering to that caused by civil wars, mega- development projects, and high modernist state interventions. Let us look at a case study of conservation in Northern Tanzania.

Case Study

In a paper written by Mara J. Goldman, titled; *Strangers in Their Own Land: Maasai and Wildlife Conservation in Northern Tanzania*, He described how the people of Maasai became economically marginalized, even though they were allowed to live in their homes yet, they cannot make full economic advantage of their lands because of conservation, they have lost their lands. But it is not just

loosing land or being evicted from one's home that is at stake, for Maasai are still (at least for now) legally allowed to reside inside the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.⁶ They have, however, been marginalized from decisions regarding its use and management, all of which impact their livelihoods. This has made Maasai throughout Tanzania strangers in their own land, whenever conservation concerns are involved. Despite dramatic transformations in conservation rhetoric towards community-based approaches, conservation in Maasai areas of Tanzania today continues to infringe on human rights in two specific ways: through the eviction of families and the destruction of property; and through the exclusion of Maasai as knowledgeable participants in decision-making processes in land that 'belongs' to them, on which their livelihoods depend, and on which they sometimes continue to reside. This second form of exclusion can also be seen as economic exclusion, since Maasai rarely benefit economically from conservation tourism, while having their own economic activities limited, e.g., farming. In his article, he focused more on this second form of exclusion, related to a relatively newly established conservation area designed on the Conservation Trust Model 7 – Manyara Ranch in Monduli district in northern Tanzania. Mara presents Manyara Ranch as a conservation opportunity lost, where local Maasai who were initially interested in utilizing the area for conservation, have come to resent and disrespect the conservation status of the area, after having lost it from their ownership and control.

The weaknesses of focusing on conservation alone as we saw seen in the above case study and many others led to a conceptual shift to accommodate the community and meet their development need thereby integrating conservation with development. This is an attempt to bridge the gap between poverty and conservation in the community. The rational is simple; if you want to take large portion of land from the rural community , land rich in biodiversity, there should be an alternative provision for the community making use of such lands so as to enable them shift their focus from using the natural resource in the Protected areas. These incentives comes in the form of education, infrastructural development and other forms of buisnesses through which the host communities can get daily income. This is what is called Integrated Conservation and development projects.

Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs)

Conservation and development projects are the product of a 1980s conceptual shift that involved increased recognition of the links between biodiversity

conservation and poverty reduction, and attempts to integrate the two in practice. Before this time period, conservation of biodiversity and development were addressed as separate entities, with a history of primarily ‘top down’ approaches that excluded local communities. With the shift, conservation was seen as less likely to succeed without addressing local community members’ rights and needs, and environmental degradation was seen as an impediment to development goals.⁷ Several factors influenced the conceptual shift including: rising criticism of top-down projects from practitioners and local communities, past project failures, influence of the 1987 Brundtland Report, evidence of geographical overlap between areas of high biodiversity and areas of high rural poverty, and increasing recognition of the dependence of rural peoples on natural resources for their livelihoods and day-to-day needs.⁸

The integration of development goals into conservation has been tested under a variety of monikers including International Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs), community-based conservation, community-based natural resource management, and initiatives associated with parks such as ecotourism and agroforestry. The conceptual shift has occurred to such a degree that it can be challenging for conservation projects to acquire funding without some degree of attention to achieving positive socioeconomic change.

The logic driving these projects has been as follows: provide communities living in biodiversity-rich areas with alternative livelihoods that foster improved development, and the combination of education and increased income will result in a decreased need to remove resources (fuelwood, animals, plants) from these areas, thereby benefiting local ecosystems. Integrated conservation and development projects are seen to be ‘win-win’—conserving biodiversity and improving the livelihoods of people involved with or impacted by a project. Supporters argue strongly for the integration on both ethical and practical grounds.⁹

Putting the concept into practice has not been without its challenges, and projects that integrate conservation and development have been highly criticized over the past decade. Critics suggest that benefits are not being shared equally and there is a lack of participation of local communities, oversimplified concepts of ‘community’, ‘participation’, and ‘empowerment’ are being used and there is little evidence of success in achieving either conservation or development goals.¹⁰ The lack of success of conservation and development projects has been attributed in part to development being seen as a means for conservation instead of an end-

goal in and of itself. Others argue that addressing poverty is beyond the mandate of conservation¹¹ and that in some instances there may be conflicting priorities between conservationists and local community members. The result of these debates has been calls for a return to so-called ‘fortress conservation’ where community members are again excluded from conservation activities and/or areas and the development component is disconnected from conservation. The challenge involved in evaluating conservation and development projects has strongly influenced this debate. Few suggestions have been given as to how best to manage ICPDs so as to achieve the integration of conservation and development. Let us see some of the solutions put forward by scholars. We will also argue here that the concept of community or ingenious knowledge needs more light. Introducing strange environmental ethical model to a community, one different from their background I argue, may hinder community participation. Thus, there is need for an indept understanding of African environmental perspective for ICDPs to succeed, let us see few solutions to these criticisms.

Tools And Approaches For Facilitating Conservation And Development Outcomes

Spatial planning is a crucial component of government land allocation and ICDP implementation. However, many spatial plans end up on shelves, unconnected to local realities and playing no role in guiding development, especially in regions where governance is weak. Wollenberg propose five principles to support more interactive planning between land users and government. Their approach sees planning as essentially a process for tackling the institutional issues rather than being a mere source of maps.¹²

1. Link local (indigenous) knowledge, experience, and the aspirations of different groups to formal land-use planning and decision making. The importance and necessity of including community perspectives in natural resource management has encouraged the development of a range of approaches and methodologies. The necessity and difficulty of incorporating local perspectives is greatest in tropical forest-dependent communities where poverty, literacy, language, culture, and access can all pose obstacles to effective local engagement.
2. Develop the adaptive capacities of leaders and institutions through better communication and involvement of local land users and managers. Developing the adaptive capacities of different groups who have to work together is a key

need in ICDPs. After several years of action research in Malinau to try to accomplish this, it became evident that the socio-political situation, leadership, and institutions changed so rapidly that efforts to develop collaboration were a moving and unreachable target and relative priorities for conservation and development changed in unpredictable ways.

4. Work at multiple jurisdictional levels. This ensures that the driving forces of landscape change are taken into account; these forces are often actors that are well

beyond the district level and who may render local plans meaningless. It means intervening at all levels from the local community to the national government and even influencing some international agencies and companies that are active in the landscape.

5. Build capabilities through explicit activities and procedures. It is usually insufficient to deliver new knowledge and options. The work needs to incorporate the key actors as they will be the ultimate users of any new knowledge or information. This kind of interactive planning requires significant investments of time and goodwill. It is only appropriate in places of high resource value and threat, where the stakes are high. This approach complements rather than replaces, conventional spatial planning. What is added is a broader understanding of landscape scale processes and an exploration of a broader range of options that explicitly address difficult local and higher level governance issues. External facilitation is important, and probably essential, to ensure that power differentials do not distort the process and to help planners and managers to deal with the necessary transaction costs associated with broad participation and knowledge management.

It is noteworthy that the concept of community participation is somewhat complex and the measuring yardsticks used to measure the success of ICDPs needs a revisit instead of turning back to fortress conservation again. Indigenous knowledge of the ethics and values guiding an area is necessary if success is to be achieved in the integration of conservation and development especially in Africa. Donor agencies and conservation organizations should be at the same page epistemologically with the people and should be guided by indigenous perspectives to the environment. This is where African environmental ethics comes into focus. African environmental ethics is simply African understanding of their relationship with their environment. Many scholars have suggested

different theories; Ogungbemi's ethics of nature relatedness, Tangwa's eco-bio-communitarian, Behren's African relational environmentalism and Ramose's ecology through Ubuntu. I however argue that these theories are either not African enough or not African at all informed by African ontology. I here argue for a theory I call Obligatory anthropoholism. This theory I argue best underscores African perspective to the environment. This theory also bridges the gap between conservation and development. It argues that humans have an obligatory role to tend, keep and care for their environment. The end being for the balance of the whole of the ecosystem. I call it obligatory anthropoholism. Humans have a special place in African ontology which have been erroneously branded anthropocentric. This theory argues that it is the fact of her obligation that distinguishes her from other beings, but it also posits that obligation to the environment will be done perfectly when the human being is developed, when her capabilities are enhanced. Thus conservation in African perspective cannot go without development.

Obligatory Anthropoholism: African Understanding Of Their Environment

The theory the researcher wishes to pursue as a possible alternative to Behren's African relational environmentalism,¹³ Tangwa's Eco-bio-communitarian,¹⁴ Ogungbemi's ethics of nature relatedness¹⁵ and Ramose's ecology through Ubuntu¹⁶ should be one that will have the following characteristics firstly, it should show mastery of African ontology. Thereby being African enough. Secondly it should highlight holism as an important aspect of African ontology which informs our relationship to the environment. Thirdly, it should have and retain a privileged place for humans in line with African ontology. This pride of place has been the subject of misunderstanding in African environmental ethics as it is often branded anthropocentric. It is worthy of note here that African ontology has that place for man from Tempel, Ogotemeli, Ubuntu, Uwa ontology, Ife and Onye ontology, Relational moral status etc. Fourthly and more importantly, there should be a sense in which humans are a privileged part in the holistic ecosystem. This sense brings to fore the non-anthropocentric understanding of African environmental attitude. This portends that even though humans are a privileged part of the ecosystem, it cannot be interpreted as anthropocentric.

This I call Obligatory anthropoholism. This underscores both the place of humans (Anthropos) the holistic interrelated community, that is the communitarian concept of being in Africa whereby all existing things

intercompenetartes each other (Holism) and the researcher gave a sense in which humans are singled out of the whole. This sense is the fact of obligation. It is human who have the capability to care for the whole of ecosystem. The researcher is writing because he wishes to prescribe to humans and not cows, how to relate, care, tend and conserve the ecosystem. This is practical and simple; human's special place is not a right based placement, which is somewhat alien to Africa. It is in the light of obligations that humans are privileged. Right based conception is what brought anthropocentrism, Obligation based ethics will strike a balance in the whole of ecosystem.

Few objections and criticisms can be raised against obligatory anthropoholism in my view; the first is that it is anthropocentric because it makes humans the agent of obligation and sees human from a privileged perspective. This by implication will make humans exploit rather than tend the environment, at the end of the day, we are back to anthropocentrism. Secondly, there can be criticisms about its Africanness, where scholars have argued that African environmental perspective is simply anthropocentric. Thirdly, is the question of how this theory can comfortably fit into the issues and challenges in the African soil, fight and defeat them.

In attempting but not exhausting these criticisms, it is worthy of note that mine is only an attempt at evolving an Africa theory of environment that can match and defeat the challenges of the environment in Africa and elsewhere, my theory does not boast of mastery, it does not in any way dismiss or counter the views or theories of other African environmentalist it is only a humble contribution to the understanding of African environmentalism. As much as possible, it is a personal understanding made out of African ontology, it therefore cannot be said to authoritatively assume "the African environmental approach". The implication of the above statement is that it puncturable, it can be criticized and can be built upon; it is a contribution among other contributions which does not claim to exhaust all there is to African environmental philosophy. This position is really worthy of note for critics of obligatory Anthropoholism.

In reply to the first criticism of obligatory anthropoholism being anthropocentric and thereby falling into the pit it has tried to fill up, it is important to understand that for whatever position you choose to take anthropocentric, nonanthropocentric and ecocentric, the humans are the one who will still be the agent in all these discourse. Humans are the ones who should care for the whole of ecosystem, they are the ones we are writing to, they are the ones who should

be obligated to protect the ecosystem, whether as institution or as parastatals, action based ethics can justify anthropocentric ethics but can also justify obligatory anthropoholism. The simple difference in obligatory anthropoholism is that the purpose and end (*telos*) of human obligation in African ontology is interconnectedness, togetherness and this fulfills her humanness as Ramose asserts, it is in working for the betterment of all both humans and physical nature that the human in Ubuntu finds fulfillment and satisfaction. It is in respectful relationship with the environment that eco-bio communitarian of Tangwa finds satisfaction. It is that relationship defined from the obligatory role that makes African relational environmentalism worthwhile. It is the obligatory role of humans to the environment that makes it necessary to assert as Metz does, that it is relating with humans that somewhat confers moral status. The implication of this theory is germane, the humans have a pride of place in African ontology and this place is the place of obligation to care for not just herself in the sense of using the physical nature for personal gains but rather in holistic sense of being the one who enforces holism. This means in practical terms that human should eat cow, but also means that humans should protect rivers and the atmospheric air for the sake of the circle of ecosystem and since the end is holism, it differs from anthropocentrism. The purpose of anthropocentrism is human benefit, the while the purpose of obligatory anthropoholism is ecocentric or holistic. In the end, all theories if seen from an obligatory action perspective will come back to an agent (humans) and thus nonanthropocentric view can as well be justifiable with this.

On the question of the Africanness of obligatory anthropoholism, a theory in African environmental philosophy is African the extent to which it imbibes the values extracted from African ontology. It therefore requires mastery of African ontology Given, ethnophilosophy or what Innocent Asousu calls unintended ethnocentric commitments¹⁷ may question the criticality of some African ontology for instance, arguments from ancestors, deities and gods. Asousu posits that these sociological or cultural postulations are simply not philosophical because of two reasons, firstly, they are not critical or rational and secondly, some of these philosophers hide under African communal thought to express their individuality, oftentimes seen as overgeneralization. Philosophy thrives in individuality and not communal thought. I argued elsewhere however, that even though African ontological discourse of some philosophies are ethnocentric, they are raw materials for philosophy and necessary tool for evolution of a promising African environmental ethics. This is true in the sense that it is from African experience, ideologies, worldviews and cosmologies that a promising African

philosophy can be formed, since going outside the African experience will not foster or motivate Africans effectively to care for their environment, scholars like Hargrove will suggest that theorists should enrich their theories with the peculiarities of their different cultures so as to motivate and persuade men and women to care for their environment.¹⁸ African ontology holds values such as togetherness, holism and a special place for man high. And it is based on these values when well interpreted that a promising environmental non anthropocentric philosophy can emerge.

Conclusion

There is need for a balance between conservation and development especially in Africa. Integrated conservation and development project was designed to care for the environment as well as develop the community in terms of infrastructure, education, markets and means of livelihood for host communities so as to alleviate poverty. When this first work is not done, the second work of conservation will not make any sense. Among the challenges of ICDPs is inadequate understanding of community participation. Indigenous knowledge should be considered and without which conservation projects will be strange to the host community and participation difficult. Few theories have been put forward as African understanding of their environment for which I described as either being not-African-enough or not being African at all. Africanness of any theory on the environment is determined by its relationship with African ontology. I however argue that obligatory anthropoholism is a plausible alternative. It posits it is humans who have the capability and capacity to take care of the environment. This obligation stems from her natural capabilities. It seeks for a shift of focus from rights to obligation. The end of this obligation is not necessarily for her immediate needs or for future generation, but also for the balance of the holistic ecosystem.

Human development is therefore imperative if this obligation is to be carried out effectively. It also holds that environmental degradation happening today is as a result of underdevelopment of human capabilities for obligation. Without economic strength, Africa cannot adequately conserve their environment. If one is left with the option of choosing between development and conservation, I think Africa will choose FIRST to be developed and THEN con serve her environment, but a synthesis of the both will be the best choice.

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