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Ecological solidarity and sustainable development in Africa*

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Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own ... This will happen if we see the need to revive our sense of belonging to a larger family of life (Maathai, 2010).

According to John Paul II, the “threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness - both individual and collective - are contrary to the order of creation, an order which is characterized by mutual interdependence.” (John Paul II, 1990).

We have clearly shown in previous chapters that human beings are the authors as well as victims of the ecological crisis. If they are part of the problem, they must also be part of the solution. “No one can face life in isolation. We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead” (Francis, 2020, No. 7).

We shall discuss the ecological solidarity framework as a new paradigm vis a vis our responsibility towards each other as human beings and the ecosystem at large. The African cultural worldview would be a useful guide in the search for a sustainable development.

In the final analysis, ecological solidarity outlines two moral issues which are essential to sustainable development: firstly, an ecological awareness that recognises the interconnectedness of human life and other forms of life in the ecosystem. And secondly, an obligation to be responsible for other human beings and the ecosystem (Azetsop, S.J. and Conversi, eds., 2022).

The Concept of Ecological Solidarity

It was first introduced by the French government in their environmental law during its reform of national parks. The law states that a national park:

"is composed of one or more core areas, defined as the terrestrial and maritime areas to be protected, as well as an area of membership, defined as all or part of the territory of the communes (i.e. the French lowest administrative unit) which, having the vocation to be part of the national park because of their geographical continuity or their ecological solidarity with the core area, have decided to accede to the charter of the national park and to voluntarily contribute to this protection" (Mathevet et al., 2018).

With its presence in the 2006 law, ecological solidarity provides the management of national parks with a legal foundation to facilitate cooperation as well as a conceptual framework towards revitalising the ecosystem services that contribute to the environmental, economic and social well-being of local communities (Thompson., 2011, p. 416). So ecological solidarity is “implemented through the commitments made by the communes that accede to the charter to protect the core area

of the park, and ... to ensure the maintenance of economic activities within the membership area” (Mathevet et al., 2018, p. 618). The human society is recognised as part of a natural contract with the rest of other living entity. It can evaluate the impact of its activities on the ecosystem and adopts responsible forms of management (Thompson, 2011. p.417).

According to many environmental scientists, the concept of ecological solidarity is based on two main dimensions: on Ecology (i.e., biophysical and functional interactions), and on the solidarity among people with a shared goal and a sense of community (Mathevet et al., 2018, p. 618). These have to do with the dynamic relationship and interdependence between all living things and the non-living components of the planet. A national park for example depends for its efficient functioning on the human activities outside it and the biodiversity within, can be influenced from without (Mathevet et al, 2018, p. 618). This is where ecological solidarity takes on its full meaning.

Ecological solidarity can thus be defined as “the reciprocal interdependence of living organisms amongst each other and with spatial and temporal variation in their physical environment” (Thompson, 2011, p. 414). According to Raphaël Mathevet et al, (2016, p. 7) this definition in the first place contains the idea of a debt. Due to the fact of our interdependency, we become debtors when we contribute to the destruction of the environment. Thus, ecological solidarity underscores the moral tie between the human society and the environment as well as the web of relationships that exists between humans and nonhumans, some chosen and some not (Mathevet et al. 2016, p. 7). Secondly, the definition implies a certain form of limitation of human action on nature in terms of rights and duties. As such, “ecological solidarity participates in the implementation of a principle of responsibility for nature and for future generations of humans and other species” (Mathevet et al. 2016, p. 7)

They further enumerate three key principles that are associated with ecological solidarity. The first is the sense of a community of life that leads a stakeholder or social group to wisely use land and natural resources and to support humans or nonhumans in the belief that he/she shares certain values and objectives with all or some of the community members. The second is the voluntary obligation of a stakeholder or social group to adopt a strategy of land- use and natural resource use which supports humans or nonhumans in the belief that some are better equipped than others to achieve these objectives. And the third are obligations (laws and social rules) to sustainably use land and natural resources and to support others in harmony with nature (Mathevet et al. 2016, p. 9).

It is important to note the nuance between ecological solidarity and ecological interdependence: solidarity is chosen, interdependence is often not. In this sense ecological solidarity becomes a moral and positive attitude; a deliberate and purposeful commitment to interdependence and reciprocity derived from acknowledging objective social and ecological interdependencies (Mathevet et al. 2018, p. 620).

Therefore, the use of ecological solidarity in environmental policy is key in confronting the ecological crisis especially in the 21st century since it is “based on the notion that individuals become united around a common goal and are conscious of their common interests and shared responsibility (Mathevet et al. 2018, p. 619). In choosing development trajectory, ecological solidarity will highlight the common destiny humans share with the rest of nature, as well as the

importance of being aware of our interdependences (Mathevet et al. 2018, p. 618). Raphael Mathevet et al. affirm that, "it is a concept that provides a compelling invitation to strive towards a major transformation of our moral and political order based on the virtues of common sense, humanity, and respect" (Mathevet et al. 2016, p. 14).

Earth stewardship: hearing the cry of mother earth

In the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, after creating the heavens, the sea, the earth and all it contains, God created man and woman. He saw all he had made, and they were very good. God entrusted the whole of creation to the man, and only then could he rest from all his work (Genesis 1 and 2).

The call of Adam and Eve to share in God's plan of creation brought to the fore those abilities and gifts which distinguish them from all other creatures. At the same time, this call established a fixed relationship with God, humankind and the rest of creation. Their task was to "cultivate and care for creation" (Genesis 2:15).

In the biblical Jubilee, the people and the land had a rhythmic relationship which allowed each to rest and to be restored:

"When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land" (Leviticus 25: 2-5).

The religious interpretation for this rest is to honour the Lord. However, on the other hand, it emphasizes the fact that this rest is not just for the benefit of the people, it is for the land (Fernández. 2021).

As regards the Sabbath, every seventh day, the people and their domestic animals were to refrain from work in order to celebrate the Sabbath: "Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed" (Exodus 23: 12). This prescription allows them to rest as well as every other created thing in order to regain strength. We see in these prescriptions an implicit sense of care for every created thing, the interdependence of all creatures and the intrinsic value placed on creation. These biblical considerations help us to understand better the relationship between human activity and the whole of creation. With respect to the intrinsic worth of each being, Alfred North Whitehead affirms:

"Everything has some value for itself, for others, and for the whole. This characterizes the meaning of actuality. By reason of this character, constituting reality, the conception of morals arises. We have no right to deface the value experience which is the very essence of the universe. Existence, in its own nature, is the upholding of value intensity. Also, no unit can separate itself from the others, and from the whole. And yet each unit exists in its own right. It upholds value intensity for itself, and this involves sharing value intensity

with the universe. Everything that in any sense exists has two sides, namely, its individual self and its signification in the universe. Also, either of these aspects is a factor in the other" (North Whitehead, 1938).

Unfortunately, the earth now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. The earth is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth (Francis, 2015', No. 21). The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople lamentably notes:

"Our very own financially developed world is already leaving an untenable footprint through the greedy production and consumption of goods, the uncontrollable pollution of modern transportation, the industrial and nuclear accidents, all of which contribute immensely to global warming and climate change with irreparable and irreversible ramifications" (Catholic Culture, 2017).

This greedy production mentality needs to be transformed by a culture of caring for the environment. We need to move from a sense of earth ownership to a sense of earth stewardship, in the way we relate with creation. This movement also involves an anthropological turn from who we think we are as humans as well as imagine how our role on earth should be. This is the only way to ensure a responsible form of management of human activities and their impacts on the natural environment. This will help "to ensure the conservation of biodiversity, natural resources and their values in terms of use and non-use for future generations of humans and non-humans" (Mathevet et al., 2018, p. 607).

Therefore, an understanding of our common origin and interrelatedness with everything in the universe could help us realize our close affinity to the whole of creation (Beltran, 2020, p. 44)). Everything is connected to everything in the universe. Inspired by the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'*, offers a lyrical meditation on the deep interconnectedness of all things in the universe. If everything is interconnected, then every violation of solidarity would be harmful (Pope Francis, 2015, No. 142).

The Pontiff brings to bare the sacramental view of creation: "soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God" (Pope Francis, 2015, No. 84). There is a "mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face"(Pope Francis, 2015, No. 233). He reminds us that we are "united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures, and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river, and Mother Earth" (Francis, 2015, No. 94). The universe is an expression of God's love for mankind: "Each of the various creatures, will in its own being, reflect in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness"(Pope Francis, 2015, No. 69). Every creature has an intrinsic value and so connected that the human person "can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement" (Pope Francis, 2015, No. 89).

However, in the course of history, there have been environmental justice theories that have been to a large extent the cause of this painful disfigurement and degradation of the earth.

Inadequate Environmental Justice theories

In recent times, environmental justice has become one of the key issues in environmental debates especially in such a time of severe environmental degradation and global ecological crisis. It can be defined as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” (Chemhuru, ed., 2019, p. 176).

Fair treatment means that no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies. Meaningful involvement means that: (1) people have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health; (2) the public can contribute to regulatory agency’s decision-making; (3) their concerns will be considered in the decision-making process; and (4) the decision makers seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.

Robert Figueroa and Claudia Mills (2001) see environmental justice from two perspectives: distributive and participatory justice. The first deals with how environmental benefits and burdens are distributed between nations. And the second has to do with how the distributive decisions are taken and by whom (Figueroa and Mills, 2001). The distributive dimension recognises that there are people or nations with a disproportionate amount of environmental burden and tries to create a kind of environmental equity. The participatory dimension deals with the fact that the poor nations and people of the unindustrialized South should be included in the decision making process. More often than not, those who suffer this environmental burden are excluded in the decision making or policy formulation process ((Figueroa and Mills, 2001).

Environmental justice can be traced to the Environmental Justice Movement (EJM) which developed from local struggles against environmental discrimination and environmental racism in the United States (Bullard, 1999). The poor especially African Americans suffered most from environmental pollution, racially prejudiced disparities, and inequalities. And this led to public demonstrations against such injustices in different parts of the United States. However, the term environmental justice began to be applied to issues outside of the United States in the early 2000s (Mohai, et al. 2009, p. 420). Today, it has also been applied to the issues of climate change and has become a global concern and movement. This movement across the globe has advanced environmental wellbeing and instigated sustainable development practices (Mohai, et al. 2009, p. 421). It has also challenged the social, political and economic inequalities that make a particular set of people, usually the poor, suffer the negative impacts of environmental degradation caused by the avaricious-driven attitudes of others, usually the wealthy (Bullard, 1999).

All over the world the poor has always been at the receiving end of the effects of any environmental crisis since they have not enough resources to cope with drastic environmental change. They are less likely to enjoy the benefits of environmental resources and are rarely compensated for the environmental harm inflicted on them by industrial activities (Sandler, 2019). In Nigeria, for example, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) issued the “Ogoni Bill of Rights” to the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1990, demanding for local benefits sharing with respect to the oil fields in their lands as well as for redress for the environmental degradation

caused by the oil industry (Senewo, 2015). Unfortunately, some of them were executed by the then military government. The advocates of environmental justice explicitly seek a fair distribution of environmental outcomes.

It is universally accepted that the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burden is unjust. In a search for the best social and distributive model that will ensure equity and fair redistribution of environmental benefits and burdens, there came different theories of justice. For example, “the principle of commensurate burdens and benefits” states that “those who enjoy the benefits of some activity should also shoulder the associated burdens, and vice versa, unless there good justification for them not doing so” (Wenz, 2012). In other words those who derive benefits from environmental resources should be held liable for the burdens they produce. Also, “the principle of social cooperation” states that “justice increases when the benefits and burdens of social cooperation are born more equally except when moral considerations or other values justify greater inequality” (Sadler, 2018). Thus inequality can be justified.

John Rawls, in his theory on justice, advocates for basic equality of liberty or resources and only permits inequality when it serves to benefit those who may not have similar access (Rawls. 2001). This is to say that the basic structure of any society ought to be arranged in such a way that no social group advances at the cost of another (Rawls. 2001). This point of view is also shared by D. Bell, who believes that a Rawlsian environmental justice “is committed to the idea of guaranteed minimum environmental standards as part of the social minimum for the least advantaged group” (Bell. 2004). On his part, D. Keller asserts that a Rawlsian model of environmental justice will be one where “a social group bears a disproportionate burden of the costs on industrialization in comparison to a wider population, and that group would be better off without industrialization” (Keller, 2011).

It is evident, from the above, that environmental justice theories appear to mainly concentrate on attaining fair distribution of environmental resources and burdens for both the rich and the poor, majority and minority groups, the global north and south as well as between the advantaged and the disadvantaged, with little or nothing said with regards to the sustainability of the natural environment. Thus, one is forced to conclude that humans are the only beneficiaries of environmental justice. According to Margaret Ssebunya et al, the fact that the environment is not considered “renders the usually anthropocentric Western theories of environmental justice inadequate” (Ssebunya, et al., 2019, p. 184). They further add that these models of environmental justice theory do not take into consideration the cultural and traditional principles of the African people who are worse hit by the effects of climate change.

From what has been discussed about the features of African communitarian societies and about the principles underpinning the various African environmental ethics, it is clear that an African theory of environmental justice would be holistic. It reflects solidarity and the importance of human interconnectedness with one another and also with the environment. Thus, a theoretical framework that integrates the important principles of solidarity, shared values, and mutual responsibilities that permeate the communitarian lives of the African people as well as assures its sustainable development would be the “ecological solidarity” paradigm.

African culture at the service of Ecological Solidarity

We have seen that attempts at solutions to environmental injustices have relied mostly on theories of social and distributive justice based on principles of utilitarianism, libertarianism, free-market approach, right-based approach etc. These theories are inadequate to resolve the ecological crisis nor mitigate the plights in Africa. In dealing with environmental issues, especially in Africa, there is need to proffer solutions that suits the African worldview (Chemhuru, 2019, p. 180). We need to appreciate the African sense of harmonious relationship that is communitarian, cooperative, conciliatory and accommodative (Chemhuru, 2019, p. 190).

The search for harmony between human and non-human world as well as a moral consideration for future generation is very important to proffering solutions to the ecological crisis. The world is searching for theoretical framework that will help to prevent further environmental degradation and mitigate the effects of climate change. Africa being rich in culture and natural resources can lend a voice to the search for ethical attitude of mankind to the environment.

Godfrey Tangwa (2004), in his “eco-bio-communitarian ethic”, argues that the metaphysical outlook of a traditional African involves the recognition and acceptance of interdependence and peaceful co-existence between humans, (both past and future) animals and plants. This viewpoint is responsible for the relational attitude of traditional Africans societies towards animate and inanimate things and the various invisible forces of the world (Ifeakor and Otteh, 2017, p. 76). This respectful co-existence is the reason for offerings of sacrifices to God, to the divine spirits, to the departed ancestors and to the various invisible forces of nature (Tangwa, 2004, p.389). Correlatively, Chinedu Ifeakor and Andrew Otteh opine that there are great lessons to be learnt from the respect for nature that adorn traditional African culture ((Ifeakor and Otteh, 2017, p. 77).

On his part, Segun Ogungbemi notes that the traditional African relationship with nature was that of not taking more than what one needed from nature. He refers to this relationship as an “ethics of care”. He clearly states:

"In our traditional relationship with nature, men and women recognize the importance of water, land and air management. To our traditional communities the ethics of not taking more than you need from nature is a moral code. Perhaps this explains why earth, forests, rivers, wind, and other natural objects are traditionally believed to be both natural and divine. The philosophy behind this belief may not necessarily be religious, but a natural means by which the human environment can be preserved. The ethics of care is essential to traditional understanding of environmental protection and conservation" (Ogungbemi, 1997).

Furthermore, the African holistic worldview seeing reality as a composite, unity and harmony of natural forces is taken up by P. Ikuenobe (2014). He notes that the African community comprises mutually reinforcing natural life forces consisting of humans, spirits, gods, deities, stones, sand, mountains, rivers, plants, and animals. “Everything in reality has a vital force or energy such that the harmonious interactions among them strengthen reality” (2014, p. 2). For an African, one cannot flourish as a person without a close relationship with others and with the cosmos. “The whole world in an African understanding is interconnected with each other. A harm to one aspect

like the physical nature will have a strong effect on the rest of the ecosystem and this informs human relationship with her environment” (Ifeakor and Otteh. 2017, p. 86). The African concept of Ubuntu articulates this interconnectedness.

There is no doubt that a return to traditional environmental beliefs and practices, in tandem with adequate political commitment towards environmental protection and conservation, would contribute immensely to sustainable development in Africa. As Amitav Gosh laments:

"The cumulative effect is the extinction of exactly those forms of traditional knowledge, materials skills, and ties of community that might provide succour to vast numbers of people around the world—and especially those who are still bound to the land—as the impacts intensify we must look to the past for some solutions" (Gosh,2016).

Similarly, a Palestinian writer observes:

"Building the world requires more than one knowledge discourse, and it necessitates dialogue to ensure the inclusion of different views and experiences. In contrast to western social philosophies— which are generally predicated on the primacy and exceptionalism of the human experience, and human domination over all there is— those that emerged from indigenous or First Nation peoples, and which are available to us principally in the form of proverbs and observable ways of life, are informed by a humility that places humans in a larger natural order" (Abulhawa, 2017).

From these principles underpinning the African societies, it is evident that the African perspective of environmental justice cannot be devoid of solidarity and interconnectedness of humans person with one another as well as with the environment (Abulhawa., 2017, p. 184). It is marked by the “African communitarian character of shared responsibilities and the projection of the community’s good above that of anyone else’s” (Abulhawa., 2017, p. 184).It does not suggest from the onset that only individuals who are benefitting from the environmental resources should be held equally liable as suggested by most environmental justice theories. According to Margaret Ssebunya et al, African understanding of environmental justice is “characterised by mutual dependence, cooperation, harmony, relationality and communion in order to promote the common good of the people as well as the good of the environment for both current and future generations” Ssebunya,et al. 2019, p. 174).

Since the human person in an African setting depends on the community for survival, care for its sustenance was paramount. This informs the cautious use of common environmental resources such as rivers, lakes, streams, forests, grasslands and vegetation. Natural resources were considered to belong to everybody and everyone has right to its usage (Bennett.,2004, p. 374). Nevertheless, individuals were mindful of how they use these common resources so as not to pollute the environment because this would be contrary to the African communitarian society’s values. Negative actions such as pollution of streams, improper waste disposal, etc would show a lack of care and concern for others (Bennett, 2004, p.182). However, there were categories of punishment meted out to those who do not respect this social order. This is done to correct an offender and deter others from committing such offense (Bennett, 2004, p.182).

There are many examples of community-based initiatives of collective responsibility where African societies express their environmental justice system especially in the pre-colonial era. In Buganda region of Uganda, there is a practice of bulungibwansi which means “for the good of the country” (Bennett, 2004, p.183). A day is set aside for the cleaning of the environment. There is a similar practice in Kenya called Harambee which literally means “pooling efforts together”. “This involves community members undertaking communal work as a contribution towards individual and communal causes” (Bennett, 2004, p.183). The Akans in Ghana, have also this practice of communal labour called Omanadwuma which literally means “working in the interest of the community/nation-state” (Fobih.2001, p. 213). On the day of Omanadwuma, members of the community are called for communal work. In Rwanda, umuganda was a monthly communal activity which entails “de-silting drainages, sweeps streets and village paths, makes composts, clears bush lands and builds houses for the elderly and ultra-poor” Luberenga, 2012, pp. 20-21.

The case is not different in Nigeria where people are used to planting trees around their homes to provide fresh air and fruits for consumption and nutrition. In 1984 the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the monthly environmental sanitation exercise. It was a day set aside for cleaning of the environment and to inculcate in the citizens the importance of caring for the environment where we live. According to T. K. Adekunle and Hilary Nwaechefu, there still exist traditional environmental protections practices in agriculture used by rural communities in Nigeria for ages (Adekunle and Nwaechefu. 2019). These farming practices include shifting cultivation, crop rotation, bush fallowing etc. “By these methods the forest or vegetation are preserved and protected against uncontrolled bush burning and tree felling”(Adekunle and Nwaechefu. 2019, p. 38). The forests were preserved because the communities realized that their wellbeing depends on them. Many ailments were cured by the barks and leaves of some of the trees (Adekunle and Nwaechefu. 2019).

So the principles underlining these practices within the African societies were born from the African understanding of the interconnectivity that exist in the ecosystem. Such relationality, cooperation and communion that characterise the African worldview were paramount in ensuring social and environmental justice. According to Margaret Ssebunya et al, the African principles “stand in disparity to the widespread selfishness, capitalism, oblivious competitiveness, and the prevailing large scale private ownership of property that have greatly contributed to environmental injustices today” (Ssebunya et al., 2019, p. 183).

How African Culture of Ecological Solidarity could contribute to Sustainable Development

The African continent has an important role to play in the sustenance of the earth. The Congo basin, for example, has been referred to as one of the lungs of the earth (Francis, 2015, No. 38). It has also been found out that the world’s largest global reserve of peat bogs is found in Africa, storing some thirty billion tonnes of carbon which is equivalent to three years of global emissions of green-house gas (Azetsop and Conversi, eds., 2022, p. 325). And Pope Francis reminds us “how important these are for the earth and for the future of humanity” (Pope Francis, 2015, No 38). Consequently, one can say that the continent of Africa has a huge role to play in the ecological debate. However, the position of Africa in ecological discourse has been one of passivity or pity as if Africa has got nothing to offer.

An historical review of the pre-colonial African kingdoms points to the fact that they were great centres of rich culture, tradition, trade, and efficient governance structures (Eyong and Foy. 2006, p. 135). According to C.T. Eyong and I.I. Foy, unsustainable development practices began with the advent of European colonial masters and missionaries who referred to Africans as primitive, savage, barbaric, etc. (Eyong and Foy. 2006, p. 135) They denied African nations the right to pursue its development path by using Western-styled systems, expertise, standard and problem-solving methods which largely did not bear much fruits.

That notwithstanding, Africa was not the only continent colonised. It can't continue to lick its wound forever. It has to rise up and propagate its cultural heritage including its ecological wisdom especially as the world is facing a global ecological crisis. African rationality and world view which appeals to the ethics of solidarity with and care for the earth needs to be propagated. It may not be possible to achieve sustainable development by sticking to the Western capitalist model (Tosam, 2019, p. 184). Sustainable development, as Okechukwu Ukaga affirms, "is generally homegrown and not something that is readily or easily exported from one place to another" (2005, p. 1). So Africa has to contribute to the global ecological discourse.

Article 8 (j) of the Convention on Biological Diversity emphasizes the fundamental importance of indigenous values and knowledge in achieving sustainable development. It states:

"Subject to National Legislation, to respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices" (United Nations. Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992).

Nonetheless, there has to be a conducive political environment and selfless leaders that will make legislations guiding environmental behaviours.

In precolonial Nigeria, for example, there were various system of government like monarchy, gerontocracy, etc. (Oladiti, 2014, pp. 78-79). The monarchical system was a centralized form of government where the king is selected from the royal family. Gerontocracy on the other hand was a non-centralized political system. Here elders and lineage heads performed religious and political functions. Despite these various system of government, there was great understanding between people of various tribes and political organisation especially in trade. Consequently, there is the need for African unity. Unity is so essential that without it, it is nearly impossible to achieve anything. One of the stumbling blocks to sustainable development in Africa is the disunity among African leaders (Ukaga and Osita Afoaku, 2005, p. 19). Contradictions and mutual distrust among the political elites have prevented them from speaking with one voice in the global sphere. "Forexample, while Libya and Zimbabwe hold a radical position within the African Union (AU) and New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Nigeria and South Africa take a liberal and pro-Western stance" (Eyong and Foy, 2006, p.140). Internal divisions would always diminish bargaining power. According to Kwesi Kwaa Prah (2005), African unity will grant

Africa and Africans the ability to successfully resist further exploitation of its natural resources as well as extract benefits for itself from global trading system. Unfortunately, there are still trade barriers that exist between some African states. This will definitely hamper its progress.

Furthermore, these system of government earlier mentioned, provided effective and efficient governance system (Oladiti, 2014). The kings or the leader in a typical African society were believed to be divinely ordained. He cannot enforce his personal will indiscriminately since he was only a representative of the divine. He held absolute powers, but was assisted by an institutionalized council of respected chiefs. Public interest was paramount. Therefore, good governance and effective leadership is a *conditio sine qua non* to achieving the goal of sustainable development. Embezzlement and poor management of state funds are the bane of most African government. And these definitely pave way to external begging. Africa is blessed with rich human and natural resources. However, as Albert Ahenkan and Alex Osei-Kojo opine, "the quality of life of any given society depends not just on the availability of resources but the management of such resources" (Alagoa, 2001). Therefore, we must promote good and accountable governance in order to achieve sustainable development in Africa.

More still, there was a strong belief that the ancestors would always reward people for good behaviours and punish bad actions. For this purpose everyone is urged to comply with the laws of the land in order to attract peace and prosperity. "Because rulers and their subjects wanted peace and prosperity, emphasis was placed on satisfying the ancestors and gods through regular and annual sacrifices. Also there were mechanisms to resolve conflicts. According to E.J. Alagoa (2001),

"First, the principle of impartiality of the manager of conflict. Rulers in all Nigerian communities were expected to behave impartially in their office.... Second, the principle of fairness. That is, the poor and weak should receive a fair deal as well as the rich and powerful.... Third, the ... principle of accommodation, compromise and a disposition for reconciliation, as opposed to the principle of "winner takes all" or the "zero sum game".... Fourth, the principle of reciprocity. The spirit of accommodation must be mutual and reciprocal to be effective.... Fifth, the principle of moderation and of measured action and response. It was this principle that informed the deliberate limitation of the level of violence in conflicts within Nigerian communities in the past... Sixth, the principle of incompatibility or separation. That is where the parties to a conflict cannot be reconciled, the best policy would be to separate them..."

African government should assist in seeking ways to resolve conflicts and promote peace rather than result to violence. "In a climate of chaos, interethnic mistrust, insecurity and violence, no amount of development aid can put a society on its path to sustainable development" (Eyong and Foy, 2006, p. 140). Farmers should not see herders as their enemy and vice visa. Christians should not think the Muslims are their problem. We are already suffering the effect of climate change, we will worsen it by further destroying the environment with armed conflicts and civil wars.

Religion plays a very important role in African. African religious leaders possess the moral authority to form the conscience of the society as well as provide meaning and guidance to societal issues. The people listen to them because it is believed they speak on behalf of God. Therefore,

African religious leaders must begin to decolonize and contextualize Christian religious beliefs. The task of inculturation must be taken seriously. African theology should reflect African experiences and realities. “The dominance of perspectives from the Global North must be challenged in African theology and religious studies” (Chitando, 2022, p. 12). African religious researchers would have to devote more time in reflecting on African realities and using their findings to ameliorate the living conditions of Africans. Also, the importance of education in this debate cannot be overemphasised. The educational system should be revisited to include resource management and environmental education.

Lastly, sustainable development can be achieved if African governments would take interest in the promotion of indigenous systems of knowledge and practices with regard to environmental protection. Unfortunately, the revitalization of these knowledge systems has been a major challenge facing African governments who are largely unwilling (Eyong and Foy, 2006, pp. 143-144). Indigenous knowledge refers to a social, political, economic, and spiritual dimension of a local way of life that has been built up and passed from one generation to another (Chitando, et al., 2022, p. 25). Culture is essential in this regard because it “encompasses all that members of a society do and is passed from one generation to another” (Kwesi Kwaa Prah. 2005, p. 19). Consequently, sustainable development must be pursued against the backdrop of this cultural process. Africa can promote sustainable development on the basis of its rich culture.

To conclude, the appeal of the South African bishop's conference as echoed by Pope Francis finds its basis at this point. According to the South African bishops, Africa must be ready to contribute her quota to the ecological discourse (Pope Francis. 2015, No. 14). The richness of its culture could help in constructing a body of thought capable of tackling the ecological crisis.

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