

**UBUNTU AND NIGERIAN ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP:
APPLYING THE AFRICAN COMMUNITARIAN ETHIC OF UBUNTU TO
SUSTAINABLE FARMING, DEFORESTATION, AND ECOLOGICAL CARE
IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The present paper seeks to look at ways of how the African communitarian philosophy, Ubuntu through its ideas of interconnectedness and collective responsibility can deal with the acute environmental perils that affect Nigeria such as deforestation, unsustainable agricultural practices and ecological degradation. As the country loses more than 1 million hectares of the tree cover every year (2001-2021) with a deforestation percentage of 3.7, there is a dire need to apply ethical frameworks to inform sustainable stewardship of the environment (DGB Group, 2023). Ubuntu philosophy is founded on the I am because we are which gives holistic solutions in which human beings, society and natural world are interdependent. This study describes how the concepts of Ubuntu can be used to develop sustainable agricultural, forest regeneration and ecological restoration programs in Nigeria based on an examination of traditional ecological knowledge systems and community-initiated conservation efforts. It reveals that the collective responsibility, intergenerational responsibility, and peaceful coexistence with nature evolved by Ubuntu appeal to indigenous environmental behaviours that have supported African people through millennium, suggesting how indigenous wisdom can be applied to the current environmental policy.

Keywords: Ubuntu, African Environmental Ethics, Nigerian Environmental Stewardship, Traditional ecological knowledge, Sustainable Agriculture, Deforestation and Community Conservation.

Introduction: Nigeria's Environmental Crisis and Ubuntu Philosophy

Nigeria is exposed to environmental issues that pose a threat on the ecological and human health. The country has an unpleasant reputation of the fastest rate of deforestation in the world, 3.7% every year, and more than 350,000 hectares of forest cover are lost annually (DGB Group, 2023). The 10% of hectares of tree cover lost between 2001 and 2021 is 1.04 million hectares in Nigeria (10% of 2000), 21 million hectares in the USA, and 2.7 million hectares in China (Raji, 2022). These

environmental damages give rise to soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, disruption of the climate and decrease in agricultural production, especially to the rural populace who survive on the environmental resources.

The traditional environmental management concepts in Nigeria focus on technocratic resolution of problems, policy realization and economic incentives with little consideration of cultural and philosophical assumptions of human-environment relationships. That is especially problematic in African contexts where the history of sustainable resource management was informed by the indigenous worldviews and morality systems. African communitarian ideology– Ubuntu, which focuses on interconnection, collective responsibility and I am because we are can be used as a powerful ethical guidance to rethink environmental care in Nigeria.

Ubuntu philosophy acknowledges that the wellbeing of individuals cannot be achieved in isolation without reflecting on the health of bigger communities, including not only human relations but also nature of the environment (Metz, 2019). This community idea of holism, that is, people, animals, plants, and ecosystems, offers conceptual empenies to address problems of the environment together and, at the same time, is rooted in certain African values and traditions.

By considering Ubuntu philosophy as educating about sustainable environmental management in Nigeria, this paper explores how it can be applied in farm management, forest conservation and ecological recovery. According to the recent discoveries of African environmental ethics, traditional ecological systems and systems of community-based natural resources management, the discussion informs with the Ubuntu concepts about the effectiveness and cultural sensitivity of natural resource management and the environmental policies.

Ubuntu Philosophy and Environmental Ethics

Foundations of Ubuntu

Ubuntu is a symbol of African worldviews, which focus on the interrelatedness of everything, manifested in many terms throughout the sub-Saharan world (gimuntu in Angola, muthu in Botswana, maaya in West Africa, botho in Sotho) (Wikipedia, 2025). Ubuntu-umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (a person is a person through other persons) is not only limited to human relations but also to the full life webs where the natural environment is involved.

According to Chibvongodze (2016), Ubuntu brings human, natural, and spiritual tripartite together, whereby human identity and ethical responsibilities are passed to the world around, animal life, and ecology. Such a tripartite association can be explicitly in opposition to Western dualistic thought that places people and nature apart and makes human beings real members of the ecological communities.

The environmental stewardship has a few principles within the philosophy of interconnectedness and interdependence: Ubuntu acknowledges individual wellbeing to alter the welfare of other community members and natural environment; collective responsibility: Ubuntu promotes collective responsibility of the society welfare where environmental stewardship is collective action and shared responsibility; intergenerational obligation: Ubuntu views of the world rely on the interdependence of future generations, since current practice will affect the sustainability and community

continuity of a society; harmony and balance: Ubuntu promotes peaceful coexistence of a society with natural world

Ubuntu and Environmental Interrelatedness

The more recent literature focuses on the green of Ubuntu. Ubuntu values are comparable to the core environmental ethics and sustainable development concepts. Interrelatedness acknowledges the human-nature interdependence under community forests and sacred groves. Shared responsibility takes the form of joint responsibility in the stewardship of the forest by villages and in collective agriculture. Intergenerational thinking provides the future generation with a sustainable consumption of the available resources by means of ancient conservation methods, and seed banking. It is a balance and harmony that ensures ecological balance and conservation of biodiversity by ensuring rotational farming and banning seasonal restrictions. Environmental health has been identified by community wellbeing as human welfare foundation in terms of access to clean water and maintained soil fertility. The consensus decision-making allows participation-based governance in the environmental sphere with the help of traditional councils and community conservation agreements (Ajitoni, 2024).

Ajitoni (2024) reckons that the more collaborative and inclusive approaches of managing natural resources and combating climate change that Ubuntu focuses on interconnectedness and shared responsibility offer bases to such practices. This opinion is more than true when one thinks about the Nigerian environmental problems which need inter-layered actions at local community levels to national policy frameworks.

Philosophical Analysis: Traditional Knowledge and Environmental Degradation

Nigeria's Environmental Crisis Scale

Deforestation in Nigeria is one of the most deplorable environmental problems that the nation is facing. It is estimated by United Nations that Nigeria has lost over 90 percent of total forest cover, 10 million hectares or 10 percent of total land area and this puts Nigeria in the highest rank of deforestation countries in the whole world with an emission of approximately 3.5 percent every year (Elnafat, 2024). The Sahara Desert is expanding south at a rate of 0.6 kilometers per annum endangering 75 million hectares of land in northern Nigeria and affecting the coastal floods.

In the areas of the Niger Delta, the primary contributors to deforestation are agricultural expansion, logging of timber and charcoal, infrastructural development, and exploration of petroleum (Wikipedia, 2024). Small-scale farming is the largest cause of deforestation because of the demand creating more food to feed swelling populations and the commercial logging to get the precious timber to the home and overseas markets.

The effects on the environment are not limited to the disappearance of forests. Deforestation leads to soil erosion, biodiversity, climate changes, carbon, and the probability of high flooding and landslides (Wikipedia, 2024). Ecosystem imbalance is a restrictive factor in access to clean water, medicinal plants, and other forest products on which the rural populations have been depending on access to live.

Nigeria is also faced with agricultural sustainability challenges. Agricultural sector is a significant part of the population (approximately 70 percent) and a quarter of the GDP, but experiences growing sustainability demands which are aggravated by the degradation of the environment (Akanmu et al., 2023). The fact that continuous cultivation has displaced the traditional farming regimens that used to ensure soil fertility by way of fallowing, crop

rotation and integrated pest management methods has exhausted the soils nutrients and exposed them to the predations of pests and diseases.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Ubuntu

Ecological knowledge systems in Nigeria (TEK systems) based on Ubuntu concepts are found in broader ethnic groups that are setting up extensive, multifaceted ecological knowledge systems (Ruth, 2024). Agricultural practices, forest management, wildlife and natural resource management that support the generations of communities are among such systems.

Ubuntu environmental application can also be found in aboriginal farming practices such as integrated agroforestry systems where food crops, trees and livestock are integrated in mutually supportive systems. These systems indicate the interconnectedness focus of Ubuntu, which recognizes the different elements of the farm ecosystem, which contribute to the help of one another.

Farming decisions are based on precise knowledge of the functioning of the environment, plant life cycles, and animal behavior due to seasonal calendars and ecological clues. This kind of knowledge represents the sensitivity of Ubuntu to the needs of society, in this case, to the broader ecological community (Akanmu et al., 2023).

Seed conservation and exchange is a natural Ubuntu idea of sharing and exchange in which the community responsibility and intergenerational obligation are manifested. Farmers keep a large number of crop variety ranges and share them within and between the communities, which guarantees food security and genetic diversity (Maundu, 2022).

There are also sacred forests and special places that many Nigerian societies maintain sacred groves and community forests that have a religious and ecological purpose. These spaces imply the elements of spiritual, social, and environmental community living addressed in Ubuntu (Maundu, 2022).

Community-Based Forest Management

The traditional forest management systems in Nigeria can be used as an example of practical implementation of Ubuntu philosophy in the field of environmental management. The Ekuri community forest of Cross River State is the example of community-based management that was officially recognized since 1982 demonstrating the effectiveness of the indigenous government system (Kom & Nethengwe, 2024).

The community forest management is typically characterized by collective ownership and decision making whereby forests are seen as community property and decisions made by traditional councils to ensure broader participation and consensus formation which depicts Ubuntu collective responsibility. The ecological calendars of tradition allow communities to manage forests according to the seasonal cycles and reproductive behavior and ecological processes of wildlife, which is a testimony to the harmony and balance orientation in Ubuntu. The intergenerational transmission takes place within the formal and informal Ubuntu systems of education through knowledge and management responsibility passing between the older and younger generations, therefore, Ubuntu intergenerational responsibilities. Spiritual and cultural factors imply that forests have spiritual functions that enhance the sense of community and environmental values in which Ubuntu community life involves the material and spiritual community life factors.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Ubuntu-Based Environmental Policy

The concepts of Ubuntu can offer viable recommendations on how to develop agricultural systems that are more sustainable in Nigeria. The philosophy of interconnectedness supports agroecological practices that take agro farming as a part of a greater ecological and social system (not as individual production units). Community-supported agriculture on behalf of Ubuntu collective responsibility principle Community-supported agriculture schemes Community-supported agriculture schemes In practice, community-supported agriculture schemes can be implemented, with the risks and benefits of cultivation being proportioned out among members of the community. These would result in food security and reduced reliance of individual farmers on effects of environmental and market stressors.

The activities of participatory crop improvement based on Ubuntu-related solutions would be directed at participatory plant breeding and knowledge sharing between farmers that involve sharing local knowledge and concerns rather than relying on external agricultural research. The concept of integrated pest management supported by the balance and harmony emphasis of Ubuntu uses the approach of integrated pest management based on the work of natural ecological processes rather than on the use of only external inputs. These plans recognize the fact that healthy ecosystems provide natural pest control services.

Community wellbeing and soil health manifest where Ubuntu interconnectedness principle states that soil health relates to community wellbeing, the composting, cover crops, and minimal tillage that lead to soil fertility and reduce external input costs.

Forest Conservation and Restoration

Ubuntu philosophy provides ethical reasons on conservation and restoration which involves communities as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries or conservation fences. The community forest businesses promoted through community forest enterprises which are based on the Ubuntu collective responsibility principle allow the communities to earn revenues and maintain forests. Examples include sustainable harvesting of timber, collection of non-timber forest products and ecotourism where the economic incentives help in conserving the forests.

Ubuntu has promoted participatory forest monitoring through participatory forest monitoring systems where synergistic decision-making by the Ubuntu means that communities can monitor forest health, wildlife populations and conservation outcomes by using traditional ecological knowledge and scientific methods. Community building by restoration implies community-building activities that can be exemplified by forest restoration processes that strengthen social groups and also restore ecological processes. The opportunities involving Ubuntu principles by working in the ways of tree-planting campaigns, nursery management, and restoration site management are the possibilities of collective action.

Implementation Challenges and Conclusion

Implementing Ubuntu philosophy in the Nigerian environmental management is structurally challenged even with its potential. Urbanization changes the traditional structures of the society and weaken the social values to enable Ubuntu-based systems of

governance. The young generation is gradually migrating to cities abandoning traditional ecological knowledge systems and community-based management institutions. Market integration globally creates incentives to extract resources on a short-term basis that would ultimately undermine long-term Ubuntu values of stewardship of the environment. Traditional sustainable practices may be destroyed through commercial logging, cash crop production and export agriculture.

The Nigerian environmental policy is susceptible to the Western policies that imagine individual property rights, technical solutions, and centralized management systems as opposed to community-based stewardship systems, which are based on the Ubuntu philosophy. Both population growth, climate change and economic pressures are short term needs that require sustainability which is beyond traditional management systems means.

Regardless of these obstacles, there is a chance to embrace Ubuntu ideals to the contemporary environmental care. Ubuntu can be integrated into the policy innovation to include the following aspects in the policies that assist in environmental policies; policy should facilitate participatory environmental management, community-based project to manage natural resources locally, and appreciation of traditional ecological knowledge systems. Ubuntu philosophy and traditional knowledge on ecology could be incorporated into the courses of environmental education where education offers culturally driven sustainability that inspires the African people.

The opportunities provided by technology integration call upon the use of new thing technologies such as Geographic Information Systems, remote sensing, and mobile communications to complement the established community-based monitoring and management systems without interfering with the conventional government systems. Economic incentives can assist the Ubuntu-based stewardship practices through the payment of ecosystem service, community forest enterprise, and sustainable agriculture certification programs.

As demonstrated in this discussion, Ubuntu philosophy can provide useful frameworks in grappling with the problems of environmental issues in Nigeria with the approach of taking into account social, ecological and cultural sustainability dimensions. Relationality, shared responsibility, and generational responsibility, which Ubuntu seeks to emphasize, are ethically sustainable ecological stewardships models that are morally viable in African cultural contexts and traditional ecological knowledge sites.

Among the main lessons, it is important to note that environmental issues cannot be eliminated merely on technical terms but have to be viewed through social and cultural backgrounds that define human-environment relationships. Ubuntu philosophy offers the following assumptions: The interdependence of environmental health and human wellbeing is achieved through the thick webs across species and generations.

The usefulness of traditional environmental ethics manifests practically when conservation success on biodiversity in Yoruba sacred groves and use of traditional systems in agricultural production in northern Nigeria is achieved. The outcomes are consistent with the vision of Ubuntu that focuses more on long-term ecological consciousness and communal significance of ethics but emphasizes the role of indigenous knowledge systems in the issues of conservation in the present context.

Correspondence between Ubuntu and environmental philosophies opposes mainstream western-based environmental ethics and conservation behaviour. This analysis treats

indigenous philosophical paradigms as offering intricate alternatives to mainstream conservation paradigms and helpful solutions to existing environmental issues, as opposed to viewing traditional ecological knowledge as primitive and outdated (Diawuo and Issifu, 2017).

Better analysis of parallel matches between western environmental philosophy and other traditional African knowledge systems, how to integrate traditional and modern approaches to conservation, and the generalization of community-based conservation form possibilities are further studies that should be done. Ubuntu and environmental philosophy intersection has the prospects of developing more accepting, culturally-grounded, and environmentally useful environmental conservation policies during global environmental change eras.

To effectively implement the Ubuntu philosophy in environmental stewardship in Nigeria, communities, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners will need to develop viable plans that will integrate indigenous knowledge and modern environmental science. Such integration processes may also provide opportunities to mitigate environmental crisis in Nigeria by providing the ways of creating ecological resilience and social cohesion the central theme in Ubuntu that health is ecological webs that sustain all the life on earth.

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