

Communalistic Ethics and Natural Resources Depletion in Africa

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Abstract

Africa is blessed with enormous amount of natural resources. The abuse and mismanagement of these resources have resulted in their depletion. The research examines why the continent that is so rich with natural resources and raw materials is grossly underdeveloped in terms of scientific and information technology as a result of which her people suffers and non-human lives are endangered? It is partly because her rich indigenous communalistic ethics has been abandoned. A critical analytic method is used to understand this communalistic ethics and how it can help to curb natural resources depletion. Communalistic ethics has its own weaknesses, but if the viable aspects of this ethics are reclaimed, it will help greatly in the management of natural resources in Africa and curb environmental degradation.

Keywords: Communalism, ethics, natural resources, environment, and Africa.

Introduction

Africa, in terms of life expectancy, high standard of living, provision of abundant life for the people, presence of massive infrastructure and advancement in contemporary scientific and information technology, is generally considered to be developing (Odey, 2005 & Nduka, 2006). The continent is blessed with rich and vastly untapped human potentials and natural resources. The continent has been drastically affected by the brain-drain phenomenon. Thousands of qualified African personnel in every human field and endeavour imaginable have gone into Diaspora using their potentials and resources to build already developed nations more than their home countries. Regarding her natural resources, gold is found in southern Africa, the central African region is rich in diamond, the North and West Africa are blessed with crude oil, and East Africa and Southern Africa are replete with wildlife. The continent has a vast landmass and atmosphere and is surrounded by vast ocean resources. There is hardly any nation in Africa that is not endowed with some natural resources especially mineral resources.

The point is that Africa's vast enormous natural resources harnessed by her massive human potentials could have helped to achieve more development and a higher standard of life. Rather what the continent has experienced is a lot of social, economic, political and environmental problems (Odey, 2005 & Nduka, 2006). Many of these are precipitated or caused by human mismanagement of the economy and the environment (Igwe, 2010). In terms of social problems, she has suffered from high youth unemployment, youth restiveness, ethnic conflicts, and insecurity (Odey, 2005). In the economic sphere, the economy is grossly underdeveloped; there is poor infrastructure, financial corruption, embezzlement of public funds, and poor communication network (Igwe, 2010). The political scene is inundated with terrorism, political violence, electoral fraud, inept and poor leadership, and political instability. Environmental problems that the continent has faced and faces includes deforestation, desertification, drought, resource

wars, ozone layer depletion, soil erosion, natural environmental disasters, and misuse of natural resources.

The last of these, the misuse, abuse or depletion of natural resources is a crucial one in this age of environmental crisis. The fact that Africa's natural resources are in a state of depletion is attested to by many scholars and sources (Kearney, 2010; RedOrbit, 2008 & United Nations University, 2012). Without the effective management of her natural resources, Africa's achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other goals will be greatly hampered. This is why it is critical to reflect on the abuse of those natural resources. It is also vital to propose an ethic that can help in managing those natural resources. The aim of this paper is to show that Africa's vast natural resources when well managed and harnessed by her vast and abundant human resources can conquer poverty and many other developmental challenges. This paper shows that this could have been done with her rich traditional ethical heritage of a communalistic lifestyle. Why is it that with such a rich ethical heritage, Africa is still suffering and impoverished? It is because the communalistic ethic has been greatly vitiated by practices such as consumerism, greed, individualism, etc.

Conceptual Analysis

Communalism implies placing emphasis on "common ownership of virtually all the means of production" in a society (Igwe, 2005). The concern is with the communal identity more than the individual. It does not deny the existence of the individual but the individual is because of the community. This is the notion of *Ubuntu* which means "I am because we are" (Ramose, 2009). Wiredu (1996) defines a communalistic society as one in which the person is rooted in social responsibility and the individual is embedded in the larger society not above it. Communalism is co-operative living and is expressed in the African extended family system. In the extended family system, as Ekei (2006) opines, "the African sense of family is more extensive, integrative, and altruistic. It is a system that includes all and excludes none" (p. 167). The African extended family system is a radical expression of *Ubuntu* for it "addresses our interconnectedness, our common humanity and the responsibilities to one another that flow from that connection" (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 101). Nussbaum (2009) citing Mkhize rightly opines that:

The African view of personhood denies that a person can be described solely in terms of the physical and psychological properties. It is with reference to the community that a person is defined. The importance of the community in self-definition is summed up by Mbiti, 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am'... it is this rootedness of the self in community that gives rise to sayings such as *umuntu ngu, umtu ngabantu* (Nguni)/*Motho ke motho ka batho babang* (Sotho). This roughly translate to, 'it is through others that one attains selfhood'. The Venda saying, *Muthu u bebelwa munwe* (a person is born for other), also captures the interdependence between self and community. (p.101)

Nussbaum (2009) further cites Battle when he says that: "We say a person is a person through other persons. We don't come fully formed into the world...We need other human beings in order to be human. We are made for togetherness, we are made for family, for fellowship..." (p. 101). Turaki (2006) states that African communalism is based on the notion of holism. There are no solitary individuals rather the individual is related and dependent on the community, a community which is inclusive of the spirits and nature. Turaki (2006) propounds further that it is characterized by "communal self-

respect, interdependence, survival of the community, group assurance, cooperation and harmony, affiliation and shared duties” (p. 36). Communalistic ethics refers to how this African orientation and worldview reflects in human behaviour in working for the good of the society and all. Gyekye (2012) describing African ethics argues that:

The ethics of a society is embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right or wrong, what is a good or bad character; it is also embedded in the conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes held by the members of the society; it is embedded, furthermore, in the forms or patterns of behavior that are considered by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living, justice, and fairness. The ideas and beliefs about moral conduct are articulated, analyzed, and interpreted by the moral thinkers of the society.

African societies, as organized and functioning human communities, have undoubtedly evolved ethical systems—ethical values, principles, rules—intended to guide social and moral behavior. But, like African philosophy itself, the ideas and beliefs of the African society that bear on ethical conduct have not been given elaborate investigation and clarification and, thus, stand in real need of profound and extensive analysis and interpretation. In the last three decades or so, attempts have been made by contemporary African philosophers to give sustained reflective attention to African moral ideas. (par. 1 & 2)

It is in this light that African communalistic ethics should be described. It is concerned with the right and good behaviours that will boost the wellbeing and welfare of the community members. This ethics shuns destructive and harmful anti-social behaviours that degrade human identity and the order in the cosmos. Ethics is well known as the study of right and wrong actions. Its purpose is to make humans take the right decisions and live morally right to enhance life. From the thoughts of Ndubuisi and Okoro (2005) right behaviour in terms of communalism recognizes the unitary world and interconnection for all things, enhances vital force, affects others positively, strives to maintain a balance between individual and communal interests, ensure the welfare of others, destroys selfishness, promotes solidarity and wealth sharing, promotes communal labour, and respect for the land. In the words of Ehusani (1991) social dualism is absent from the African worldview, neither the individual nor community is a threat to each other. Ehusani (1991) describes the implications of the communal spirit furthermore as: solidarity among persons, collective achievements, inclusivity, strong bond of kinship, sacrifice for one another and hospitality.

The idea of African hospitality is truly a vivid expression of a form of communalistic ethics. Olikenyi (2001) notes that hospitality is at the heart of African culture and is still strongly practised, despite the ravages of colonialism and global culture. It is practised in the form of welcoming of strangers/guests through greetings, presentation of kola nuts, sharing of meal and offering of accommodation. Hospitality is rooted in the conviction of one’s duty to others and the community. The other is recognized as part of one’s kith and kin. Achebe (1959) succinctly describes this love for solidarity, friendship, and hospitality thus:

A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyman can see it in

his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to come together. (p. 155)

This communalistic ethics and spirit pervade the sharing of natural resources in traditional Africa. Land and the natural resources in it were considered to be communal properties held in trust to the ancestors and ultimately to the creator God. This being the case, the idea of private property especially for its own sake was discouraged. Whatever is owned through labour and inheritance is for the good of all and the individual should be ready to come to the aid of others in need. As Nwala (2010) indicates, among the Igbo people there can be some form of individual ownership but it is subject to communal control. Nwala (2010) also shows that the idea of cooperative labour on communal land and projects is also very strong. The benefits of this labour are shared following specified customary laws. The delicate point that should be stressed is that even when land is apportioned to individuals and families/groups, the land ultimately is for the community. Ndubuisi and Okoro (2005) state that land is not a market commodity; it is communal belonging meant for all generations. Nyerere (1968) has acknowledged the African communalistic spirit in his writings on African socialism by identifying this communalistic mindset as *Ujamaa* or African socialism. *Ujamaa* speaks of brotherhood/sisterhood and implies sharing of life and resources. In traditional African societies people were discouraged from amassing wealth simply for themselves.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to define what natural resources are. Natural resources refer to all the resources on the land, below it, or above it that are not created or manufactured by humans. They are endowments and gifts from nature. They are not products of human ingenuity or labour. When humans add their labour to them they become social and cultural products. Ikeke (2012) argues that: natural resources are neither artificial nor cultural resources and they are not simply for the human good. They are also for the ecological and cosmic good and so they should be exploited in a sustainable manner (Ikeke, 2012). The exploitation of natural resources in a sustainable manner can be partly achieved through a communalistic spirit. Communalism is not the total panacea to the African resource curse and crisis. The Africa that is the concern here is the continental geographic landmass of Africa with its peoples and cultures.

With the above in mind, it is imperative to now define the concept of natural resource depletion. The concept of natural resource depletion implies that natural resources can be used up to such a point that they become scarce or no longer available. *The Oxford Dictionary* (2013) defines the word, “deplete” as “use up the supply or resources of,” “diminish in number or quantity.” Depletion is the gradual process of getting depleted. The term can also be used metaphorically to refer to environmental degradation or the diminishing quality of value of natural resources. When natural resources are polluted their value diminishes. Natural resource depletion is a core aspect of environmental degradation. As Jimoh (2006) notes, “environmental degradation relates to the depreciation in the qualities and quantities of vegetation, soil, air, water resources among others” (p. 276). To be more exact, citing Miller, Jimoh (2006) says that it means, “a downward trend in the environmental resources such that their level of use in the human societies equally decrease at an increasing rate” (p. 276). The implication of this is that misuse, overuse, mismanagement, and pollution of free environmental goods and services amount or result in the depletion of those resources. There should be no doubt

that when natural resources on which human life and some other non-human lives on the planet depend are used up, human and planetary lives are endangered.

The Causes of Natural Resources Depletion

There are a lot of factors that bring about the depletion of natural resources in Africa. They can be classified into anthropogenic, and natural. The focus here is more with the anthropogenic. The list of anthropogenic factors includes deforestation, violent conflicts and resource wars, population growth, urbanization, etc. The anthropogenic factors are so many that it would not be wise to examine all here.

The natural factors are not manmade although some of them can be precipitated by some human activities. Take for instance soil erosion and land degradation. It can arise from the landscape and terrain of the environment. It can occur as a result of natural disasters and emergencies such as earthquakes, drought, and terrible weather conditions. But it can also be caused by misuse and over-exploitation of farmland, industrial activities, and urbanization. Desertification can be natural or it can be as a result of human activities such as deforestation and agricultural activities. In the process, the vast Sahara Desert in North Africa has been encroaching southward as a result of human activities (Anizoba, 2005).

War and violent conflicts have exerted enormous pressure on natural resources (Bassey & Aniah, 2012). War brings about destruction of both natural and built environments. Financial resources that should be devoted to urban renewal, re-forestation, curb desertification, and embark on environmental friendly projects are devoted to war. Warfare often involves massive movements of troops which impact on the landscape. The United Nations Environmental Programme (1992) declares that: "Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development. States shall therefore respect international law providing protection for the environment in times of armed conflict and cooperate in its further development, as necessary." Enzler (2006) shows that:

The application of weapons, the destruction of structures and oil fields, fires, military transport movements and chemical spraying are all examples of the destroying impact war may have on the environment. Air, water and soil are polluted, man and animal are killed, and numerous health affects occur among those still living.

How war has depleted the natural resources of Africa is well documented in Enzler (2006), and United Nations Environmental Programme (2010). There is hardly any region of Africa that is not affected by war. Look at the wars in Central Africa, the Nigeria Civil War, Liberia, Sierra Leone; conflicts in the Horn of Africa, and rebellions all over the continent.

Human over-exploitation of environmental resources makes them to dwindle in quantity and also lowers the quality of those resources. Humans live in nature and they must make use of the resources of nature to sustain their lives. But this must be done in a sustainable manner. It should be noted that this is what brought about the concept of sustainable development. Ajibade & Ojebola (2006) state that: "diverse anthropogenic activities and environment related problems such as deforestation, desertification, air, land, and water pollution, flooding and erosion, soil infertility and soil organism loss, etc., now pose a problem to man's existence" (p. 303).

Lumbering activities destroy forest, cause biodiversity loss, and soil erosion thus limiting the uses of those forests (Jimoh, 2006). Humans have also depleted water

resources making it unfit for human consumption through the use of chemicals to capture fishes (Jimoh, 2006).

Rapid urbanization which often leads to urban decay as a result of overcrowding, unemployment and social crime also results in slums. Slums are serious hazards to biotic organisms in those areas. Slums are often without good water supply; they lack provision of power and make the people who live in them to put pressure on the natural resources surrounding them. Anizoba (2005) says that high population leads to destruction of ecosystems as built environment has to occupy more space, make the vegetation to recover slowly and reduces animal pollution. Every form of population increase puts pressure on natural resources (Udo, 2012).

The Imperative to Curb the Depletion

Depletion of natural resources endangers human survival as food security and basic needs of human are threatened; and employment, economic progress, export earnings are also impacted (Eregha & Isitoah, 2007; Odibo & Oletu, 2007). Environmental health challenges arise from depletion of resources such as soil, water, and air. When the soil is contaminated by solid and industrial waste the health of people who use that soil is affected. When the air is polluted through noise pollution, combustion from vehicles, gas flaring and other factory activities; people breathe in toxic and polluted air. In an interview with some residents from Illorin, Nigeria, Ajibade and Oyelola (2006) indicate that the residents which include those who engage in these anthropogenic activities and those who live in the vicinity complained that they were suffering from lungs, eyes, skin, ear and bodily pains and most of them frequently report in the hospitals, which used not to be the case many years back. When humans are not healthy as a result of a degraded environment their full potentials cannot be realized and human ambitions are dwarfed (Oghenekome, 2007).

It also leads to extinction of endangered species and biodiversity loss. Biodiversity loss has serious consequences for both human and non-human lives. Eregha & Isitoah (2007) rightly note that:

Heavy exploitation of biodiversity could lead to the extinction of some indigenous species because they are well adapted to the local climate and resistant to disease and pest attacks from organisms with which they, for a long time, formed a very rich ecosystem for conserving the environment.

Loss of such species contributes further to degrading the environment. (p. 70)

A degraded or depleted environment is a serious threat to human health and wellbeing. Natural resources depletion in the forms of deforestation, desertification can result in climate change. The benefits of natural forest resources cannot be over-exaggerated. The trees are the lungs of the world. Forest provides humans with food and water, fuel, timber, paper, plastic, pharmaceuticals, provides recreation, provides habitat for animals and organisms, regulate the world temperature, reduce climate change, controls flood and erosion, and helps in management of soil fertility (Anizoba, 2005).

Wildlife is also part of natural resources in Africa. A lot of benefits accrue from wildlife areas such as creation of zoological gardens, medical and biological research, controlled hunting for games, grazing resources, medicine, and recreation but when it is depleted through poaching, unauthorized grazing and gaming, over-exploitation; these benefits are lost (Anizoba 2005). It can then be seen that because of the immense benefits that natural resources bring to humans and ecosystems, it is necessary to conserve and use them in a sustainable manner.

Curbing the Depletion through Communalistic Ethics

The use or misuse of environmental resources cannot be separated from the issues of values. One's beliefs on what natural resources are and their purpose will ultimately determine one's attitude and one's behaviour towards these resources. Humans cannot exist without the resources of nature. One's use of resources then cannot be separated from moral questions. How one uses resources determines the wellbeing and welfare of others. Over-exploitation of resources without ethical restraints will affect people's survival especially that of the poor and future generations. There could be many ways to tackle natural resources depletion. They include: pro-poor policies, environmental policies, environmental education, intensification of corporate social responsibility, and moral rearmament with communalistic values. While not ignoring the others, it should be understood that moral rearmament with communalistic ethics is a crucial one.

The idea that African cultural values can enhance sustainable living, environmental conservation, foster altruism and solidarity is attested to by many scholars (Eregha & Isitoh, 2007; Ekei, 2006; & Maathai 2010). The anthropogenic factors that precipitate natural resource depletion can only be mitigated by a change in behaviour of humans. And that change will not come unless humans are convinced of it and accept to modify their lifestyles with the communalistic ethics proposed here. Humans need to look beyond their individual and sectional interests to the good of the entire community and ecosystems. Humans must assess their environmental behaviours in the light of the impact on other humans and non-humans. African communalism is rooted in holism and dynamism. The person is because of the community (*Ubuntu*). The person is because of the environment (*Ukama*). The African is to think of the interest of future generations. When resources are depleted, present and future humans are endangered. This consideration must not be lost sight of in making use of natural resources. It behoves humans in Africa then to be prudent and wise in managing resources.

Perhaps the greatest problem with African countries is the problem of leadership. Nwoke (2006) citing Okigbo correctly says that:

... endowment with natural and human resources does not necessarily make a country rich; it makes it only potentially rich. A country can remain potentially rich on a permanent basis while a country that is not generously endowed with natural resources can become very rich. Ultimately, it is the quality of human (leadership) resources, not merely the endowment of natural resources, that determines whether a country becomes rich. (p. 95)

Africa's natural resources have been mismanaged and squandered through corruption and embezzlement. Many countries in Africa look like failed states. Leaders in public office and rebel leaders fight wars over natural resources thus depleting the resources. If Africa is to take its proper place among the comity of nations, her leaders must root their lifestyles in communalistic ethics. Natural resources are not simply for the good of leaders, but they are for the entire biotic good. Communalistic ethics emphasizes the value of good character. People with good characters are needed if African's natural resources are to be used and managed in a sustainable manner. The notion of character is central to African ethics. For African ethic is "a character based ethics that maintain that the quality of the individual's character is most fundamental in our moral life" (Gyekye, 2011, Section 3). Gyekye (2011) propounds that:

Good character is the essence of the African moral system, the linchpin of the moral wheel. The justification for a character-based ethics is not far to seek. For, all that a society can do, regarding moral conduct, is to impart

moral knowledge to its members, making them aware of the moral values and principles of that society. In general, society satisfactorily fulfills this duty of imparting moral knowledge to its members through moral education of various forms, including, as in African societies, telling morally-freighted proverbs and folktales to its younger members. (Section 3)

When people fail or they mismanage the resources of nature it is because they lack a good character. They have failed to put into action the values they were taught. In the formation of character, the African from birth is formed to be part of a community and to live with the community in mind. Vices like greed, corruption, embezzlement, pollution of the environment, destruction of natural resources are all as a result of failure of character. The communalistic ethics causes the African to see his fellow man as a brother. The Akan people say, “*Honam mu Nni Nhanao* -Humanity has no boundary” (Gyekye, 2011, section 6). It is true that in some traditional African societies, the concept of communalism was limited to one’s kin and tribe and that Africans did fight themselves on the basis of tribes, clans and culture. These are things that should not be promoted in any culture. Based on the African concept of *Ubuntu* and *Ukama*, the concept of brotherhood must be extended to include not just humans but nature. Hospitality, generosity, concern for others, compassion, communal feelings, must be extended to non-humans. It is true that Africans were rooted in a virtue of hospitality and they extended it to strangers and foreigners most of the time.

Communalistic ethics can impact Africa greatly for good as it did in the past. Confirming that Africa is rooted in a communitarian ethic, Gyekye (2011) affirms that African ethic is social not individualistic and the human is social by nature and related with others. For the Akan people say, “when a human being descends from the heavens, he descends into a human town (*Onipa firi soro besi A, obesi onipa kuron*)” (Gyekye, 2011, section 10). Gyekye (2011) is right to argue thus:

The recognition in the African ethical traditions of all human beings as brothers by reason of our common humanity is indeed a lofty moral ideal that must be cherished and made a vital or robust feature of global ethics in our contemporary world. It is a bulwark against developing bigoted attitudes toward peoples of different cultures or skin colors who are, also, members of the universal human family called race. (section 10)

Africans are interested in helping one another and coming to the aid of strangers. They were concerned that nobody should be allowed to suffer. This value can help in the management of natural resources. Why should an individual acquire so great an amount of natural resources when many people are suffering in the same continent that is blessed with abundance? The communalistic worldview included the natural world as part of the community. Gumo, Gisege, Raballah, & Ouma (2012) enunciate that:

Humankind, according to the African thought and belief, is not an isolated creature. Humanity is only part of the universe which is full of animals, plants and inanimate objects. All these components are related to each other in various ways, and all these are dependent on the Supreme God for their appearance and their continued existence. The relationship between humanity and the surroundings are in different categories, depending on the use to which humankind puts them, and on the beliefs which developed in the creation of myths. African philosophy on resource utilization and environmental protection is spiritually-based. Major conservation efforts and the control of resources are influenced by this spirituality. Religious

beliefs and taboo systems are at the centre of life as a whole. The African spiritual worldviews create respect for nature, reverence for hills, forests, animals, and rivers. This practice is still held by some African communities, especially among the Luhya of Kenya who use their African spirituality to conserve the Kakamega Forest. (p. 3)

It is clear that there was interdependence between nature and humans and that through taboos, totems, religious myths, rituals, sacred groves; recognition of mystical powers, Africans conserved environmental resources (Gumo, Gisege, Raballah & Ouma, 2012). In the light of the environmental challenges that Africa faces and the depletion of resources, if present Africans can thoroughly revive this attitude, it can curb the depletion of natural resources. People will not just take resources without thinking of others or the future generations. There is need for a new reawakening. Reviving viable aspect of African cultural way of life should not be discountenanced. Maathai (2010) is right to note that, “the importance of Africans cultural heritage to the sense of who they are, are still not recognised sufficiently by them or others” (p. 160). She writes that in time past:

People carried their cultural practices, stories and sense of the world around them in their oral traditions, which were rich and meaningful. They lived in harmony with the other species and the natural environment and they protected the world.... they took what they needed for their own quality of life but they did not accumulate and destroy in the process – and they did all these so that future generations would survive and thrive. By the time my mother died, in 2000, everything could be sacrificed for money: forest, land, goats, values, and even people. In a cash economy, it became necessary to destroy the environment, own part of it, and deny others access to it – including those whose families had lived on it for many generations. It is my search into this heritage I have in common with millions of other African and elsewhere that convinces me that the tenants of modernity – with its belief that material goods, greater technology, and innovation at any cost will solve all our problems and meet all our needs – are insufficient to provide an ethical direction for our lives.” (p. 161-162)

It is important not to be unmindful of the limitation of African communalistic ethics. Maathai (2010) avers that:

To be sure, culture is a double-edge sword that can be used as a weapon to strike a blow for empowerment or to threaten those who would assert their own self-expression or self-identity. In many communities in and their regions, women are discriminated against, exploited, and controlled through prevailing cultures, which demand that they act a certain way. They are denied power access to wealth and services, and even control of their bodies through practices such as female genital mutilation, early or child marriage, and rules of disinheritance. Some cultures demand that men be warriors and learn to kill, or to treat women a certain way, or to repress emotions, such as affection, pain, and compassion. Those who break away from the norm are punished or ostracized. These are some of the negative aspects of culture. We cannot shy away from these realities. (p. 164)

In the communitarian outlook to life, there can be tension between the individual and the community. In traditional society, the rights of the community will prevail over that of the individual. It should be noted that the right of the community should only prevail over that of the individual if what the individual seeks is selfish, anti-social,

dehumanizing and not for the good of all. The debate of defining these terms or on what basis the community should prevail is not relevant here. It suffices to know that individual rights should be respected but not when they destroy common or natural resources that should bring benefits to all. This is why societies and governments must regulate the exploitation of natural resources. Imagine if there are no public policies regulating the mining industry; then multinational corporations would have greatly devastated the African environment. Imagine if there are no regulations guiding wildlife; illegal trade and poaching would have brought many African animals and plants into extinction. While individual rights should be respected, it should not be forgotten that:

Solidarity and cooperation are necessary requirements for human living and flourishing. This thought is most keenly expressed by the Sotho saying that 'I am because we are, and because we are, I am too'. As such, one must pay regard to the role that one's life may have on the welfare and interests of others. One's conduct, preferably, should contribute to the common good because it is from this pool of good that one's own welfare can be extracted. This essential interdependence of human life is succinctly expressed in Akan, as rightfully observed by Wiredu, by the maxim life is mutual aid. Hence community must be accorded primary status in determining ethical norms and conduct in African culture. (Ajei, 2007, p. 197-198)

It is important to note that the individual is not fully engulfed by social relationships for the moral autonomy of the person remains and the ethical identity of the individual should not be dissolve by the community (Ajei, 2007). The individual is important and should develop his/her self autonomy, self confidence, self-reliance and ability for it is only then that he/she can contribute to the community (Ajei, 2007). African ethics does not reject individualistic values in so far as they promote the common good of humans and nature for "the welfare of the community requires the initiative and talents of its individual members. The relationship between persons and community is thus one of interdependence and mutual nourishing. This is the quintessence of African communitarianness" (Ajei, 2007, p. 201).

Kochalumchuvattil (2012) citing Forster contends that that the communitarian worldview has been battered by the effects of individualism, westernization and other global values therefore all Africans do not see the world in an integrated manner. Despite the critique that communalism limits individuation, and at times has an oppressive element, Kochalumchuvattil (2012) advises that:

This rejuvenation of the philosophy of Ubuntu is important since it provides Africans with a sense of self-identity, self respect and achievement enabling them to deal with their problems in a positive manner by drawing on the humanistic values they have inherited, yet attention needs to be given to the elements of the ethics of Ubuntu in relation to the active engagement in horizontal relationships that shape who one is. True identity is not only based on the tasks or roles of the individuals. (p. 121)

The fact is that there should be no romanticization of the African past but it should also be realized that the whole purpose of education is not simply to transform but also to transmit what is good that comes from the past. As it is, human civilization will not be fully complete without its histories, zoos, museums, architectures, libraries, science and technology. Without a preservation of what is noble from the past, humanity has no future. The goal is not to romanticize the "African's tradition, but there can be a culture's

returns to African tradition for the important lesson of the living earth and those on community, care, ownership and continuity for forging new meanings in development that fosters sustainability” (Apusigah, 2011, abstract).

Conclusion

The foregoing clearly reveals that there is an ongoing depletion of natural resources in Africa. This depletion is caused by a host of anthropogenic and natural factors. Human activities such as deforestation, gas flaring, agricultural activities, industrialization, urbanization, and a host of others involve the use of the natural resources of the earth. While humans must make use of the resources of the earth, they need to be made use of in a sustainable manner. It is the overexploitation and mismanagement of natural resources that have degraded the environment. These very often are as a result of failure of human character. Good human character is at the heart of the African communalistic ethics. Though communalism, the African is encouraged to live in solidarity and harmony with fellow humans and nature. Humans are to shun greed, conflicts, corruption, embezzlement, and other vices that dehumanize the human person and degrade nature. While being critical and attentive to the limitations of communalism, the positive values in it can help humans to conserve natural resources in reverence to nature and the good of humans.

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