

Review

Environmental ethics: An African understanding

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Global concerns about the current environmental crisis have culminated into some controversial environmental ethical theories, that is, normative environmental ethics, sentientist ethics, biocentric ethics, ecocentric ethics and eco-feminist ethics. One of the fundamental underlying features connecting these environmental ethical theories is their grounding in Western perspectives and cultural experiences. Given that environmental concerns are global concerns, and that the imperative of environmental ethics is challenging those life-threatening concerns, critical explorations of environmental ethics need to go beyond the Western horizon. But with respect to the African perspective to environmental ethics and the people's cultural understanding of the environmental crisis, little has been done in this penultimate area. However, Segun Ogungbemi and Godfrey Tangwa have pioneered philosophical discussions on environmental ethics from an African vantage point. Hence, Ogungbemi defends what he calls "ethics of nature-relatedness," while Tangwa proposes "eco-bio-communitarianism" as a definitive theory of an African orientation to environmental ethics. This paper is therefore a contribution to the consolidation of an African orientation to environmental ethics through a critique and reconstruction of some of the misrepresentations of the African perspective to the environment, implicit in the arguments of Ogungbemi and Tangwa.

Key words: Environmental ethics, ethics of nature-relatedness, eco-biocommunitarianism.

INTRODUCTION

Africa has a complex history of valuable heritages as well as multifaceted challenges in her cultural-political evolution. Since primordial times, Africans have had a humane and peaceful society and environment informed by a sound ethics. But owing to some internal dynamics in the people's culture and some other external constraints and forces, African states are now experiencing acute developmental challenges which have impacted negatively on their environment. Besides political issues arising from leadership ineptitude and capitalist aggrandizement, which have brought about vices of corruption, injustice, poverty and underdevelopment of the continent, there is now a new dimension to the African crisis. And this is the environmental imbroglio.

It is a known fact today that the environmental crisis is one of the most pressing concerns of our planet at the turn of the 21st century. As a global phenomenon, no society is totally immune against the threats and dangers which the environmental crisis poses to humanity and the rest of the ecosystem. But with respect to the African experience, a vast area of land rich in natural resources of all categories, flora and fauna of immense diversities,

the dimension of the global environmental crisis in the continent has a peculiar character. The causes of environmental pollution and degradation, environmental injustice, poverty of effective coping and management strategies in challenging the environmental crisis, and lack of a viable environmental ethics that takes cognizance of the peculiar dynamics of the environmental crisis in Africa are issues worth courting with philosophically.

In this paper, therefore, we seek to explore the role of African philosophical thinking on the African environment in particular and the contemporary society and global world order in general. The primary aim of doing this is not to ethno-philosophically describe, merely, how traditional Africans have managed their environment in pristine manner. Also, the focus of our defense is not to establish the primacy or superiority of the African option over and above the existing theoretical perspectives in environmental ethics in Western discourse. Rather, the primary objective of this paper is to contribute to the consolidation of an emerging orientation in African environmental ethics and effective environmental management.

This paper considers some fundamental questions such as: What is the condition of the African environment? Why is the African environment more pathetic than other regions of the world? What are the efforts made and being made in the process of saving the African environment? Do Africans care for the environment? What are the factors to be considered in salvaging the African environment from further deterioration? What is the need for an environmental ethics that is African in orientation? How coherent is it with the existing known ethics of the environment:

Enlightened (weak) anthropocentrism, animal liberation/rights theory, biocentrism and ecocentrism (which include the land ethic, deep ecology and the theory of nature's value)?

In addressing this host of fundamental questions, this paper proceeds with a discussion of ethics and the environment, after which it surveys the arguments of Ogungbemi and Tangwa, respectively on an African understanding of environmental ethics. Finally, we posit some critiques of their argument.

ETHICS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Ethics is a normative study of the principles of human conduct in relation to justice and injustice, good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice. It questions what ought to be done and the extent to which there is justification for a past action that had been done. By environment, we mean man and his surrounding, including the life support provided by the air, water, land, animals and the entire ecosystem of which man is but a part (Osuntokun, 2001: 293). Ethics has something meaningful to do with the environment, it questions humanity's relationship to the environment, its understanding of and responsibility to nature, and its obligations to leave some of nature's resources to prosperity (Pojman, 1997: 1-2). Environmental ethics is a field in applied ethics that asks fundamental questions about humans and the environment, it examines the moral basis of environmental responsibility.

Environmental ethics is a diversified discourse with competing different ideas and perspectives. Generally, discourse on environmental ethics can be categorized into five schools of thought: Enlightened (weak) anthropocentrism, animal liberation/rights theory, biocentrism, ecocentrism (which includes the land ethic, deep ecology and the theory of nature's value) (Yang, 2006: 28) and eco-feminism.

Normative (and traditional) ethical theories (teleologism, utilitarianism and deontologism), which form the first category, are very anthropocentric and short-sighted in matters concerning the future generation as their reference to rights and duties are limited to the present generation. From an anthropocentric point of view, humans have a moral

duty only towards one another, any duty they seem to have towards other species or entities is really only an indirect duty towards other beings.

Animal liberation/rights theory notably championed by Peter (1975) expands the object of duty to include all animals and to all species in the universe. They contend that the pleasure and pain that animals experience are morally relevant, and that sentience is the necessary and sufficient condition for a creature to receive moral consideration. From the point of view of animal rights theory, the only right way to treat animals is to treat them as ends in themselves, never as mere means, because animals, like us, have rights that precede other's interests. As the holder of rights, animals deserve our respect. This theory has been criticized on the ground of being individualistic, and does not promote the interest of communities through common good and equilibrium of the entire ecosystem (Fadahunsi, 2007: 6).

In order to break radically from anthropocentric ethics, non-anthropomorphic environmental ethical theories emerged, the biocentric and ecocentric approaches. Biocentrism maintains that all life forms are 'moral patients' - entities to which we should accord moral consideration. We therefore have a duty towards all forms of life. It is their *TELOS* that gives each individual organism inherent worth and that all living organisms possess this worth equally because all individual living beings have their *TELOS*. The equal inherent worth of all living beings warrants according to them, equal moral status: therefore, we must respect all living organisms (Fadahunsi, 2007: 6).

Upon realization that biocentrism is not radical enough ecocentrism emerged and expands the definition of what is a 'moral patient' to include nature as a whole. This implies respect for our fellow members and respect for the community as such. Ecocentrism focuses on the integrity of the ecosystem and the value of species. Under ecocentrism, we have the land ethic, deep ecology and the theory of nature's value. Aldo (1966) summarizes the land ethic in the maxim: 'A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community, it is wrong when it tends otherwise'.

There are two notable basic ethical principles in deep ecology. The ecosphere egalitarianism principle says that all organisms and entities in the ecosphere, as parts of the interrelated whole, are equal in intrinsic value (Callicott, 1992). And all things in the ecosphere have equal rights to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization. To harm nature is to harm ourselves, and to defend earth is self-defense. Rolston's (1989) theory of nature's value derives our 'duties' to nature from the 'value in nature'. According to this theory, nature is a kind of subject with teleology, creativity, intelligence and a capacity to value. Instrumental value, intrinsic value and systematic value exist objectively in nature. These values in nature impose on us the imperative to

care for the earth. Humans, therefore, should be Earth's moral overseers. Ecocentrism, like the existing environmental ethical approaches before it, equally has its shortcomings. It is alleged that it leads to unacceptable treatment of individuals, and requires excessive sacrifice by humans (Fadahunsi, 2007: 7).

Ecofeminism, as a school of thought and theory in environmental ethics seeks to end all forms of oppressions, including oppression of the environment. It does so by highlighting the interconnections between the dominations of humans by race, gender and class on the one hand and the domination of the earth on the other hand. It uses the lens of gender to reveal the logic of the interrelated dominations. Ecofeminists like Warren (1994) agree that there are important connections among systems of domination (for example, historical, literary, political, empirical, and ethical connections), and any adequate feminism, environmentalism, or environmental policy must recognize these connections. Susan Feldman notes the problem with ecofeminism when he points out that the claim that the domination of nature is wrong in the same way that the domination of women is wrong makes no sense, since domination can only be considered to be unjust when the object dominated has a will (Feldman, 2007: 1).

When we take a closer look at all the aforementioned theories, it is evident that each has its own internal problems, and the environmental ethical theories have been, to a reasonable extent, a creation of Western scholastic mindset. It is worthy to note that the shortcomings of the various existing environmental ethical theories suggest the possibility of some further theories, which may not necessarily come from the Western world. And given that environmental concerns are global concerns, and in view of the imperative of environmental ethics in challenging these life-threatening concerns, critical explorations of environmental ethics therefore need go beyond the Western horizon. Some African scholars have recognized the importance of this, and have consequently made some reflective leads in this respect. Two of such scholars that shall engage our attention are: Segun Ogungbemi and Tangwa Godfrey.

SEGUN OGUNGBEMI ON AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

Ogungbemi in his paper, "An African perspective on the environmental crisis," discusses the nature of the environmental crisis in Africa. In doing this, he came to a number of conclusions concerning the principal causes of the environmental crisis in Africa and proposes some ethical reflections and practical suggestions on how to mitigate the challenges posed by the environmental crisis.

Ogungbemi construes environmental crisis in global content as one of the greatest global problems of our

time. In his thinking, environmental crisis is a conjunction of some natural disaster such as earthquakes, volcanic eruption and storms, together with man's activity of exploration and utilization of natural resources through the ingenuity of science and technology, which have impacted negatively on the environment. While recognizing the universality of the environmental crisis, Ogungbemi notes that in understanding the nature of the environmental crisis within the content of sub-Saharan Africa, three points are sacrosanct:

- 1) Ignorance and poverty
- 2) Science and technology
- 3) Political conflict, including international economic pressures.

He argues that in order to properly understand the nature of the environmental crisis in Africa, we need to understand the ways in which both traditional and modern social structures have led to environmental degradation.

Concerning the factor of ignorance and poverty, Ogungbemi explains that the majority of traditional Africans lived in rural areas where the people wallow in poverty, and lack basic amenities such as good water supplies, adequate lavatories and proper energy use. As a consequence, the rivers are polluted with human waste, exposing the people to avoidable water-borne diseases such as dysentery, typhoid and cholera. And the excessive use of fuel wood and constant bush burning which is a predominant practice in traditional Africa, increases air pollution. This affects air quality adversely and depletes the forest and other natural habitats. This factor of poverty cum ignorance on the part of traditional Africans, Ogungbemi argues, "does not necessarily exonerate our people from their contribution to environmental hazards (Ogungbemi, 1997; 204). This is particularly so given that the relevant patterns of behaviour may come, at least in part, from an inability to exploit nature because of low levels of economic and technological development.

Besides the crude contribution of traditional African societies to the world environmental crisis, mention must be made of the more catastrophic contribution of modern Africa to the environmental crisis. Ogungbemi is of the opinion that the drive to catch up with the developmental pace of the Western world by African states government is responsible for the mass destruction of our ecosystem through unguided explorative engagements with African natural resources, the flora and fauna. Many African nations are rich in resources but because their economies are not structured to take full advantage of these resources, they are exported with little or no 'value added'. The net results are relatively few jobs and other economic advantages (that are often siphoned by the corrupt elite), as well as considerable environmental damage. Moreover, this damage often results in loss of

agricultural land that the poor rely upon, and significant pollution of waterways.

Ogungbemi argues that the way in which natural resources such as land, water and air are being used goes contrary to the traditional practice of environmental conservation. (Ogungbemi, 1997: 205). With respect to land for instance, the drive to develop has led to increased deforestation with its incalculable effects on turbidity, erosion, flood and desertification. In another instance, "in its bid to catch up with developed nations, modern Africa has exploited some of its essential minerals, namely: gold, copper, oil, diamonds, coal, uranium, etc., thereby creating ecological imbalance and environmental problems.

Water is another essential natural resource that has been adversely affected in modern Africa through human activities. The deposition and dumping of toxic waste on the African coasts and inland by industries, both within and outside the continent, pollution of water through oil exploration and spillage, and through bacteriological and chemical agents like fertilizers have made our waters unsafe not only for humans but also other species in our waters.

Ogungbemi further pointed out how air, which is an essential natural resource for living, has been threatened by human techno-scientific activities. Most fundamental in this regard is the uncontrolled nature of the emission coming out from automobiles, industrial machines, artillery air raids and such likes. In addition to the causes of pollution of the air, land and water in Africa, Ogungbemi equally identified the unprecedented population growth in contemporary Africa as another factor that has continued to aggravate the destruction of the environment in Africa. The logic here is that, the more the population, the more the stress on the natural resources and consumption ipso facto increases. More consumption results in more disposal of waste and where waste is carelessly managed as it is the case in many African states, the more the hazard the environment is prone to. It needs be stated that however, Ogungbemi says that it is not clear whether population, by itself, is the key problem. Rather, it is inequitable distribution of global wealth.

Granted that many African traditional folks as well as their contemporary counterparts have in some ways contributed to the general environmental problems of the world today, Ogungbemi equally underscores how traditional Africans have loved nature with respect and awe. He writes on traditional environmental management. In our traditional relationship with nature, man 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 and 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: 204).

By ethics of care, Ogungbemi (1997: 208) meant an orientation in which one is not taking more than one's needs from nature. However, Ogungbemi is quick to note that this moral code is not unique to African societies as it has a universal appeal and applications, and that there are some interlocking questions that may obliterate its sensibility and justification and adoption in contemporary African order. Pertinent among these questions are: How do we know how much we need, given the nature of human greed and insatiability? Who judges whether we have been taking more or less than we need from the natural resources? If we have been taking more than we need, what are the penalties and how fair are they? (Ogungbemi, 1997: 208).

The fundamental questions raised by Ogungbemi are quite strong and as a consequence, he attempted a reformulation of the traditional environmental practice of "ethics of care" in order to make it applicable to contemporary African situation. This conceptual reformulation is what Ogungbemi (1997: 208) called "ethics of nature relatedness.

According to him, "ethics of nature-relatedness asserts that our natural resources do not need man for their existence and functions.... The ethics of nature-relatedness can be succinctly stated as an ethics that leads human beings to seek to co-exist peacefully with nature and treat it with some reasonable concern for its worth, survival and sustainability (Ogungbemi, 1997: 208-209). In Ogungbemi's submission, ethics of nature-relatedness has three basic elements: reason, experience and the will. It does not attribute natural resources to a spiritual nature nor does the creation of natural resources have any religious affinity. With this new ethical thinking, Ogungbemi's expectation is that our present reckless use of nature can be curtailed.

In addition to this environmental ethics he envisages, he offers some practical suggestions on how to mitigate the current environmental crisis in Africa. First, he suggested the generation, transmission and distribution of solar energy at a reasonable cost as a safety value in reducing African over-reliance on firewood, coal, kerosene, gas and petrol as sources of energy. Secondly, on the issue of population, Ogungbemi prophesized that "when our population has reached an alarming situation, nature will invariably apply its break (through volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, etc.) and have a drastic reduction in our population growth rate. Thirdly, he recommended a turn-around in Africa's political leadership in order to put in place good policies that are environmental friendly. He urged them to demonstrate the political will that is necessary for reducing the amount of industrial and agricultural wastes and properly dispose of them so that both our industrial and commercial centers, as well as our

rural areas are safe from air and water pollution (Ogungbemi, 1997: 209).

There are some critical problems in Ogungbemi's idea of environmental crisis in Africa and his environmental ethics. But before exposing these, it suffices to note first, the perspective of Godfrey Tangwa on an African orientation in environmental ethics.

Godfrey Tangwa on an African perspective to environmental ethics Tangwa is another African philosopher that has made some reflections and contributions toward creating philosophical awareness on the need for an ethic of the environment in Africa. Though his work has no reference to the earlier work of Ogungbemi, but their point of focus is essentially similar. That is, towards developing an environmental ethics that can confront environmental crisis. In his paper, "Some African Reflections on Biomedical and Environmental Ethics," Tangwa bases his conception of an African orientation in environmental ethics on the metaphysical outlook of pre-colonial traditional African societies, which he called "eco-bio-communitarianism."

This metaphysical worldview involves the "recognition and acceptance of inter-dependence and peaceful coexistence between earth, plants, animals and humans" (Tangwa, 2004: 389). This metaphysical outlook underpinned the ways, manners and cosmically relations between human and his fellow humans. It is also responsible for why traditional Africans were more cautious in their attitude to plants, animal and inanimate things and the various invisible forces of the world (Tangwa, 2004: 389). Tangwa noted that traditional Africans were more disposed towards the attitude of 'live and let live'. He emphasized further that within the traditional African metaphysical worldview, the dichotomy between "plants, animals, and inanimate things between the sacred and the profane, matter and spirit, the communal and the individual, is a slim and flexible one" (Tangwa, 2004: 389). It is in line with this metaphysical framework that one can consistently and coherently situate the people's belief in transmigration of the soul into animals, plants or into forces such as the wind. On the basis of this metaphysical understanding of nature and the nature of man, Tangwa says such a mindset has very significant implications for the way nature is approached and treated by traditional Africans.

Illustrating his positions on the conciliating relation between humans and the environment in traditional African culture, Tangwa cited the instance of his own culture, the Nso in Cameroon. According to him, the "Nso' attitude toward nature and the rest of creation is that of respectful co-existence, conciliation, and containment, there are frequent offerings of sacrifices to God, to the divine spirits, both benevolent and malevolent, to the departed ancestors and to the sundry invisible and inscrutable forces of nature" (Tangwa, 2004: 390).

In all these, the point of Tangwa is that African culture

is not against technology whole handsomely, but consistent with cautions and piecemeal use of technology. And given the respect for natural human values that adorn traditional African culture, there are some lessons to be learnt by western culture that has subjected such values to the caprice of the god of technology, industrialization and capitalism.

As against the western worldview, which Tangwa sees as predominantly anthropocentric and individualistic, African worldview, he maintains, is eco-bio-communitarian (Tangwa, 2004: 392). This distinction notwithstanding, Tangwa is aware that, that does not necessarily have an automatic consequence on the environment. He holds:

An anthropocentric ethic, even an individualistic one, if it were sufficiently rational, need not necessarily endanger the environment, just as an eco-bio-communal one may not necessarily forestall all dangers to the environment (Tangwa, 2004: 392-393).

The point Tangwa is making is that there is nothing wrong with the technology in and of itself but only with the motivation for its development and the uses to which it is put. He condemns the motivation for development of western technology and the uses to which it has been put, which he identified as the will to possess and dominate the world. In his submission, a more humble motivation for the pursuit of science and technology based on the eco-bio-communitarian attitude of 'live and let live' can be substituted for the aggressive motivation of domination to the immeasurable advantage of the whole of mankind (Tangwa, 2004: 394).

SOME CRITICAL COMMENTS ON AFRICAN ORIENTATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Ogungbemi's proposal of a reconstructed return to the traditional attitude reflected in the "ethics of care" regarding our interactions with the environment led him to what he termed "the ethics of nature-relatedness." This ethics of nature-relatedness is not a preservationist approach, nor is it in any way non-anthropocentric. It does not even imply, as he observes, "that natural resources actually have a spiritual nature" (Ogungbemi, 1997: 208). Rather, it is an approach that recognizes that humans necessarily rely upon the natural world for existence. Because of this reliance, we must treat the environments in which we live with due respect - for the sake of current and future human well being. One major problem with Ogungbemi's ethics of nature-relatedness is that it bears little affinity or no semblance with African cultural experience and ontology. It is not grounded in the metaphysics of African cultural belief system. Though Ogungbemi's discourse shows a good understanding of the African dimension of the environmental crisis,

especially with his analysis of the traditional and modern African societies' contributions to the complexity of the environmental crisis, his position on the needed environmental ethics is alienation of the African spirit and peculiar experiences.

As he rightly noted, environmental problem in Africa and anywhere else, is primarily a consequence of human actions. And as value systems inform our actions, we need to search for a viable environmental ethics that is in agreement with African ontology. This is essential in order to pave way for environmental policies that will be compliant with the historic cultural experiences of the people. In fact, Ogungbemi's alarming recommendation that nature should invariably apply its brake through volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and others in order to have a drastic reduction in Africa's population growth rate is reflex of the disconnectedness of his ethics of nature-relatedness and African ontology.

The aforementioned mark of deficiency in Ogungbemi's ethics of nature-relatedness is the strong point of Tangwa's environmental ethics of eco-bio-communitarianism. Though, not without its own problem, the merit of Tangwa's position is that he recognized the indispensability of African metaphysics in the construction of a meaningful African environmental ethics. The absence of the dichotomy between plants, animals and inanimate things, between the sacred and the profane, matter and spirit, the communal and the individual in the African metaphysical worldview informed the traditional African disposition and attitude of 'live and let live'. Such metaphysics is not one of domination instigated by greed nor is it consumerist in nature. The belief is that there is reason for whatever is, although man may not know immediately why a thing is created, but they all serve a purpose. Being is therefore conceived as the whole range of existent things. Latent in that metaphysics are folkloric assertions and certain taboos that are conservational of ecological balance of the environment.

The problem with Tangwa's exploration of an African environmental ethics is that it is an ethno-philosophical defense of indigenous African treatment and management of the environment. He never recognized the ways and manners by which traditional Africans contributed to the degradation of the environment, albeit ignorance and poverty. This is the strong and commendable point explicit in Ogungbemi's position.

In the accounts of both Ogungbemi and Tangwa, some fundamental questions, which are critically essential to a plausible African orientation in environmental ethics, are left un-raised let alone discussed, what should be the nature of African obligation and role of the relationship between Africans (non-Africans in Africa inclusive) towards the future generation in Africa, sentient beings, non-human animals, African environment in particular and nature in general? What is the need for an environmental ethics that is African in orientation? And must such be exclusionary of the existing known

environmental theories from the West? What are the political, cultural, economical, educational, legal, and moral imperatives to be taken into consideration in the construction of an African environmental ethics in order to salvage the African environment from further deterioration?

While it is not the primary task of this paper to explore in details, considerations of answers to the aforementioned raised questions, it is significant to note that the questions are meant for further examination in a separate study.

Be that as it may, the solution to environmental destabilization is not purely technological or exclusively attitudinal. Environmental ethics no matter how grounded in African experience it could be or intellectually sophisticated it could be, cannot alone solve the environmental crisis in Africa. There has to be an orientation that keeps in mind the various imperatives as mentioned previously, as well as other recommendatory notes:

Bearing in mind that improved technology, which is at the root of the environmental crisis, is still much inevitably craved for in Africa and cannot be done without in our today's world, it is our recommendation that only technologies, which are more benign to the environment, should be developed in the continent and allowed to be imported into Africa. This will aid in curbing the use of environmentally harmful technologies.

It is a possibility that testing how harmful some technologies are may not be immediately foreseeable or proven, in such instances, the technologies can be deemed guilty until proven innocent. This reasoning is premised against the backdrop that it is better to eliminate potential hazards and err on the side of caution, than to discover hazards when much damage has already been done. This should be the attitude towards science and technology in Africa. The green technology of bio-fuel is environmentally friendly efforts in this regard.

Currently, the world is assiduously moving towards green technology, especially the use of bio-fuels at the detriment of the use and of fossil fuels. Though economically expensive and at present, Africa may be lacking in the technical skills and human capital requisite for the smooth adoption of this technology in her shores, the cosmopolitan onus falls on the developed nations to assist Africa without exploitation, in matching up with the current pace. This perhaps informed the debate at the recently concluded conference in Cancun, where rich nations were encouraged to help (through funding) poor nations tackled environmental problems.

Environmental managers of existing regulatory bodies in Africa must ensure that organizations and agencies meet local and international environmental standards and other legal policy requirements. Government and

non-governmental bodies have to do their part in ensuring a good environment in Africa. This ought to be done through public enlightenment of the need to preserve and protect the environment. In the absence of proactive environmental awareness campaign, many see environmental agencies as avenues created for siphoning financial interests from the government and soliciting for international loans. The adoption of a more pragmatic approach by these bodies in the issue of environmental concern will instill environmental consciousness in the minds of many (Nneji, 2010: 37).

Furthermore, environmental consciousness and appreciation should be instilled into students through the introduction of environmental issues in their course contents. Such environmental issues and topics should aim at making students appreciate the principles of sustainability as it relates to biodiversity, non-renewable resource and the quality of human life in the biosphere.

Also, cognizance of the improvement in compliance to environmental laws, environmental policies and regulations should be revisited to deal seriously with the attitude of recklessness towards the environment. This is with special reference to the business sectors that are almost insensitive to environmental concerns. In curbing such negligence, every business organization must be compelled to conduct an environmental impact assessment (EIA) and produce such report before the corporate affairs commission (CAC) can register it. The corporate affairs commission is the body in charge of the registration of business organizations in Nigeria. Many of such bodies do exist in other African countries (Nneji, 2010: 39).

CONCLUSIONS

The point of this paper on an African orientation in environmental ethics should not be misconstrued. It is not seeking for an entirely unique environmental ethics for the African world alone. Rather, its point of emphasis is that, not just any environmental ethics will do for the continent because of certain peculiarities in environmental degradation in Africa. If need be, there could be borrowings from the existing Western ethical approaches to the environment, but such borrowings must critically have in addition, a concern for the African environmental experience. While the known environmental ethics in Western discourse are not infallible, their respective deficiencies left us open to the question of which ethics is most appropriate and ought to be embraced in effectively challenging the African condition.

The task of fashioning what should constitute the ethical principles of the African environment is one of the most fundamental challenges and issues contemporary

African philosophy continent must deal with. Not until this intellectual imperative is settled, collaborative efforts by government, NGOs, environmental agencies and managers, as well as other sub sectors of the society towards orientation and sensitization, policy formulation and implementation on sustainable environment in Africa would not yield the desired result.

Finally, and more importantly, consideration of profit rather than human need, must be looked into seriously by multinationals and rich nations. The reckless exploitation of the environment is borne out the value placed on profit. And as long as powerful predatory nations of the world continue to exploit poorer nations, as long as they fail to treat these poor nations with respect, environmental crisis will remain or become even more serious than we experience it today. We must accept the fact of inter-relatedness of the world, the interconnectivity of the entire globe. Whatever happens in one part of the world, affects other parts. Since this is the case, the philosophy of exploitation must be dropped for the philosophy of respect for, not only persons, but for nature as well.

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