

The Indigenous Abaluhya Worldview in Communicating Conservation of Kakamega Forest, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The indigenous Abaluhya worldview is an important reserve whose practices, value systems, and knowledge are critical for the effective communication of the conservation of Kakamega Forest. To ascertain the role played by the indigenous Abaluhya worldview in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest, this paper sought to examine the indigenous Abaluhya worldview's strategies in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest. Guided by the Worldview in Intercultural Communication Theory, the study employed a descriptive study design and used simple random sampling to select 200 respondents drawn from the 2000 registered members of the Mwileshi Forest Community Association. Data was collected using interviews and focus group discussions and analyzed thematically. The results showed that the indigenous Abaluhya worldview has channels for communicating conservation of the forest as well as climatic events. These strategies have withstood the test of time since they touch on the very core of the Abaluhya beliefs. Indigenous Abaluhya people communicated conservation of the forest through songs, wise sayings, prohibitions, folk tales, and cultural ceremonies. The study concluded that the indigenous Abaluhya worldview's strategies for communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest have the potential to enhance effective communication. This study recommended that indigenous Abaluhya worldviews be incorporated into communicating the conservation of Kakamega Forest since the community would resonate with the communication approaches.

Keywords: Communication, Conservation, Indigenous Abaluhya Worldview, Kakamega Forest

I. INTRODUCTION

Kakamega Forest continues to face the danger of depletion due to anthropogenic caused destruction. It is critical to communicate measures that aim at ensuring that the forest is conserved for posterity. The indigenous Abaluhya people have strategies embedded in their cultural worldviews which they use to communicate conservation of the environment and the forests in particular. In synergy with the understanding that the Abaluhya have practices which communicate conservation of the ecosystem, Ikuenobe (2014) expounds that Africans have had conservationist values, practices and ways of life. This author recounts that African views and thoughts on ontology, cosmology and religious practices communicated their moral attitudes towards the conservation and preservation of nature.

Tarusarira (2013) highlights that the basic elements of African worldview are basically the belief in God and/or gods, the belief in spirits and the belief in cultic prohibitions relayed through taboos and moral violations. According to Tarusasira (2013), Africans communicate through sacrifices performed for various purposes, belief in the continuing existence of the dead in the invisible world and in judgement from God and the dead. African religion gives meaning and direction to its adherents and it is expressed in the way Africans have always regulated their relationship with nature and with fellow human beings. The views of Tarusarira (2013) about how Africans communicate compare well with the indigenous Abaluhya worldview's concept of communicating conservation of forests which is also founded on their religious beliefs and practices.

Gumo et al. (2012) hold that Africans have ways of regulating the use of the environment. According to these scholars, African spirituality is communicated through the environment and it has been enhanced through the environment where humanity worshipped and venerated everything under the earth, on earth and in heavens above. Gumo et al.(2012) observe that communication is so deeply rooted in human behaviours and structures of African society that it is difficult to think of social or religious behavioral events that lack communication. According to these scholars, the conceptualization of communication is that it is shared among all or most of the people who belong to a particular community. They affirm that communication is a social setting that is important in understanding the dynamics of a people's culture and religiosity and through diversity of African languages, African spirituality was passed on from one generation to another.

In their quest to live in harmony with a universe which is balanced, the indigenous Abaluhya community conserved their environment through their traditional religious beliefs. This outlook is informed by the fact that the Abaluhya acknowledge their dependence on the environment which resonates with Tarusarira (2013) who holds that African religion communicates meaning and direction to the practitioners and it is a source of dynamism and creativity. It has the capacity to generate self-respect and the ability to resist exploitation and domination of the environment. According to this scholar, there is no separation between nature and environment which are part and parcel of life, or one with the people. Therefore, to destroy nature and environment is to destroy oneself. The author suggests that living in harmony with the natural world translates to living in harmony with the spiritual world as they are interconnected and co-dependent. African religion informs the way adherents regulate their relationship with both nature and fellow human beings. The indigenous Abaluhya people's conservation practices are inspired by the fact the forest belongs to God, spirits and the living dead, hence the need to revere and care for it. This relates with the foregoing views which explain that the way an African relates to the soil upon which development agencies erect buildings, sink boreholes, carry out farming and the way they relate to water and sanitation issues, to health issues cannot omit religion. This way not only has the psychological and social functions of integration and equilibrium, but also ensures the protection of the environment, which is desperately needed in the contexts of global warming.

Chari (2016) opines that it is acknowledged that indigenous media can influence individual and social change since traditional forms of communication can be effective in dispelling the superstitious, archaic and unscientific perceptions that may act as obstacles to communication. In the scholar's view, there is a link between communication and culture. Dialogical communication allows citizens to be actively involved in the identification of problems, the development of solutions and implementation of strategies to address their problems. Thus, citizens are active agents rather than passive agents of change. The dialogical approach of indigenous media is more suited to communicating conservation issues because it incorporates local knowledge as opposed to mass media which alienates through the linear and patronizing approach.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Scholars have documented information on the impacts of destruction of forests; however the documented information is mainly based on the western scientific worldview. There is a need to communicate the documented information in a way that enables the targeted audiences to address the concerns that are raised about conservation of Kakamega Forest. Thus, the need to examine the potential of indigenous Abaluhya worldview in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest. This study therefore sought to examine the opportunities offered by the indigenous Abaluhya worldview in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest.

1.2 Objective

- i. To examine ways through which indigenous Abaluhya worldview communicates conservation of the forest in general.
- ii. To assess how the indigenous Abaluhya worldview can be used in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study used the Worldview Intercultural Communication Theory by Carley H. Dodd (Dodd, 1997). This theory was specifically addressed in Sarbaugh in 1979 with an early emphasis on identifying control over nature, as multiple cognitive orientations and as religious outlooks. The theory postulates that Worldview shapes how culture influences communication and cultural behaviour as well as interpreting events, a position that speaks to this study. Worldview as a basic interpretation schema of a culture's reality within communication implication relates to the object of this study which is to examine the potential of indigenous Abaluhya worldview in communicating Conservation of Kakamega Forest. The theory also proposes that Worldview can affect communication in matters such as time, accepting or rejecting change since it represents a way to improve understanding culture and enables ability to speak to the heart of diversity of tensions. Thus, the Abaluhya worldview has the potential to influence the community to accept the communication as it would speak to a familiar culture and result in to effective communication.

2.2 African Religious Worldview in Communicating Conservation of Forests

The need to incorporate the indigenous Abaluhya worldview in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest cannot be overemphasized. According to Gumo et al. (2012), African spirituality is communicated through the

environment and Africans have ways of regulating the use of the environment. They further state that African spirituality has been enhanced through the environment where humanity worshipped and venerated everything on earth. They claim that the African philosophy on resource utilization and environmental protection is spiritually based, thus, major conservation efforts and the control of resources are influenced by this spirituality. The African spiritual worldviews create respect for nature, reverence for hills, forests, animals and rivers.

Gumo et al. (2012) further state that African worldviews are accompanied with a series of beliefs, practices and norms related to the utilization of natural environmental resources. They affirm that these norms and beliefs communicate social pressures that control individual and group behaviour. These traditional practices are communicated and enforceable as customary law, and this collective social responsibility finds expression as common property resource regimes. They illustrate that culturally taboos communicate the inculcation of practical attitudes such as religious respect for human precaution, through dramatic symbolism. The scholars explain that taboos are passed orally from generation to generation, and have a functional role in to the society and they vary from place to place due to environmental determinism, depending on the social, cultural and economic organization of a particular community. The views of these scholars provide the basis for this study to examine indigenous Abaluhya's ways of communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest.

Consistent with the view that indigenous Abaluhya worldview has beliefs and practices of conserving the forest, Ngara and Mangizvo (2013) observe that there is a growing consensus that traditional institutions provide considerable protection of ecosystems and biodiversity without governmental juridical restrictions. These scholars thus recommend that it is therefore conceivable that these traditions should be included in conservation and management strategies as they have tacitly proved effective. In revered areas, local people refrain from cutting down trees, killing animals, harvesting useful plants within such sites or even entering or passing by, believing that the spirits or deities would be offended and bring harm to the community.

The significance of the forest cannot be overemphasized, and the involvement of indigenous practices in communicating its conservation is crucial. This viewpoint is supported by Diawuo and Issifu (2015), who concur that traditional African societies adhere to environmental ethics that effectively communicate their interactions with the natural environment. These researchers argue that African traditional religion and cultural practices throughout various African communities demonstrate a strong commitment to environmental preservation and sustainability. They assert that these activities provide significant contributions to the sustainable management and conservation of natural resources. Diawuo and Issifu (2015) highlight the presence of social taboos and totems in all cultures, emphasizing their role as informal institutions that shape human behaviour through traditional and religiously dictated norms or taboo systems mirroring their significance in the conservation efforts of Kakamega Forest. Taboos and totems hold significant cultural value within human cultures, functioning as symbolic artifacts that commemorate ancestral heritage and foster the preservation of natural resources throughout history.

Obasola (2013) affirms that the vast majority of the human species still lives within a worldview dominated by the need to find solutions to the environmental crisis. There is recognition that the earth is in danger from human activity and use and change needs to be made in order to sustain life on the earth. Awuah-Nyamekye et al. (2014) suggest that the implementation of capacity building initiatives targeting traditional leaders inside traditional territories could effectively safeguard the valuable cultural and natural resources. According to this scholar's perspective, it is crucial to grant local leaders the opportunity to enhance their engagement in environmental matters, while also providing them with legal support to ensure the preservation of traditionally safeguarded regions, which may include sacred sites. The formation of individuals' perceptions of the environment and culture is predominantly influenced by their worldview, encompassing their attitudes and values. Therefore, it is imperative to establish strategies that may effectively engage the local community in environmental conservation efforts and foster a sense of reverence towards indigenous customs and practices. Collaborative endeavors of this nature could furthermore furnish the needed assistance and instruction to indigenous populations in the realm of conservation of the environment.

Additionally, Moser (2010), claims that many communicators are primarily concerned with the message or information they want to convey over who they are trying to reach with it. Trying to better understand the audience will reveal what issues and language resonate with individuals and groups, which values are important, pre-existing knowledge, communal mental models and possible misconceptions. It is critical that communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest in based on policies that relate with the worldview of the audience targeted by the communication. In order to curb complacency and ignorance, the communication must allure the audience's conscience and belief systems. Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR, 2016) upholds that communicators remain faced with challenges such as; effectively integrating scientific information with traditional knowledge, communicating this information to people and groups with varying contexts of power, agency and social dynamics and navigating different communication channels, learning processes and modes of knowledge transmission to ensure that necessary information is accessible to marginalized groups.

According to Mawere (2015), indigenous knowledge is perceived by the respondents as valuable in the establishment of a morally virtuous society. Its utilization aids African communities in recognizing their duty in the exploitation of environmental resources. Mawere (2010) further explains that indigenous knowledge encompasses a range of community-based skills, technologies, and practices that collectively contribute to the community's awareness and capacity to responsibly and sustainably utilize the environment. Worldviews have a significant role in fostering a sense of community affiliation, hence stimulating communal responsibilities that provide individuals with guiding principles that shape their anticipated conduct. In addition, Karki et al. (2017) highlight the significance of indigenous and local knowledge systems and their potential to aid in the development of policies, plans, and programs that are responsive to conservation. The various groups in Nepal have cultivated a wealth of traditional knowledge and accompanying effective strategies for establishing, sustaining, and enhancing their means of subsistence through harnessing natural resources and engaging in community-driven initiatives.

According to Gumo et al. (2012), taboos in African community influence relationships between human beings. They demonstrate that taboos play the function of communicating natural environment resource conservation. By the use of taboos, natural environmental resource utilization is conserved. The scholars look at how Africans have formulated a variety of taboos associated with plants, animals, snakes, sacred sites, religious specialists and birds. By employing the preceding taboos, some trees and places where trees are found were protected. These scholars examine how taboos were employed to promote ecological biodiversity, since animals residing in the ecological niches were conserved and were not disturbed. Therefore, in African spirituality, taboos are employed as techniques to natural environment resource conservation. In examining how the Abaluhya worldview's taboos, religious beliefs and practices communicated conservation of the forest, this study seeks to fill the existing gap in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest. This study is informed and relates to the forgoing views by various scholars who acknowledge that indigenous knowledge communication strategies in which the indigenous Abaluhya worldview perspective of communicating conservation of the forest falls plays a role in conservation of the environment.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative and it employed a descriptive research design. The descriptive research design was used to describe the people's practices, attitudes, perceptions and responses with regards to the use of indigenous Abaluhya worldview in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest. The target population comprised of the community that lives adjacent to Kakamega Forest. The Mwileshi Community Forest Association was purposively selected as the target population's sample frame. The decision to utilize the Mwileshi CFA register as a sample frame was based on the requirement that individuals must belong to the forest adjacent community in order to become a member of the CFA. Furthermore, the CFA actively promoted participation from all individuals residing in the area adjacent to forest community, thereby establishing the register as a representative sample of the population. Simple random sampling was used to select a sample which consisted of 200 respondents from 2000 registered members of the Mwileshi Community Forest Association. This method involved assigning a unique number to each individual in the sample frame, storing these numbers in a container, and then selecting the necessary numbers at random (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). A total of two hundred individuals constituted 10% of the registered members of the CFA. A decision was made to allocate ten percent of the CFA members for logistical convenience, as it was seen that these individuals resided in geographically dispersed locations, posing difficulties in reaching them. The study used interview schedules and focused group discussion guides to collect primary data from the respondents. Data was analysed thematically revealing key themes and the respondents' understanding and familiarity with conservation of the forest and the potential for incorporating the indigenous Abaluhya worldview in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest. This led the study to note that indigenous Abaluhya worldview communication strategies have the potential to enhance conservation of Kakamega Forest.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Indigenous Abaluhya Worldview's Concept of Communicating Conservation of the Forest

Focus group discussions affirmed that indigenous Abaluhya worldview has channels of communicating conservation of the forest as well as climatic events. Through varied communication strategies, indigenous Abaluhya worldview regulated the interaction between the people who live adjacent to the forest and the forest resources. An elder within the community who was a key respondent made it clear that indigenous Abaluhya worldview has identifiable ways of communicating beliefs, meanings, ideas and values among themselves. This key respondent explained that the elementary basis of the Abaluhya beliefs, values, norms and morals with regards to conservation of the forest remains unique and informs their worldview.

This key respondent explained that there exists an authentic Abaluhya worldview with an imposing impact on the people's behaviour and relationships with the environment. The respondent elucidated that indigenous Abaluhya worldview communication strategy is not a disconnected collection of messages but a blend of many practices that are fused with communication systems which can be used to communicate conservation of the forest. This means that the indigenous Abaluhya people communicated conservation of the forest and expectations on how members of the community interacted with the forest. The communication structures were embedded in their worldview as a result of their experiences with the forest. The indigenous Abaluhya traditional practices are rooted in the community's values, beliefs and practices which not only validated but also effected by the tenet which says that worldviews can affect as well as shape how culture influences communication.

The study results lucidly indicated that the indigenous Abaluhya people have all the time considered the forest to be a significant part of their existence and apparently this explains why they have various strategies of communicating conservation of the forest in their own worldview. This worldview has withstood the test of time because it touches on the very core of the Abaluhya livelihoods. Therefore, the indigenous Abaluhya communication strategies for conservation of the forest can go a long way in addressing the menace that is forest destruction. The element of the indigenous Abaluhya worldview in communicating conservation of the forest finds relevance in the intercultural worldview communication theory whose one of the tenets states that, "worldview revolves around personal identity and group belonging which awakens cultural obligations and gives guidelines which results in expected behaviour".

Consistent with the respondents' views indicating that indigenous Abaluhya people have their communication approaches that are used to communicate conservation of the forest, Ikuenobe (2014) confirms that Africans have had conservationist values, practices and ways of life which enhance environmental conservation. The scholar acknowledges that African views on and thoughts on ontology, cosmology and religious practices supported their moral attitudes towards the conservation and preservation of nature. Responses from focused group discussions indicated that the indigenous Abaluhya's communication strategies passed on information through oral tradition as well as through their lived experiences. This finding is in agreement with Chanza and De Wit (2014) who observe that indigenous knowledge is acquired gradually and progressively in relation with the environment and is orally communicated within and between generations. Thus, these scholars confirm that indeed African worldview enabled and promoted environmental conservation hence conservation of the forest. In summation, the communication of the conservation of the Kakamega forest cannot be effectively done without in cooperating the indigenous Abaluhya worldview. Thus, the need to identify the indigenous Abaluhya approaches in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest.

4.2 Indigenous Abaluhya Approaches in Communicating Conservation of Kakamega Forest

An elder in the Abaluhya community pointed out that the indigenous Abaluhya worldview used songs, prohibitions, taboos, folklore, cultural ceremonies and wise sayings to communicate conservation of Kakamega Forest. These approaches aimed at communicating to the community that lived adjacent to the forest the significance of the forest to the community and the importance of conserving it. Various respondents of the study claimed that scarcity in the application of indigenous Abaluhya worldview has led to wanton destruction of forests.

Most of the responses from interviews drew attention to the fact that the forests provided food resources for both humans and animals, shelter to animals and birds and medicine for both humans and wildlife. The forests were therefore a fountain of life and were deemed to be sacred. Respondents revealed that the forest's sacredness necessitated their security thus prohibitions were put in place to communicate to the members of the community. These prohibitions barred them from heedless clearing of the forest for farmland or pasture. It was essential that these approaches are employed to communicate conservation of the forest for its posterity. Indigenous Abaluhya views on the sacredness of the forest as a fountain for existence and the messages to conserve it find relevance in the theory which states that worldview shapes and influences communication and cultural behavior besides interpreting events. In harmony with the view that indigenous Abaluhya communication strategies are drawn from their worldview, Chirisa et al. (2016) endorse that indigenous knowledge systems are developed from experience which locals gain over centuries and are adapted to the local culture and environment. Therefore, the study found that, it is imperative that in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest, indigenous Abaluhya worldview is applied since it would provide its knowledge and relatability to the communication.

A key respondent indicated that indigenous Abaluhya worldview conservation plans and the strategies used in communicating are intertwined with their religious beliefs. In conjunction with this view, responses drawn from FGDs pointed out that the indigenous Abaluhya worldview is informed by the belief that the forest is God's and its residents are supernatural beings. This is significant because the religious thoughts of a community are extensively informed by their worldview. Therefore, African religion provided the moral and spiritual aspects of the messages

communicated about conservation of the forest. African religion's beliefs espoused the careful handling of the environment and its sacredness.

The potential encapsulated by the indigenous Abaluhya worldview in communicating conservation of the forest is also relayed by views that African religion's capacity to communicate meaning and direction of how to care for the environment has the potential to enhance the efforts to communicate conservation of Kakamega Forest. African religion as a source of moral values for the community, informs their worldview on how conservation of the forest should be done. Thus, the study concluded that indigenous Abaluhya worldview should be employed in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest.

4.3 Communicating Conservation of the Forest through Songs

Focus group discussions revealed that indigenous Abaluhya worldview communicated conservation of the forest through songs. FGDs explained that songs are a traditional way of communicating important messages. They further revealed that songs were used to raise awareness about the importance and function of the forest in a way that encapsulated the community's worldview on the forest. FGDs revealed that songs influenced the thought processes and how the members of the community viewed the subject of conservation. The songs used ridicule to communicate messages that were aimed at discouraging members of the community from destruction of forest resources as well as spelling out the consequences of such actions. Praise was also used in songs to communicate recommended behaviour in conserving the forest. Participants consented that traditional Abaluhya songs made communication experiences more memorable and awakening. Since the songs were in the community's native language, they largely appealed to the audience. Thus, such songs can go a long way in unpacking the message about conservation of Kakamega Forest to the audiences that are targeted for communication.

Responses from interviews drew attention to the fact that songs are a cultural possession, are participatory and had an entertaining component. These elements gave them the capacity to reach a wide audience across social boundaries. Songs were hence used to communicate messages that celebrated the forest and also stirred up conservational relevant responses. The respondents pointed out that songs provided a chance for social interactions and an appropriate platform to communicate thoughts and perceptions on the importance of conserving the forest. This is the notion that worldview shapes how culture influences communication and cultural behavior as well as interpreting events.

FGDs also pointed out that during circumcision seasons, there were songs composed and sang. These songs were sung by a group of young girls during initiation ceremonies as members of the community danced to them. These songs were used in discouraging people from destroying tabooed trees amongst other issues as well as in encouraging the initiates, praise bravery and remind them of the importance of the forest which was their residence while they healed.

The following is the text of a song that talks about the importance of the forest, its ownership and use that was sang by an elder on 20/3/2022 in Shinyalu:

Luhya Version	English Translation
<i>Muliru ni kwa Mwami</i>	The forest is God's
<i>Muliru ni bulamu</i>	the forest is life
<i>Muliru ni kwa batata</i>	the forest belongs to our fathers(ancestors)
<i>Muliru ni kwa bana beru</i>	The forest belongs to our children
<i>Mihizi cheru cha indumi</i>	Our cultural traditions and practices
<i>Chiweranga mu muliru</i>	are finished (accomplished) in the forest
<i>Imbula ni bulamu</i>	Rain is life
<i>Khulererwanga na muliru</i>	It is bought by the forest
<i>Muliru ni bulamu</i>	The forest is life
<i>Muliru kukasiza bulimo</i>	The forest makes (prepares) land
<i>Muliru kukhuentsanga zinyasi</i>	The forest gives us medicine (herbs)
<i>Zinyasi zionia bulwale</i>	The medicine cures sickness (diseases)
<i>Mwami yakhana muliru</i>	God gave the forest (created the forest)
<i>Batata beru bamenya mmuliru</i>	Our fathers (ancestors) live in the forest
<i>Khulinde muliru kweru kuno</i>	Let's take care (conserve) of our forest
<i>Khulinde misala mumuliru</i>	Lets take care of trees in the forest

The study's finding on the prominence of Luhyia songs in communicating conservation of the forest, is supported by Chari (2016) who claims that music has always been an integral component of human existence in Africa. In this author's view, incorporating music in environmental conservation programs could be one way of resuscitating time-tested environmental conservation strategies that are embedded in people's everyday experience and culture. The study findings on the use of traditional songs in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest as an aspect of the indigenous Abaluhya worldview was in agreement with Chari's views on the use of songs in communicating conservation environment. This is because the captivating elements of Abaluhya songs would enhance the understanding of the target audience as well as validate their understanding.

Consistent with the respondents' views on the use of songs as a medium to communicate conservation of the forest, Chari (2016) further opines that it is acknowledged that indigenous media can influence individual and social change since traditional forms of communication can be effective in dispelling the superstitious, archaic and unscientific perceptions that may act as obstacles to communication. In harmony with the respondents' opinion that songs touch the core of the community's worldview Chari (2016) adds that there is a link between communication and culture. The scholar opines that dialogical communication allows citizens to be actively involved in the identification of problems, the development of solutions and implementation of strategies to address their problems. Thus, citizens are active agents rather than passive agents of change. The dialogical approach of indigenous media is more suited to communicating climate science issues because it incorporates local knowledge as opposed to mass media which alienates through the linear and patronizing approach.

4.4 Communicating Conservation of the Forest through Prohibitions

Focus group discussions revealed that conservation of the forest was communicated through prohibitions. These were actions that forbade or restrained something or actions especially by law or authority. FGDs claimed that the law and authority was drawn from moral teachings whose origin was believed to have been God or the supernatural force. FGDs belief on the provision of law by God is backed by Diawuo and Issifu (2015) who highlight the presence of social taboos and totems in all cultures, emphasizing their role as informal institutions that shape human behaviour through traditional and religiously dictated norms or taboo systems mirroring their significance in the conservation efforts of Kakamega Forest. Taboos and totems hold significant cultural value within human cultures, functioning as symbolic artifacts that commemorate ancestral heritage and foster the preservation of natural resources throughout history.

FGDs explained that the prohibitions that were used to communicate conservation of the forest included taboos and sanctions which were reinforced through repetition. Focus group discussion participants elucidated that the taboos guided the conduct of the community members towards proper use of forest resources and were critical in ensuring communication of the same. Taboos that surrounded certain trees, birds and animals in the forest are in themselves communication to the community about how they should conduct themselves in relation to exploitation of the forest materials.

An elder indicated that in the indigenous Abaluhya worldview, taboos forbade people from accessing or harvesting forest resources anyhow. Only certain trees that were permitted by the community could be cut. Prohibitions communicated protection of a variety of tree species that were deemed special which resulted in to conservation and maintenance of the forest. FGDs agreed with the elder on the view that certain species of trees would never be used as firewood since it was believed that they would attract various calamities in the home. A leader of the CFA who was a key respondent stated that it was a taboo to use the *omuseno* tree as firewood since the smoke produced by it would lead to blindness. Blindness was considered a punishment and a curse for committing a taboo by using a prohibited tree as firewood. It was believed that the use of *omurembe* and *omutoto* as firewood would also result into curses and misfortunes. These misfortunes would be manifested by frequent quarrels and disagreements within the homestead. The foregoing situation went against *mulembe* which is translated as peace. The curses brought about to individuals who had used the *omurembe* or *omutoto* trees as firewood had ramifications on the larger community. It was also believed that the curses would linger within the lineage.

FGDs stated that destruction of certain species of trees that had medicinal value in the forest was prohibited. If one went against the prohibitions and felled medicinal trees then the consequences would include sanctions from participating in certain communal activities and punishments meted. These sanctions which were enforced by the community's elders and medicine men were communication in themselves of the importance attached to these trees. An elder who was a key respondent pointed out that cutting of trees such as *Mukumu* (Fig tree) and *Musutsu* (Croton mestachus) was prohibited since it was believed that such an action would lead to the death of an elder or an important member of the clan of the person who cut it. The key respondent clarified that the *Mukumu* tree had symbolic attachments within the community and even when it was brought down by natural forces such as old age, strong winds, lightning or destruction by insects, many rituals would be performed to avert the death of elders within the

community. FGDs further divulged that if one dared to cut the *mukumu*, lightning would strike his home because he would have gone against the community's taboos. The prohibitions on the *Mukumu* tree allowed for the tree to live for many years and attain very large sizes in growth.

A leader of the CFA who was a key respondent explained that when a *murumba* tree was cut, it produced red sap which had the color of blood. The community equated the red colored sap to blood whose imagery was associated with sacrifices. The sight of blood communicated ritual practices and thus the red sap had a spiritual connotation and ritual implication. It was therefore important that the tree would only be cut when it was absolutely necessary and for one to cut this tree, he had to offer a cow, sheep or goat as a sacrifice dependent on the size of the *murumba* tree to be cut. According to the key respondent, the condition of giving a sacrifice of a domestic animal helped in communicating against the wanton destruction of the *murumba* tree. In case one cut such a tree without giving a sacrifice and then it was believed that death would occur within his family and the community, and the cutter would be held responsible for that death. The key respondent affirmed that these prohibitions played a very important role in communicating preservation of the trees and subsequently conservation of Kakamega Forest was enhanced. Communication by taboos relates with the understanding that worldview shapes how culture influences communication and cultural behaviour as well as interpreting events.

A village elder intimated that it was believed that if certain trees are taken into a homestead in form of firewood or timber, the home would be "spoilt" "*inzu iononeshe/litaala liabiya/ liasasikha*". There are trees that are associated with frequent accidents and certain misfortunes within a homestead and therefore introducing them in the homestead was a taboo. For instance, if the *Mulundu* tree was used as firewood within a homestead, it would lead to very frequent quarrels and disagreements within the family of that homestead. It was believed that the *mulundu* tree had demons which would stalk the cutter to his home where they would cause trouble. Therefore, members of the community were prohibited from cutting the *Mulundu* since people in search of firewood would unknowingly collect from it and yet the consequences for using it within the homestead were believed to be so frightful. The traditional African community are averse to things that are associated with bad luck. The communication process being relayed through prohibitions on the consequences of destruction and conservation of the trees within the forest validates the understanding that worldview can unlock some of the deepest layers of a culture's ideology of the cosmos and its implications for one's life in the society. Worldview influences thinking, perceiving and doing.

In the Abaluhya community, taboos surrounding conservation of the forest are considered to be actions that are prohibited for religious reasons and are meant to direct and restrain people's conduct with regards to a community's cultural worldview. Contravention of taboos then leads to retribution. The punishments are believed to be by supernatural beings such as God, ancestors and spirits.

FGD respondents pointed out that before the introduction of hospitals, the community that lived around the forest entirely depended on the forest for their medicine and treatment. The key respondent indicated that the forest is rich in herbal trees which in the recent past have been exploited by herbalists and now face extinction. The *murembe* tree was known to effectively heal people who had mumps. It was a taboo to cut the *murembe* since ancestral spirits would punish the cutter. Members of the community were prohibited from using wood from the *murembe* tree as firewood. According to the FGD, all one needed was to run around the *murembe* tree chanting *murembe mbonia*, *murembe mbonia* translated as "heal me murembe tree" and the mumps would heal. The taboo that barred people from cutting this specific tree ensured the longevity of this species of trees.

FGDs explained that *Lingubingu* was used to cure stomachaches while *lubino* was used to treat initiates wounds after they had been circumcised. Thus, it was a taboo to cut the *lubino* tree considering the importance that the Abaluhya community attached to circumcision. FGDs emphasized that circumcision was considered a very important rite of passage and any medicine that supported the ritual was deemed very important as it mark transition and promoted the continuation of the community's progeny. Any tree that produced herbs relating to human sexuality and propagation of the community was protected and the *lubino* tree fell within that category was therefore considered to be very important. After women had given birth, herbs drawn from *lundua* tree were given to them for their healing and restoration from the birth process. The *lundua* tree also fostered posterity of the community because the wellness of mothers gave them more opportunities to give birth to more children. The importance attached to the aforementioned trees in relation to the propagation of the community have a foundation in the view that worldview is a basic interpretation schema of a culture's reality within communication implication.

In agreement with the study results, Gumo et al. (2012) explain that taboos, religious beliefs, sacred rites and totems provide a framework for defining and communicating acceptable resource use. Their base is linked to the spiritual world that streamlines these practices. Taken together, these traditional practices create an ecological balance, which ensures rational use of animals and plants for food and other purposes. The scholars opine that taboos guide the philosophy of resource utilization, conservation and environmental protection. To the understanding of the African, a place or a natural phenomenon is declared sacred, either because it is deemed suitable for religious worship or that the

supernatural has abolished human beings from being in touch with this sacred phenomenon. Such sacred places or phenomena can never be abused and thus, the biodiversity of the surrounding eco-system becomes protected.

Taboos communicate by offering guidance that regulates the conduct of members of the community. This communication is believed to have emanated from the supreme being, gods and ancestors according to the Abaluhya beliefs. These taboos spell out how members of the community relate with the environment. This is affirmed by Gumo et al. (2012) who explain that taboos in African community influence relationships between human beings. The scholars demonstrate that taboos play the function of communicating natural environment resource conservation. By the use of taboos, natural environmental resource utilization is conserved. The scholars look at how Africans have formulated a variety of taboos associated with plants, animals, snakes, sacred sites, religious specialists and birds. By employing the preceding taboos, some trees and places where trees are found were protected. Gumo et al. examine how taboos were employed to promote ecological biodiversity, since animals residing in the ecological niches were conserved and were not disturbed. Therefore, in African spirituality, taboos are employed as techniques to natural environment resource conservation.

A village elder explicated that there were regulations that guided the harvesting of herbs from the forest. It emerged that whenever someone harvested herbs from a tree, it was his or her responsibility to place an egg shell next to the tree or at the spot if a root was harvested which communicated to the next person to move to an alternative tree to harvest the herbs. The positioning of the egg shells by the root of the tree or adjacent to the trees was clear communication to the next person harvesting to move away to another herbal tree. According to the elder, these regulations allowed the trees to grow and heal from the harvesting thus ensuring continuity and posterity of the forest. The elder further stated that herbalists were also required to administer treatment on the harvested plant. This was done by application of cow dung or chicken waste for the restoration of the plant and to allow for future use. Yet again, if one found cow dung or chicken waste besides a tree or put on the root, it was clear communication that the tree should be allowed to rejuvenate. Thus, regulations and prohibitions on the system of harvesting and ensuring the health of herbal trees is justified in the notion which says that worldview awakens cultural obligations and gives guidelines which result in to expected behaviour.

A leader of the CFA revealed that it was a taboo for women who were menstruating to harvest medicinal plants. It was believed that medicine obtained by such women would lose its value. Women were considered ritually unclean during menstruation, thus prohibiting them from harvesting herbs ensured that the community was not contaminated with the uncleanness. Contamination of the community had a heavy cost in terms of cleansing which involved the loss of domestic animals. Children were also prohibited from harvesting herbs, since they were young and they could easily make mistakes. It was prohibited to harvest medicine from young trees, in order for them to be allowed to grow to maturity. Harvesting of medicine was often limited to leaves, branches, the bark and roots of mature trees. The key respondent drew attention to the fact that, taboos were used to communicate protection of the forest and the habitation of the animals and birds that lived within the forest. In the bid to protect the forest, collection of firewood was restricted to dead wood, shrubs and cutting of the branches of certain trees. These taboos have slowly been lost and are not practiced today. The loss of taboos has led to aggressive search and harvesting of herbs and resulted in to extinction of some trees. The communication by taboos on the prescription for protection and preservation of herbal trees has a basis in the understanding that worldview shapes how culture influences communication and cultural behaviour as well as interpreting events.

Interviews with CFA leaders revealed that it was a taboo for members of the community to interfere with sacred spaces within the forest. These respondents indicated that sacred grooves had shrines for worship and spaces for performing rituals. Sacred grooves provided spaces for ritual cleansing to the members of the community, administration of oaths as well as spaces for secluding initiation candidates. According to the respondents, sacred grooves had trees that were crucial for administration of rituals and they needed to be protected for future purposes. It was a taboo to destroy trees within sacred grooves. Most often, sacred grooves had a river or stream passing through the them, and it promoted the thriving of the plants therein. Thus, prohibitions from interfering with such spaces communicated conservation, protection and sustainability for posterity of the forest. Violators of taboos would face consequences such as fines which would include foodstuff or an animal for sacrifice. Punishment would also be meted to violators of the prohibitions in the community.

Focus group discussions revealed that most birds which lived in the forest are not eaten. FGDs indicated that, community members were encouraged to keep domestic birds such as chicken, ducks, geese and turkeys for their food. Members of the community were only allowed to eat guinea fowls (*amakhanga*) and quails (*tsisindu*) from the forest. The taboos forbidding the eating of birds such as *Likhungu* (great blue turaco), *Makhule* (Spotted Eagle owl), *ling'ang'a* (Caskit hornbill), *Inditsu* (African Crown Eagle) and *inang'ofu* ensured the protection of the birds. Respondents claimed that eating of the birds that had prohibitions would lead to misfortunes of even death. The respondents stated that birds play a role in conservation of the forest in some ways. They explained that birds ate

insect pests thus checking on the destruction caused by insect pests. Birds also provided manure for the wellbeing of the of trees in their waste. Dispersion of seeds to various parts of the forest was done through the droppings of the birds thus enhancing and maintain the ecosystem of the forest. Seeds which stick on birds' feathers are also dispersed while they fly around the forest. Hence birds are an agent of conserving the Kakamega Forest.

Gumo et al. (2012), in consistency with the study results, affirm that taboo systems are at the center of life as a whole and major conservation efforts and the control of resources are influenced by religious beliefs and spirituality. These scholars uphold that African spiritualism creates respect and reverence for forests, rocks, mountains and rivers. It also gives an explanation as to why certain places are revered and certain activities tabooed. Chari (2016) expounds that it was a taboo to start a fire in the forest as it was tantamount to murder. In the scholar's view, lighting fires could destroy the flora and fauna in the forest. Thus, environmental conservation practices were intricately interwoven with the traditional African culture.

Tarusarira (2013) acknowledges that prohibitions express how Africans regulated their relationship with nature and fellow human beings. In Tarusarira's view, nature and the environment are part and parcel of life, or one with the people, because there is no separation. In the same vein, natural phenomena such as forests, rocks and bodies of water are respected and revered, acting as vehicles to the spiritual world and having both visible and invisible powers. The scholar contends that living in harmony with the natural world translates to living in harmony with the spiritual world since they are interconnected and co-dependent. Therefore, to destroy nature is to destroy oneself. The basic elements of African worldview are basically belief in God and/or gods, belief in spirits and belief in cultic prohibitions such as taboos and moral violations.

It is evidently acknowledged that prohibitions and taboos contribute to communicating conservation of the forest among African communities. The way the taboos work in communicating conservation endorses the view that worldview can unlock some of the deepest layers of a culture's ideology of the cosmos. Taboos and prohibitions also communicate cultural worldview's implications for life.

4.5 Communicating Conservation of the Forest through Wise Sayings

The study revealed that wise sayings such as proverbs or aphorisms were used in communicating conservation of the forest. According to a community elder, these sayings are an integral part of communicating which conveyed daily life lessons and processes. Interviews revealed that wise sayings communicated conservation of the forest through strong imagery and they also expressed the moral attitude of approving or disapproving certain actions with regards to forest materials. Abaluhya proverbs being products of the experience of the wise and older people in the community, are memorable and communicate messages of caution, advise and warning with an element of fear which drew the people away from activities that lead to destruction of the forest. Interview respondents indicated that proverbs push people to behave in a certain desired way. The respondent's views are ratified by the view that cultural worldview and communication represent a way to improve understanding culture and enables ability to speak to the heart of diversity of tension.

Focus Group Discussion participants identified some sayings which were used to communicate conservation of the forest. *Muliru ni mwana weru* which literally means that the forest is our child is a proverb that was given to edify the community's close ties with the forest. Respondents explained the forest's value is compared with that of a child and that just as one would care for their child, so should care be extended to the forest. This saying is informed by the benefits that people drew from the forest. *Muliru yuko koo khukulinde* which is translated to mean; this forest my kinsmen, may we protect it. The existence of this saying which implores people to protect the forest is evidence of communication that extolled conservation of the forest. *Ininga yahale ibotsa niyileshera* is translated to mean that a 'pigeon from far eats sparingly.' This saying was meant to caution the community who live adjacent to the forest that it is those nearest to the forest who can destroy the forest more than those who live far away from it.

FGD indicated that there are proverbs that emphasized the forest's role as a haven of food. *Muliru okulila* is a proverb which means that the forest is a source of our food, therefore people are extorted to preserve and protect it from destruction. *Omusala kukhulira khukundi* means that a tree propagates from another tree. This saying was applied in prohibiting cutting certain species of trees such as the (*olusiola*) ciala which is known to continue propagating once one is planted. Propagation ensured continued forest life and cover. *Muliru ni bulamu* translated to mean that the forest is life. The Abaluhya people equated the forest continuity to life. The communication within this proverb emphasized how important the forest was perceived in relation to human life. *Khukhutsa khwo Muliru ni mwisho kwo bulamu* which means the death of the forest is the end of life gives a picture of how crucial the forest was considered as a source of life in the Abaluhya worldview. Communicating conservation using wise sayings validates the notion that worldview shapes how culture influences communication and cultural behavior as well as interpreting event.

Gumo et al. (2012) assert that for conceptualization of communication to be attained, it should be shared among all people who belong to a community. They affirm that communication is a social setting that is important in understanding the dynamics of people's culture and religiosity. Wise sayings are shared in indigenous communities and they also belong to the social community. The shared values have the potential to influence appropriate behaviour among people who have the same perception of things.

4.6 Communicating Conservation of the Forest Using Folktales

Focused group discussions revealed that folktales were used to communicate conservation of the forest. Folktales had moral teachings and lessons which were meant to lead the people away from wanton destruction of the forest. The folktales contained aspects such as tests and warnings on the consequences of destroying forest materials. Folktales contained humour which was used to attract the attention of the listeners and made them memorable.

Key respondents drew attention to the fact that the people who live near the forest have always used the forest as a source of their livelihood. They revealed that monkeys (*Ikhondo*) were initially used as food. However, at some point, these monkeys were slowly becoming extinct, thus, prohibitions were put in place in order to stop them from becoming extinct. In order to enforce this prohibition, children were told in folktales about how a certain person killed a monkey, then when he grew up, his child was also killed. It meant that one who killed a monkey attracted a curse in their lineage in which their children would also be killed because of this action. This prohibition was meant to stop the forest adjacent community from wanton killing of monkeys and the fear to lose one's child enforced the prohibition. However, with the erosion of traditional practices and difficult economic times, poaching of monkeys is on the rise.

It also emerged from the study that the forest adjacent community appreciated the forest as the spring from which all the water came from. According to the key respondent, through folklore, members of the community learnt that the forest was the origin of rivers and streams. This lesson that emanated from folktales formed beliefs that informed generations having been passed down through oral tradition. Whereas the community may not have had a scientific understanding of that belief, it resonates well with the scientific approach that explains that forests are catchments that supply a high population with water for domestic, agricultural and ecological needs. Therefore, through folklore, the importance attached to the forest as a source of water and the need to conserve the forest was communicated to members of the community.

4.7 Communicating Conservation of the Forest Using Cultural Ceremonies

An elder in the community who was a key respondent agreed that indigenous Abaluhya Cultural ceremonies offered platforms to educate the indigenous Abaluhya about how important the forests were to the community for posterity. Circumcision was one such ceremony as circumcised initiates from some Abaluhya ethnic groups lived in the forest until they healed. The initiates lived in the forest since circumcision was a rite of passage whose characteristic was seclusion from public interaction. The stay in the forest provided a safe space for initiates to experience the sacred and secret elements of circumcision. While the initiates were living in the forest waiting for complete healing, they were taught about conservation and preservation of the forest for the future initiates as well as for livelihood. In the same breadth, initiates were given teachings that ushered them into manhood and these were considered male secrets and values. It was also to protect them from ritual contamination that would be caused by interaction with females in the community. The respondents stated that, the sacredness of the forest and its role as a home for initiates was treasured. The cultural ceremonies having been an integral part of life of the people was treated with seriousness and the communication shared would be held with equal seriousness. Thus, the forest's significance called for its conservation in the strictest sense and communication of the same was espoused in their worldview. The significance of conserving the forest finds relevance in the tenet that states that worldview revolves around personal identity and group belonging which awakens cultural obligations and gives guidelines which result in to expected behaviour.

The study results are in concurrence with Gumo et al. (2012) in their observation that communication is deeply rooted in human behaviours and structures of African society and that it is difficult to think of social or religious behavioral events that lack communication. These scholars ratify that to Africans conservation values and practices do not come from law enforcement but from both spiritual and social responsibility. This responsibility is drawn from the desire to survive in an attempt to evade punishment from the spiritual world.

Chari (2016) adds that proverbs, song, dance, drama and street theatre are modes of communication that are embedded in the social, cultural and psychological fabric of the common man. The scholar adds that these modes of communication resonate with the everyday experience of the audiences in Africa. The scholar points out that the immediacy, impersonality and diversity are some of the prized attributes that make indigenous media more appropriate for disseminating climate change issues particularly in regions characterized by high levels of illiteracy and linguistic diversity.

Mawere (2015) acknowledges that indigenous knowledge is valuable in the establishment of a morally virtuous society. Its utilization aids African communities in recognizing their duty in the exploitation of environmental resources. Mawere (2015) further explains that indigenous knowledge encompasses a range of community-based skills, technologies, and practices that collectively contribute to the community's awareness and capacity to responsibly and sustainably utilize the environment. Worldviews have a significant role in fostering a sense of community affiliation, hence stimulating communal responsibilities that provide individuals with guiding principles that shape their anticipated conduct. In addition, Karki et al. (2017) highlight the significance of indigenous and local knowledge systems and their potential to aid in the development of policies, plans, and programs that are responsive to conservation. The views of these scholars affirm the findings of the study in so far as the importance of using the Abaluhya worldview in communication conservation of Kakamega Forest is concerned.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This study discussed the indigenous Abaluhya worldview's approaches in communicating conservation of Kakamega Forest. In addressing the research's objective, the study looked at how the indigenous Abaluhya worldview communicates conservation of Kakamega Forest. The study established that indigenous Abaluhya worldview has identifiable and effective ways of communicating conservation of the forest. The communication is a fusion of many practices blended with communication systems. The study also established that indigenous Abaluhya worldview communicate through songs, prohibitions, wise sayings, folktales and cultural ceremonies. The study concluded that these approaches have the potential to communicate conservation of Kakamega Forest. These approaches therefore, offer a platform to effectively communicate conservation of Kakamega Forest.

5.2 Recommendation

The study recommends the employment of indigenous Abaluhya Worldview strategies in communicating conservation of Kakamega forest as it has the potential to enhance communication and lead to effective conservation of the forest.

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