

THE INTERFACE BETWEEN LITERATURE AND ENVIRONMENT: AN ECOCRITICAL ANALYSIS OF KIIGEMBE PROVERBS

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Abstract

Environmental conservation is one of the key issues of concern in major world blueprints and visions like United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2063 of the *Africa We Want*, East African Community Vision 2050 and Kenya's Vision 2030. African indigenous knowledge systems can provide mechanisms and strategies to conserve the environment for the betterment of humanity. Humanity belongs to the earth and the earth depends on the activities of human beings on earth. This paper interrogates the interface between literature and environment within the notions of Africa indigenous knowledge system. Using ecocriticism as a theoretical frame work, the paper examines selected Kiigeembe eco-proverbs as literary texts to show the interface between literature and environment. The paper is premised on the fact that literature is a product of environment and that environmental issues and ecological challenges can be portrayed through literary environmentalism genres and Kiigembe ecoproverb is no exception. The findings of this study point toward the need to go back to our Africa roots, especially on indigenous knowledge systems, for solutions to environmental challenges facing humanity today.

Keywords: Literature, Environment, Eco-criticism, Kiigembe, Eco-Proverbs, Indigenous knowledge Systems.

Introduction

Environmental conservation is one of the key issues of concern in the world today. For instance, the African Union through its blue print of Agenda 2063 of *The Africa We Want* proclaims succinctly that:

Africa in 2063 will be a recognized globally as a continent respectful of its environments ecologically conscious with well-established green economy and green energy. By 2063, Africa's biodiversity including its forests, rivers, genetic resources and as well as degraded fish stock and coastal and marine ecosystems would be fully conserved and used sustainably. (African Union Commission 2014 pg.14).

This is one of the aspirations of Agenda 2063. It aspires to see Africa as the "Continent while attaining prosperity maintains healthy ecosystems and preserves the African and global environment' pg 11.

There is close relationship between environment and literature. Literature is a product of the environment. Environmental issues can be portrayed in literature. African Literature is one of the sources of African indigenous knowledge. The environmental problems can be addressed by African indigenous knowledge through genres of African literature and Kiigembe proverb is not an exception.

The term 'proverb' is derived from a Latin word 'proverbium'. Proverbs are found in many parts of the world (Meider, 2004) and there are many proverbs in Kiigembe ecoproverbs that address the issue of environmental preservation in the community.

Kiigembe proverbs like many African proverbs derive their formation and coinage from the immediate physical and natural environment. The natural environments include water, river, forest, bush, animals, land, sea, oceans, places and other related ecosystems. According to Kobia (2016:217), proverbs are important vehicles of expressing known universal truth about life in a particular community and are embedded in people's historical, cultural and environmental heritage. Proverbs serve as the acceptance medium of transmitting knowledge and convention from generation to generation (Hussein, 2015:19). Among the knowledge and ideas that proverbs transmit include the environmental issues like environmental conservation, environmental degradation and environmental knowledge. The Kiigembe proverbs are products of the environment and aptly contain environmental knowledge hence they can

be used as tools to protect the environment and address the environmental challenges that face humanity.

Proverbs are simple, shorts, metaphorical sayings that express a supposed truth held dearly traditionally by a community. A proverb is a fixed and memorable form of saying for transmission of culture and ideas of a community from one generation to another expressing the truth of experience. Kiigembe proverbs, use metaphors to convey environmental messages through use of natural environment like sky, rivers, lakes, animals, mountains and forests.

The Igembe people (pronounced as `Iembe), who are the focus of this paper, are a Bantu speaking group found in Meru County, Kenya. They speak Kiigembe as their language of interaction. They are mostly found in Igembe North, Igembe South and Igembe Central Sub-counties of Meru County in Kenya. However, due to urbanization, trade and globalization, they are found in major towns and cities in Kenya and elsewhere in the world where they use their proverbs in normal conversation. The population of Igembe people in 1943, according to Laughton (1944:1), was 49,000. Today (2023) the population of Igembe people is estimated to be over 600,000 people (Meru County Integrated Development Plan 2018-2022)

Every community has unique way of interacting with the environment hence bringing about unique perception of the environment. This perception can be portrayed in Igembe community through proverbs. The Kiigembe ecoproverbs are the proverbs that vividly use nature to communicate the community's worldview on various pertinent and contemporary issues. For example, on the need to plant many trees for environmental conservation, the Igembe people say, *Muti jumwe jutitawa mwithu* (one tree cannot be a forest). The emphasis ecologically is that trees make a forest and it is deliberate efforts towards encouraging afforestation, agroforestry and even reforestation.

Kiigembe ecoproverbs use metaphor derived from the social and natural environment, to elucidate complex issues of environmental concerns in the community. Although proverbs may convey varied important messages metaphorically to the audiences, some of the messages include

environmental conservation. Plants and animals have found place in Kiigembe Eco proverbs. The physical landscape ecosystem including desert, mountains, hills, processes, specific places, seasons, sanitation and weather patterns are used to construct Kiigembe ecoproverbs. Kiigembe proverbs serves various functions including expressing a truth and giving freshness in a speech. Kiigembe ecoproverbs can be categorized as ecofauna and ecoflora proverbs. The human world and physical environment are closely related. It is imperative therefore to study the portrayal of human-natural relationship in African oral literature genre including proverbs.

Theoretical framework

This paper applies the tenets of ecocriticism theory to the analysis of selected Kiigembe ecoproverbs. Ecocriticism is a short form of ecological literary criticism. The term ‘ecocritism’ was first used by William Rueckert in 1978, who is a major proponent of this literary theory. Ecocritism is a theory of literary criticism that integrates the relationship between literature and environment. It is concerned with how human beings relate with physical environments and how the environments are represented or portrayed in literature (Sahu 2014, Tošić 2006).

Etymologically, the term ‘ecocriticism’ is derived from the two greek word *oikois* word *kritis* whereby *oikos* means ‘household’ and it represents nature and *kritis* meaning the arbiter of taste who wants the house kept in good order (Glotfelty and Fromm pg. 163). Household refers to earth which is home of humankind.

Some of the major proponents of ecocriticism theory include William Rueckert, Lawrence Buell, Suellen Campbell, Cheryll Glotfelty, Greg Garrard, Glen A. Love, Simon C, Estok among others. Ecocritism, as advanced by Rueckert (1978), is the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature. Ecocriticism is the study of relationship between literature and physical environment. Ecocriticism takes on earth-centered approach to literary studies (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996: xviii). According to Barry (2009:248), ecocriticism is literary critical theory that interrogates the relationship between the literature and physical environment.

From the analysis of the views of the leading ecocritics, the following are major tenets of ecocriticism as literary theory:

1. Ecocriticism interrogates a literary work in which landscape is dominant character when a significant interaction occurs between author, character and place.
2. Ecocriticism offers ecological interpretation of literary texts; it answers the question how is nature represented in the literary text?
3. Ecocriticism views humankind as part of nature, it addresses the issue of the place of creative imagining and writing in between humankind and environments, between mind and environment, between mind and world, between thinking, being and dwelling (Glotfetty, 1996:8).
4. Ecocriticism is the analysis of literature expression of humanity's place on earth. William Howarth gives the etymology of ecocriticism. It is derived from Greek *Oikoskrites* meaning *oikois* nature, place, home and *kritos* mean arbiter of taste (Glotfety & Fromm 1996:69).
5. Ecocriticism focuses on the "inter connection between material world and human culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature (Love,2003:196).
6. Ecocriticism use an earth-centered approach to study of literature. It interrogates issues of meaning, value, tradition, point of view and language and contribution to environmental thinking. Ecocriticism addresses itself to the question of how human beings relate to non-human nature in literature. It doesn't limit itself to literature of specific place or historical period.
7. Ecocriticism is concerned with interrogation of cultural texts from an ecological approach. In this paper, Kiiigembe proverbs are viewed as cultural literary texts produced and reproduced by Igembe people.
8. Ecocritics read literature from an ecocentric point of view, apply ecological issues to the representation of the natural world, focus on nonfiction and environmental writing that features 'nature' and show appreciation for ethical position towards nonhuman nature.

9. Literature both reflects and helps to shape human response to the natural environments. Therefore, ecocriticism studies physical environment in literary texts and the social contexts accounting for attitudes and practices that have led to environmental problems and suggesting alternative mode of thought and behavior that promotes environmental conservation.
10. Ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary literary paradigm encompasses related disciplines like history, ecology, science, anthropology, literature, sociology, psychology, politics, geography among others
11. Ecocriticism analyses the analogies between ecosystem and imaginative texts and posits that such texts potentially have ecological function in the cultural system. It also critiques ways of cultural norms of nature that contribute to environmental degradation.
12. Ecocriticism examines human perception of wilderness and how it has changed throughout history and whether or not the current environmental issues are accurately represented or even mentioned in popular culture and modern literature. The issues of ecological values, examinations of 'place', class and gender are central to ecocriticism approach to literature

The issues of literature and environment have been a concern for ecocritics for many years. According to Glotfelty & Fromm (1996), some of the questions that ecocritics try to answer include:

1. How is nature represented in literature?
2. What roles does the physical setting play in the plot of artistic work?
3. Are the values expressed in literary texts consistent with ecological wisdom?
4. How do metaphor of the land influence the way it is treated in the work?
5. How can we characterize nature writing as genre?
6. In addition to race, class and gender, should place become a new critical category?
7. What bearing might the science of ecology have on literary studies?

These questions are critical in the ecocritical analysis of Kiigembe proverbs. Ecocriticism interrogates the interconnection between nature and culture as reflected in literature. As a theoretical discourse, ecocriticism revolves between human and non-human features in the environment. This paper looks at the ecology of Igembe and how it is depicted in Kiigembe proverbs.

Ecocritics are of the view that the nature is shaped by humankind as they interact; positively or negatively. The interaction between human beings and nature may affect each one of them directly or indirectly leading to environmental degradation or environmental preservation. This interplay can be captured aptly in Kiigembe ecoproverbs. It is possible to know the physical environment or nature through oral discourse including Kiigembe ecoproverbs.

Therefore, ecocriticism is the study of literature and environment, by analyzing literary texts that portray environmental issues and evaluate the various ways how literature treats environment. Ecocritics also suggest possible solutions to the environmental problems. Lawrence Buell summarizes well what ecocriticism is by stating that it is ‘study of the relationship between literature and environment conducted in the spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis.’ Estok goes further to broaden the scope of ecocriticism by saying that, ‘it is any theory that is committed to affecting change by analyzing the function-thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical or otherwise of the natural environment, or aspects of it represented in documents (literary or other) that contributes to material practices in material worlds’’. This paper, therefore, uses ecocriticism principles to analyze Kiigembe nature focused proverbs or ecoproverbs.

Methodology

The Kiigembe ecoproverbs analyzed in this paper were collected from adult native speakers and from a collection of Kimeru proverbs. In gathering Kiigembe proverbs the primary text that guided the study was *Njuno cia Kimeru: Uume bwa Ameru* loosely translated as Kimeru Proverbs: The Philosophy of the Ameru authored by John Kobia and published in 2003 by Starman Publishers Limited in Nairobi.

The Kiigembe ecoproverb was rendered in its original Kiigembe form followed by a literal translation to English. In translation, attempt was made to present the local texture of the Kiigembe proverb without comprising the linguistic acceptability of the proverb.

The work of translating proverbs is not an easy one but it is not something which cannot be done. A translator of the proverbs should be competent in the linguistic characteristic of the source language and target language of the proverbs. Proverbs cannot be translated word for word without looking at the context of a particular proverb. In translating Kiigembe proverbs in English, the researcher adopted the equivalence for some Kiigembe word used in the proverbs. The researcher used original works in inverted commas as advocated by Gorjian (2006). In some instances, the researcher was forced to do translation by paraphrase and close equivalent word in English. In translating Kiigembe proverbs, the researcher tried as much as possible to portray environmental issues dear to the Igembe community.

A content analysis of 100 Kiigembe proverbs with ecological messages was analyzed. Some of the Kiigembe ecoproverbs are related with rain, trees, water, animals (both wild and domestic), plants, seasons, weather, time periods, ecological processes, landscape, physical features, human nature interaction, cosmology and animal behavior.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Animals have found a special place in the creation of Kiigembe proverbs that represented natural environment. There are numerous examples, analogies, personification of wild and domestic animals in Kiigembe proverbs to reflect various ecological issues in the world. Of most important is the animal to animal relationship portrayed in Kiigembe proverbs. The interaction between humanity and animals are also well captured in Kiigembe ecoproverbs analyzed in this paper. The interrelationship between animals and plants in the ecosystem is well represented in Kiigembe ecoproverbs with unique messages for efforts towards environmental conservation. Another interaction is between plants and other plants in the physical environment. Animals (both wild and domestic) are portrayed to have a symbiotic relationship in the

environment with other physical features (abiotic environment). This is well represented in Kiigembe ecoproverbs.

Weather conditions and patterns experienced in Igembe region in particular and Meru County in general is vividly captured in Kiigembe proverbs. For instance the proverb, *Thaano kangala uti nkware iti kaulio kayo* (During dry season, there is no fowl without cultivated ground). Since time immemorial, Kiigembe proverbs have played a pivotal role in combating environmental degradation. For instance, most proverbs encourage people to plant more trees to avert desertification. Forest and trees are recurring words in many Kiigembe proverbs. For example; *muti jumwe jutitawa mwithu* (One tree cannot be a forest).

Literature is closely related to history and environment. Heise (1999:1097) is of the view that ecocriticism is an analysis of the ways in which literature represent the human relation to nature at particular moment in history, what values are assigned to nature and why, and how perception of the natural, shape literary tropes and genres. Historically, the Meru people in general and Igembe people in particular have interacted in their physical environment with neighboring communities. Their interactions is represented in proverbs like: *Biri Meru biti Ukabi* (What is in Meru is not in Maasailand). Historically, the Meru and Maasai communities have interacted with each other for many years. Infact, it is argued that the term Meru is a Maasai word meaning a cool and quiet place (Fadiman, 1993). The topography of Meru region is different from physical environment include permanent rivers, mountains, fertile soils for farming; the Maasai live in a physical environment that has mostly seasonal rivers, is lowland, grassland for livestock and fairly flat land.

The Igembe people were ecologically conscious and their consciousness and sensitivity to environment is depicted in Kiigembe ecoproverbs. This knowledge was passed from generation through proverbs. Human culture is connected to the physical environment and it is affected by it as well as affecting it. Culture and nature affects each other positively, negatively, directly or indirectly. Kiigembe proverbs are deep rooted in the traditions, customs, and cultural way of life of Igembe people. The economic activities of Igembe people are intertwined with weather

conditions, the seasons and the climate. Generally, the climatic conditions are favorable as reflected in Kiigembe ecoproverbs. Cultivation of land or farming was one of the economic activities of the Igembe people which is captured in the proverb, *Thaano kangala uti nkware iti kaulio kayo* (During dry season, there is no fowl without cultivated ground).

The Igembe people as depicted in proverbs live harmoniously with their ecosystem. Kiigembe proverbs reveal the environment relation between the Igembe people and their physical environment. A close survey of Kiigembe proverbs reveals that they carry the Igembe people's worldview of environmental conservation. The proverb depicts human being living harmoniously with nature for mutual benefits. This proverb gives a mental picture of Meru physical environment and Maasailand comparatively. The Kiigembe proverb, *Arume ni nyama cia nderi* (Men are meat for vultures) clearly illustrated the relationship between human being and nature. It shows men are adventures in the environment and they may meet vultures in the wilderness.

This Igembe people live in physical environment with different plants and animals. The flora and fauna is source of imagery in many Kiigembe proverbs. For example, the portrayal of frogs in rivers shows life and its continuity. Rivers symbolizes life in the natural environment. The Igembe people kept their rivers clean and there was no room for any form of pollution. That is why people drunk from the river and fetching of river water were a common phenomenon among the Igembe people which is captured in the proverb: *Mutai rui runene atitalala metithia kau* (He/she fetches water from big river doesn't count the many times he/she loses the lid).

Rivers are the habitats of many water animals, for example frogs, fish and crocodiles. Frog survives and croaks in rivers because of healthy and unpolluted water. There are numerous Kiigembe ecoproverbs that show frogs are found in rivers within the Igembe physical environment. For example; *Kaula na ira ntandi niko munene o rui* (Despite the thin legs, the frog is the king of the water). The Igembe people have the various reflections on water imagery as reflected in the Kiigembe eco proverbs analyzed in this paper. Example of these proverbs include *Uti*

mwera jukuromba jungi rui (There is no river borrowing water from another one), *Uti mwera jwenda kwona jungi na rui* (There is no river that likes to see another one with water), *Rui rwaracia ara kuri maiya* (a river makes noise where there are stones) and *Rui rutitacia kaongo* (A river doesn't climb a hill).

There were specific roles performed during specific times or periods of the day. For example, in the morning as specified in the following proverb: *Rukiri rwa kuthamba ruti mpio* (There is no coldness when bathing in the morning). The environment comprises of the earth and other parts of the solar system which are portrayed in Kiigembe ecoproverbs. These include the sun, the stars and the earth. For example; *Riua ritietaraa muambi* (The sun does not wait for the leader). Plant husbandry and afforestation is encouraged as ways of conserving and preserving the environment. This is exemplified by Kiigembe ecoproverbs like; *Muti jumwe jutitawa mwithu* and *Muti yunoracia are yuri* (a trees makes its surroundings fertile).

Wildlife is vividly portrayed in Kiigembe proverbs. These include mongoose, lion, buffalo, elephant among others. Examples of Kiigembe ecoproverbs with animal metaphors representing wild animals include; *Mboo inyingi iti nyama* (Many buffaloes may not produce meat) and *Njou itiremawa ni mibuongo yayo* (An elephant is not tired of her tusks).

Animals are portrayed as protectors of trees and forest. Trees and forest acts as home of the wild animals. In turn the wild animals protect the trees through scaring away people who cut down trees. This is well articulated in the following proverb; *Ndari mwithu niyo jicii ura ijukaracia* (The animal that sleeps in the forest knows how to guard the forest). Traditionally, the Igembe people got their food mainly from the environment. This was through gathering, hunting, cultivating and keeping of the domestic animals. Some of the domestic animals kept by the Igembe people include goat, cows, dogs, chicken, donkeys among others. Kiigembe proverbs are rich in animal and plants metaphors, a clear testimony of how dear they were to the survival of the people. In the traditional Igembe community, animals were hunted for food. Animals like antelopes, buffaloes, hare and gazelles were hunted for meat as source of food. Hunting was also done to protect people from

ferocious and dangerous animals like elephants. For example, hunting as an economic activity is epitomized by numerous proverbs like: *mwathi o riitho riimwe atirawa tangira* (A one-eyed hunter is not entrusted with hunting), *mwathi uri kalonda atiathacia waathi bwaana* (a wounded hunter cannot bring forth any hunt), *uriiria bwa kathia iibutiaa bwa njou* (Chasing a gazelle you may land you into an elephant) and *utikiraa nthongo na kithaka utiutira* (you don't fear being one eyed yet you are always in the bush).

Domestic animals like cows, pigs, sheep, donkeys, goats and chicken were kept in Igembe community for transport and food. This is represented in Kiigembe ecoproverbs like; *ntiiri nirijaira bwa ng'ombe*, (a donkey eats because of the cow), *mburi ikorokaa ni uciara* (A many goat becomes weak because of giving birth, *ng'ombe inkuru ni ya rui na mutindi* (an old cow requires water and banana stem), *nguku itaacua na mpempe* (a chicken is tricked by maize) and *ngore yikarangaa na mauta yayo* (A pig fries herself with own fat). There used to be cattle rustling in the neighboring communities particularly the maasai. This is historically represented in Kiigembe ecoproverbs like *Biri meru yetu biti Ukabi*, *ng'ombe ititaa itikiri ncuuma* (cows cannot be taken (raided) away without a fight) and *Ng'ombe ti cia atai ni atairwa* (Cows are not for the raiders but those who are raided for).

The Kiigembe proverbs clearly portrays that food is derived from the environment which is composed of plants and animals. The wild fruits which were conserved in the environment were ready source of food for igembe people. The wild fruits could be picked by boys, girls and women from trees or shrubs in the shamba as in the forest. Some of the proverbs that depict wild fruits include-*Mbirwa yaremwa ni ukinyila ntaratare yauire itiiri* (when the fox failed to reach the strawberries he claimed they are not ripe). Kiigembe environmental proverbs have didactic functions of companionship, unity and friendship. For example, *uti mbiti iti munyanya* (there is no hyena without a friend), *kiulu ni kia ba njoka* (a lizard belongs to the snake family) and *kuri nyoni ireraa twana twayo na twa ingi* (there are birds that feed their young ones and for other birds).

The Igembe people have reserved some areas as sacred and hence they are conserved. For example, Iombe, Nyambene forest and Njuri Ncheke shrines, swamps and other riparian lands are considered holy and are forbidden to certain people. It was uncouth behavior to build a house near a river or very close to a forest. This was to allow the animals to interact freely for mutual benefits in the environment. Collection of firewood in the forest was done not too early in the morning or too late in the evening. This was to allow wild animals to follow their route to get food and drink water and interact with the environment freely. Kiigembe proverbs are human observations based on nature. These observations are a result of accumulated experience of man's interaction with the environment over period of time. There is need to use this kind of indigenous knowledge as part of effort towards environmental conservation in the world today.

Most trees are treated as sacred and they are viewed as life. This is attached to cultural and religious significance of nature. Sycamore is one of the sacred trees and Igembe people treat it as such and hence they are protected for religious purposes.. For example, muumo (sycamore tree) is represented in Kiigembe proverbs like *kuntu kwauma muumo kutiuraa yungi* (You will not miss a sycamore tree where there was one). *Muumo* tree has cultural significance to Igembe people hence it is preserved for religious purposes. If one cuts down a *muumo* tree he/she is heavenly fined and can be excommunicated from the community. *Muumo* tree can only be cut by elders through elaborated rituals on cleansing and appeasing gods. *Muumo* trees are good reservoirs of water and hence Igembe people value it very much. The Igembe people view *muumo* has shelter for life due to its cultural and aesthetic value. This is captured in Kiiigembe proverbs like; *Ndaara muumone iticii ndara mulerene nikumutwa* (the one that sleeps in the sycamore trees doesn't know the one that sleeps in the acacia tree is being pricked (suffering)). The most frequently mentioned trees in Kiigembe proverbs include *muroro*, *muumo* among others. Some of the tree-related proverbs in Kiigembe include *Uti muroro yuti kiinyo* (there is no muroro without a worm). In the Kiigembe proverb, the animal that speeds night on sycamore tree doesn't know the one that spends on acacia tree is being picked clearly illustrates that trees are used as habitats for animals and birds. Trees are viewed as habitats for birds and animals. Sacred tree like

muumo provide a better habitat for birds than acacia which is thorny and uncomfortable.

Kiigembe proverbs caution against inappropriate environmental practices that may endanger the plants, animals or human beings. For example, *Ukarea utema muunda ruteree ukethira nthingari atiati* (If you refuse to cultivate the garden, you will get *nthingari* at the middle of the garden or shamba). This call for environmental awareness to prune grass lest it may harbor dangerous plants to the ecosystem. It is important to note that nature provides food for the animals like cows, sheep, donkey and goat. Human being in turn depends on livestock as a source of food. Animals provide manure for the plants. This food chain relationship is exemplified in the following Kiigembe ecoproverbs; - *Ntiiri nirijaira bwa ng'ombe* (A donkey eats because of the cow), *Nderi iujaa ara kiimba kiri* (a vulture lands where there is a carcass) and *Kirumi kia nguku kitiwataa lui* (The curse of the chicken doesnot affect the eagle).

The Igembe people co-exist with nature. This coexistence with nature also relates well with their interaction with deity. Deity is respected as portrayed in Kiigembe proverbs like *Murungu atirijaa nkima* (God doesnot eat ugali) and *Bwa murungu buti kirite* (You cannot do what God is against). Fertility is highly valued in the physical environment as represented in Kiigembe proverbs. For example, Igembe landscape as represented in Kiigembe proverbs reveals the land, river, water, hill and other ecological features. The Kiigembe ecoproverbs analyzed in this paper reveals that Igembe people lived harmoniously with nature for mutual benefits. For instance the proverb, *Nderi iujaa ara kiimbi kiri* (a vultures lands where there is a carcass).

Natural phenomenon that occur in the environment include rain, wind, dust and rainbow. These are well represented in Kiigembe ecoproverbs like *Mbura imbii yiwatacia mpuo* (A bad rain blames the wind) and *ngai ikuitanua ni mukui* (Rain has been intercepted by the rainbow). Seasonal division is an environmental issue that is addressed in Kiigembe proverbs. Some of the seasons include; *thaano* (dry season), *munyaaro* (rainy season). These seasons are represented in the following proverbs; *Thaano kangala uti nkware iti kauli kayo*, *Uti munyaaro jutakia*, There

is no wet season which has not ended) and *Uata mibwi na ncooro na nkoroi ikeya munyaaro* (do not waste arrows with monkeys yet colobus monkeys will come during the wet season).

The Igembe people are farmers who practices animal keeping and crop husbandry. They value livestock and cattle are highly revered. Cattle are cared for due to their economic and cultural significance. Cows are used for dowry and also religious ceremonies. There are numerous Kiigembe proverbs which use the animal metaphors like *Meetho ya ciula yatiiracia ng'ombe inyua rui* (the frogs's eyes dosenot prevent cows from drinking water in the river), *Mucoki ianjone riawe ati ngeere* (He/she who returns to her/his homestead is not asked for a sheep), *Mwoni ngai ikumi, ngeere ni imwe* (He/she who gets misfortunes, the cure is sacrifice of one sheep), *Nyuma imbea no ya nturume* (the only good back is that of a ram), *Ukathuria nguku nkaa ikuraa ya njaamba* (If you annoy a hen, she crows like a cock) and *Uti njaamba ya mwela jumwe* (There is no cock for one hen). Although some domestic animals especially dog are portrayed in negative ways in Kiigembe proverbs, they serve important role in the life of human beings. For example, *Uti kuuru mbitikua mpempene cia njua* (you cannot trust any dog in young maize plantation) and *Uti kuuru nkoi kwoo* (there is no coward dog in his/her home).

Nature should be treated well by human beings so that mankind can benefit from the environment. The Igembe people value the human beings-nature coexistence. Breeding and multiplication of domestic animals is encouraged for continuity of the animal species and as source of food for human beings. The concept of giving birth denotes continuity of the animal species and as source of food for human beings. For example, *Yaciara maatha yonkacia tuonthe* (If animal gives birth to twins, she suckles all). The concept of giving birth denotes continuity of life in the environment. Care for domestic and wild animals is emphasized in Kiigembe proverbs. For example, *njou itiremawa ni mibuongo yayo* (An elephant does not fail to carry it tusks). This proverb emphasizes ecologically there in no need to hunt elephants for their tusks.

There are numerous Kiigembe rain related proverbs which also are connected with the agricultural activities carried out by Igembe people. Igembe region receives enough rainfall and this is evidenced by the copious Kiigembe proverbs with rain metaphor like *Ngai ti kironda* (Rain is not a wound) *Mbura yananacia nkia na itonga* (Rain brings equality between the poor and the rich).

Kiigembe ecoproverbs reveals a clear interrelationship between nature and social system in the community. Most proverbs portray the notion of intersection between landscape and cultural interaction of the people of Igembe. For example, *Kwaba mwendwa kuti iriima* (The home of the beloved one does not have hills). The notion of 'hill' as a topographic feature may portray a barrier. However, because of the loved one and the need to strengthen family ties and interaction, there is no physical barrier which cannot be overcome. This is more applicable especially to young man and women, when they are engaged in courtship. Courtship is a cultural event in most African community, Igembe not an exception. The Kiigembe proverbs represent the ecological and cultural landscape of the Igembe people. A proverb like; *Muti yunoracia ara yuri* (A tree will make its surroundings fertile) reveals close knit social relationship and their benefits to members. Ecologically, a tree drops its leaves and if the leaves decompose they make the area near the tree fertile and productive. Trees are, depicted in Kiigembe ecoproverbs, as source of life and continuity.

Kiigembe proverbs give some hint on origin of wild animals. They portray women as the ones who chased domestic animals from homes and went to the bush and forest to become wild animals as represented in the proverbs like *Aka nibo bengirire nyumoo kithakene* (The women chased the animals into the bush), *Aka na nyumoo bati nduu* (Women and animals have no relationship), *Aka na ng'ombe batitumaa nduu* (women and cows cannot befriend each other) and *Aka ni ata* (women are wasteful). This partly explains why in Igembe community, which is a patriarchal society, women were not allowed to own animals or land. However, with modernity, education and globalization this view has changed over the years.

Conclusion

Human beings have to be accountable for their actions on environment. This calls for concerted effort to conserve the environment for survival of human being on earth. This knowledge should be passed through effective African indigenous knowledge system like the Kiigembe proverbs.

The central thesis is this paper is that Kiiigembe proverbs are short statements that contain truth about nature and can be used to provide indigenous ecological knowledge on environment awareness and preservation in the modern community. Kiigembe proverbs communicate the Igembe community worldview of environmental awareness in the community.

Persistent use of Kiigembe proverbs can enhance eco-literacy hence promotion of environmental preservation and conservation awareness. It is proposed that ecological policies can be well articulated to masses through use of proverbs as a form of African indigenous knowledge system. Since proverbs are contextual they can be interpreted based on specific time and place of use. Kiigembe proverbs address all issues in the community including environmental consciousness.

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