

# Chapter 1

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## Introduction and Overview

African governments have laid their hands on most international proposals made in response to the need to address environmental decay. But, unlike the sequential and harmonious progression witnessed from the developed countries, starting from the Stockholm Declaration on Human Environment in 1972, through the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit on Environment and Development in 1992, to the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, Africa has been forced into a discrete progression in addressing the requirements of such global landmarks. Evidently, a number of factors have forced the continent into such positions, and they can be listed, among which are the need to be part of the global village, the quest for rapid economic development and attached donor strings that firmly established, and are prolonging, the master-slave relationship between Africa and its former colonial masters. Clearly, we have for a long time been beggars of resources from our former colonial and other masters. Through such set-ups, some African governments have been held to ransom and arm-twisted for the love of development aid that has done little to eradicate extreme poverty and environment damage.

### **The Concept of Environment**

The issues pertaining to the framework and tools for good environmental stewardship in Africa may not be fully understood without analysing the concept of environment. In this book, the term environment is conceptualised as being constituted by both the following dimensions: biophysical (natural) and human (socio-economic and political) dimensions. The biophysical dimension is made up of elements such as climate (temperature, rainfall, wind and evaporation), air, topography, geology, soils, vegetation (flora), fauna (animals), groundwater (hydrogeology), and surface water (hydrology). On the other hand, the human dimension constitutes element such as people, land tenure and use, archaeological, social, cultural, political and economic aspects. However, both the biophysical and human environments should be viewed as constantly interacting in a dynamic nature that supports all forms of life on earth.

This kind of conceptualisation of the environment helps us understand issues surrounding the uncertainty of environmental stewardship in Africa. We are in a position to engage holistically with some of the discourses that ground and shape

narratives pertaining to environmental threats, particularly those of non-African origin, and the motives behind them.

### **African Environments and Colonial Histories**

It may be wrong to assume that the current environmental problems stem from African origin, neglect or lack of civilisation. Much of the current environmental decay is a manifestation of Africa's colonial histories. Such histories testify to the fact that the partitioning of the continent and its resources, including the brutal dissection of cultural arrangements and physical boundaries, have contributed immensely to the wounded terrain we see and experience today.

Populations were re-grouped into squashed, infertile and fragile ecological zones across the face of the continent, resulting in the collapse of ecosystems and the emergence of the cycle of poverty – environment degradation. With the aid of forced, near-slave labour, mineral wealth was exploited and exported with much greed. Scores of huge open pits and scary underground mine shafts are still visible today. Africans had to make ends meet, and sacrifice their lives to regain dignity and land through many liberation wars. Fertile soils and healthy ecological zones were reserved for the privileged few colonial masters who, even today, have vast tracts of land (including under-utilised land) which they refuse to release for equitable redistribution. Hence, the fact remains that Africa's environmental problems mirror its past. It is only when all stakeholders acknowledge these anomalies that a sustainable solution to the current continued environmental damage can be holistically understood and found. Yet, many of our former colonial masters wish to conceal this critical pillar of understanding that shapes our future. Instead, they portray a picture of failing African governments, ineffective governance structures, corruption, poverty, the HIV/AIDS scourge, and so on. Therefore, in this text, the environment is as much understood a political and social question as it is an environmental question. However, many donor agencies present different narratives.

### **A Struggle for Environmental Management Space**

The manner in which various Northern donors and countries have placed the environment on African governments' agenda is best seen as a struggle for environmental management space in Africa; and similarly, as a contest and battle for political, social and economic realisation by the foreign entities involved. The possible results (giving the benefit of the doubt) are the unintended consequences of the re-partitioning of Africa through the so-called environmental strategies and the associated finance mechanisms originating outside the continent. Some of the key financiers and aid agencies are the World Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). These, along with other aid agencies and donors, have come up with a number of environment related strategies that include: CIDA's Policy for Environmental Sustainability in 1992; Strategy for Denmark's Environmental Assistance to Developing Countries 2004-8, SIDA's 2002 Country

Strategies: Guidelines for Strategic Environmental and Sustainability Analysis; and the World Bank's Environment Strategy. More recently, the Africa Union, African Development Bank and other sub-regional groupings have developed 'home grown' strategies for good environmental stewardship. The key provisions of some of these environmental strategies are revisited in Chapter Four. A number of international NGOs, such as Greenpeace, have also propelled various agenda for environmental management in Africa.

### **The Challenge**

This book outlines a framework for environmental management in Africa. It synthesises tools available to address environmental decay on the continent. It aims to bring to our attention the discourses surrounding who shapes and decides the continent's environmental policies. It answers questions such as: In what contexts are such policies and tools designed and implemented? How are these policies and tools applied and addressed to solve the crucial environmental concerns and problems we face? Why are these environmental policies and tools failing, or why are they not producing the desired results, in and for Africa?

The text reveals that part of the problem has been the fact that in recent years, the development field in Africa has witnessed a proliferation of global discourses and a flurry of ideas and activities promising to tackle perennial problems, among them inequality, environmental degradation and underdevelopment. Whilst the global development community and the African continent are grappling with the conceptualisation and implementation of one discourse, another discourse is suddenly unveiled and thrown into the mix. This means that the development community, particularly in Africa, has to literally and immediately pursue the new idea, almost always restructuring existing research and policy programmes to fit new concepts. It then becomes an aspect of the 'old' versus the 'new' environment agenda, rather than governments giving themselves time to harmonise new ideas with old ideas, and finding a way forward. Many environmental policies and tools have suffered this dilemma, and environmental concerns and problems have been only partially addressed.

Until recently, modernisation theories emanating from the developed world have dominated development thought and environmental policies, leading to research and development interventions that ignore the indigenous and local knowledge bases and skills that Africa can offer. The marginalisation and the neglect of indigenous environmental knowledge, due to its perceived inferiority, has led to growing popularity and dominance of Western science, characterised by its so-called 'universalism'. Where appropriate, this text will provide insights with regard to the manner in which African governments can use the tools available to address environmental concerns and problems 'the African way'.

### Book Outline

This book comes in two major parts: framework for environmental management (Part I) and selected tools for environmental management (Part II). The sub-themes addressed in the various chapters are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Chapter Two focuses on global landmarks for environmental management, including The Brundtland Report of 1987, the United Nations Summit on Environment and Development that took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 14–17 June 1992, leading to the adoption of Agenda 21 as the global action plan on sustainable development, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Millennium Development Goals and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Sources and fundamentals of international environmental law are discussed in Chapter Three, which presents law-making treaties, and how the procedures around negotiation, adoption, authentication and ratification are conducted. International customs and the general principles of environmental laws are considered. However, the larger part of the chapter is dedicated to the fundamentals of selected multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), which are of significance to Africa, and not discussed elsewhere in the book. Some of the MEAs highlighted include the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna, Convention to Combat Desertification, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Kyoto Protocol. The last part of the chapter dwells on addressing implementation gaps faced when domesticating these MEAs.

Chapter Four interrogates how environmental problems are put on the African agenda. The role of key donors such as SIDA, DANIDA and CIDA, and how their various environmental management strategies have pursued specific enviro-political agendas, are outlined. The chapter also traces how new Afro-centric enviro-political agendas are emerging with the coming into effect of the Africa Union's New Economic Partnership for Africa's development (NEPAD) Environment Strategy, and the African Development Bank Group's Policy on the Environment. The above chapters make up Part I.

Chapter Five is dedicated to addressing key environmental problems in the continent with an emphasis on common resources. Among the issues addressed are deforestation, wildlife de-population and extinction, land degradation, drought, desertification, soil impoverishment, air and water pollution, global warming, and gender and the environment.

Aspects relating to Africa and global environmental problems are addressed in Chapter Six. Some of the major global environmental problems discussed in much depth include air pollution, global warming and climate change, ozone-layer depletion and acid deposition. The chapter also addresses issues of nuclear waste and waste treatment in general.

Chapter Seven considers natural resources, and definitions and objectives of conservation and natural resource management. From the definition, it is established that conservation and natural resource management are synonymous. The

chapter highlights some of the causes and effects of the mismanagement of natural resources. It analyses the distinction and link between conservation and sustainable development, advancing arguments and suggesting strategies for conservation. It ends by emphasising the need to seek the active participation of women in conservation and natural resource management, given their various levels of interaction with environmental resources.

Issues concerning environmental impact assessment (EIA) and public participation are considered in Chapter Eight. The chapter addresses these aspects in a unique fashion, looking at both the typical project and EIA cycles simultaneously. The value of this approach is the benefit that stakeholders using this resource will have when addressing sustainability issues at various project stages, especially with regard to the involvement of the public in practical set-ups.

Environmental education, as one of the key environmental management tools, is reviewed in Chapter Nine. The chapter starts with a historical account of the development of environmental education, highlighting the various movements and key actors. It proceeds to a discussion of the conferences that led to the formulation of its definition and objectives, ratification and internationalisation. Adequate attention is given to the definition, scope, forms and objectives of the subject. A clear distinction is made between awareness raising and sensitisation, in order to inform policy and practice. A discussion of organisational structures and institutions that provide excellent environments and programmes is aimed at schools, local communities and the general public. Some prerequisite activities, prior to the implementation of an environmental education programme, are also proposed.

Chapter Ten introduces the relatively new concept of sustainability reporting. This tool has been effective in making businesses conscious of their environmental, social and community responsibilities. Through various voluntary and quasi-mandatory initiatives, sustainability reporting has resulted in companies doing more for the environment in Africa than before. Instead of reporting and accounting only on financial matters, corporate entities are now able to report on ways in which the 'triple bottom line' of the economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainable development is being effectively addressed both within and outside company premises.

Chapter Eleven deals with presentations around non-formal and formal environmental education programmes, approaches for their implementation and methods, as well as monitoring and evaluation tools. These issues are usually given little space, or are neglected in some of the literature dealing with tools of good environmental management, especially in Africa.

The single-chapter contained in Part III, Chapter Twelve presents emerging environmental concerns and tools, and concluding remarks. Emphasis is on the need to consider climate change and the loss of biodiversity as the key environmental management challenges. To minimise the impacts of climate change and loss of

biodiversity, including human security, African governments and individual communities are encouraged to take strong positions to work together to address the problems in an 'African way'.

This chapter re-introduces the key elements covered in this book. The term 'environment' captures both human and non-human facets. The term 'environment' embraces a holistic picture. It is not used in a limited context to cover conservation or ecology alone. The chapter explains the fact that it is wrong to attribute African environmental ills to political, social and economic neglect by African governments. But rather, it needs to be acknowledged that colonial histories still remain embedded in the terrain of the continent. This kind of acknowledgement is necessary to give those in positions of influence, power and authority a holistic overview, putting in place strategies to address environmental decay in the continent.