

**IS DEEP ECOLOGY INAPPLICABLE IN AFRICAN CONTEXT:  
A CONVERSATION WITH FAINOS MANGENA**

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**Abstract**

In 2015, Fainos Mangena published an essay entitled “How Applicable is the Idea of Deep Ecology in the African Context?” where he presented a number of arguments to support his thesis that deep ecology as discussed in the West has no place in the African context. Mangena later presented a counter-version of deep ecology that he claims is based on African philosophy. In this paper, I interrogated Mangena’s arguments for rejecting deep ecology and found that they were based on certain erroneous presuppositions. Further, I developed a critique of Mangena’s Shona version of deep ecology which shows it to be impractical, unappealing, and based on a misunderstanding of the true nature of the modern African environment. I employ the method of conversationalism in this work.

**Keywords:** Deep Ecology, African Environmental Ethics, Fainos Mangena.

**Introduction**

There have been several contributions to the deep ecology literature globally, but I think, if I am correct, there have not been Afrocentric readings or analysis of the idea of deep ecology until recently, when Fainos Mangena did an Africanist reading of the concept. In an original essay entitled “How Applicable is the Idea of Deep Ecology in the African Context?” published in this journal in 2015, he presented several arguments to support his thesis that deep ecology has no place in the African context. For him, deep ecology presents environmental ethics as being materially instrumental to human welfare whereas environmental ethics in the African place is anchored on spirituality interpreted from a communitarian viewpoint. Mangena later presented a counter-version of deep ecology that he claimed is based on African philosophy.

I find Mangena’s arguments quite interesting. First, I give credit to him for attempting to re-engineer the idea of deep ecology to suit the

African place. Deep ecology is a forty-four year old environmental movement that has had serious impacts in Europe and in the Americas. In fact, deep ecology occupies a place of its own in the overall constellations of Western environmental ethics. The movement has made a number of notable achievements, including re-casting the Western mind towards spirituality, at least the type articulated by Spinoza. Deep ecology can also be said to be an ecocentric system although not in a strict sense. So Mangena's attempt at mainstreaming deep ecology for the African place projected strong appeal, particularly to some of us who are in the tradition of ecocentric philosophy.

However, despite the promise in the Mangena's essay, one's excitement soon disappears as Mangena began to present deep ecology as an anthropocentric system that is likely to hurt the African environment. It is here I find Mangena's analysis deeply troubling. I think Mangena did a great injustice and violence to deep ecology; for he attempted to disrobe deep ecology of its essential characteristics. It is a case of demonizing a dog to have it hanged. My mission in this paper, therefore, is to interrogate Mangena's arguments for rejecting deep ecology. In doing so, I attempt to show that his arguments were based on certain erroneous presuppositions that were apparently forced into his (Mangena's) understanding of deep ecology. I also aim to show that Mangena's version of deep ecology is impractical, and based on a misunderstanding of the true nature of the modern African environment. I will further show that deep ecology is inter-intuitive with African environmental ethics and it is applicable in the African environment.

### **The Conceptual Framework and Basic Principles of Deep Ecology**

In April 1984, George Sessions and Arne Naess presented the following as the eight basic principles of deep ecology.

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.

5. Present human interference with the non-human world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life's quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes (NAESS 1995, 68).

### **Mangena's Analysis of Deep Ecology: Some Misreading**

Mangena began his reading of deep ecology by citing Naess's definition of deep ecology as the "deeper questioning about human life, society and nature which goes beyond the so-called factual scientific level to the level of self and earth wisdom" (2015, 1) and that, for Naess, deep ecology includes basic intuitions and experiencing of ourselves and nature in what constitutes ecological consciousness. He further noted that deep ecology differs from the dominant view in Western environmental ethics, the latter, being deeply anthropocentric (MANGENA 2015, 2). In addition, he noted that deep ecology includes studying ourselves as part of nature's organic whole; that is, as beings who do not lie outside of nature (MANGENA 2015, 5).

From pages 7 to 8 of his essay, Mangena analyzed the implications of the eight basic principles of deep ecology. According to him, there is no problem with Principle 1 except where it is stated that "these values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes". He stated that the problem with Principle 1 is that in stating the principle that way, the intrinsic or inherent value of the non-human world is forfeited or transformed into instrumental value. Regarding Principle 2, Mangena argued that it has not been clearly demonstrated how richness and diversity of life-forms can give intrinsic or inherent value to both humans and nonhuman nature. For him, "there does not seem to be a closer relationship between the human world and the non-human world, that is, nothing brings the two together".

Mangena argued that Principle 3 "treats the non-human world as a world that has instrumental value to the human world". Further, he argued that deep ecologists have made "no attempt to define 'vital needs', and to explain why it is important to have these needs satisfied

at the expense of the non-human world”. However, he argued that “vital needs” should be defined on an interdependent basis; for it is by not defining “vital needs” on an interdependent framework that makes the principle sounds anthropocentric. With regards to Principles 4, Mangena argued that it seems to contradict the first and third principles, which he thinks are framing nonhuman nature to serve as vehicle for human evolution. He questioned how the principle would fare in an African cultural community where polygamy is prevalent. Here, it appears that Mangena nurses a certain animosity towards any policy that may bring about reductions in African populations.

Mangena agreed with the deep ecologists on Principles 5, 6, 7, and 8 that there is need for changes in social policies. However, he accused deep ecologists of “standing on the fence” rather than taking a rigid stand that is embedded in some religious myth. He argued that to get deep ecology policies implemented in the society, the “law or some invisible agent” should be put in place to force obligations on people; for without this force the efficacy of deep ecology remains questionable.

It appears to me that Mangena has misrepresented the deep ecology philosophy. This is evident in the manner of his analysis, where some of the ideas of the deep ecologists are taken out of context and mutilated outright. Some of those misrepresentations will be made manifest as we proceed. First and foremost, let me point out that Mangena said he analyzed the deep ecology thesis on the basis of a bias that:

Deep ecology cannot be applied in contexts that are non-Western particularly the ecological context of the Shona people of Zimbabwe where the idea of ecology has both cultural and spiritual connotations; ...deep ecology appeal more to cultures that are individualistic and yet the Shona culture is communitarian. (2015, 2)

He also set out on the basis of another bias where he posits that he had stated in another publication two years earlier that “African attitudes to the environment are different from those of the Westerners in that the former, regard human beings as part of nature while the latter view the same as separated from nature” (MANGENA 2015, 3). These were the biases that Mangena set out with; and on the basis of those biases he had already condemned deep ecology as inapplicable in the African context owing to its Western origin. I think it is a mistake for anyone to claim that ancient Africans were the only societies that revered and respected nature. George Sessions rightly avers that “many environmental historians, ecophilosophers, and anthropologists now agree that primal societies throughout the world practiced a spiritual ‘ecological’ way of

life in which everything was to be respected in its own right” (1987, 106). Now, let us see some of the misrepresentations in Mangena’s analysis.

Mangena started by arguing that the first principle of deep ecology, in its second part, transformed the intrinsic value of the nonhuman world into some instrumental value. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.” Naess explains that in formulating Principle 1 he referred to “the biosphere, or more professionally, to the ecosphere as a whole... also referred to as ‘ecocentrism’; ...[which] includes individuals, species, populations, habitat, as well as human and non-human cultures ...[that extends on the basis] of all-pervasive intimate relationships” (1995, 68). He further explains that the term “life” is used in “a more comprehensive non-technical” context to include what biologists classify as “non-living things” such as rivers, landscapes, ecosystems. What this indicates is that Principle 1 clearly set forth deep ecology as an ecocentric communitarian system of ethics. This already liquidates Mangena’s fears that deep ecology is set forth as an individualistic and non-communitarian framework.

Mangena believes that the statement “These [intrinsic or inherent] values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes” transforms the inherent values of the nonhuman world into some instrumental values (2015, 7). I do not see how that is possible. Naess has defined “inherent value” as: “independent of any awareness, interest, or appreciation of it by any conscious being” (1995, 69). Elsewhere, he avers that intrinsic implies that “something *A* is said to have a value independent of whether *A* has a value for something else, *B*. The value of *A* must therefore be said to have a value inherent in *A*” (NAESS 1994, 111). This definition does not suggest any instrumental valuation of the nonhuman world. Mangena seems to have been confused by the baggage of biases he brought to the analysis. He seems to have thought that “inherent value” refers to individual nonhuman beings considered independent of the rest. But Naess has made it very clear that in using the term “inherent value” he refers to the nonhuman world taken holistically in an ecocentric communitarian sense. In addition, he avers that “the most promising way of defending intrinsic values today is... [if] ‘objects’ will then be defined in terms of gestalts, rather than in terms of heaps of things with external relations and dominated by forces” (NAESS 1994, 111). In other words, Naess defines “intrinsic value” in the context of gestalt or holistic experience. Once the first principle is considered this way, the problem raised by Mangena disappears into thin air.

With regards to Principle 2, Mangena argues that it has not been clearly demonstrated how richness and diversity of life-forms can give intrinsic or inherent value to both humans and nonhuman nature. He further argued that the second principle contradicts Principle 1 on the grounds that the first principle is projecting nonhuman values as instrumental to human values. I have already shown that the allegation about Principle 1 was based on a misunderstanding of the conceptual framework of deep ecology. Therefore, the second part of his objection has already ceased to exist. Now, the argument that deep ecologists have not demonstrated how richness and diversity of life-forms passes into realization of inherent values arises due to a misunderstanding of the conceptual framework of deep ecology. This problem would not have emerged in Mangena's mind if he did not presuppose that deep ecology, on the basis of its Western origin, is an individualistic non-communitarian framework. Apparently, Mangena thinks that any concept that originates in the West must be individualistic and that which originates from Africa must necessarily be communitarian. This is much akin to committing the fallacy of "perennialism" defined as a tendency of assuming that philosophical traditions are fixed, static and monolithic (EDET 2015, 212). It is not unlike the warning of Idom Iyabri to John Ushie against "materialist reading of the African imagination" which he regards as "a fundamental error-in-judgment" (2015, 22); as if all African imaginations are spiritualistic. I think there is no problem with Principle 2, especially when read within the ecocentric communitarian context of deep ecology. Naess has clearly explained how richness and diversity of life-forms translates into the realization of inherent values of the human and nonhuman world considered together. Naess explains the second principle to mean the increase of diversity and richness (that is, multifaceted quality) of life itself over evolutionary time (1995, 69). What this means is that without increased complexity of the ecosystem – that is, continuous perpetuation of life-forms – the ecosystem diminishes in size and quality. This further means that the ecosystem must be seen as an interdependent whole before this can be realized. In other words, the life-forms, taken individually, do not bring forth the intrinsic value as it should.

With regard to the third principle, one may say Mangena raised a strong objection. The questions he raised here seem to be legitimate and significant. However, it is still based on a misunderstanding of the conceptual framework that projects the principle. He argued that deep ecology has made "no attempt to define 'vital needs', and to explain why it is important to have these needs satisfied at the expense of the non-human world" (MANGENA 2015, 7). However, despite that, he argued that even if the "vital needs" were to be explained; nonhuman

nature has vital needs which the human world should satisfy. In other words, “vital needs” should be defined on an interdependent basis. He argued that it is by not defining “vital needs” on an interdependent framework that makes the principle to sound anthropocentric (MANGENA 2015, 7). Let me re-state the third principle: “Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs”. From here we can see what fuels Mangena’s misperceptions. On the basis of his bivalent individualistic interpretation of deep ecology as humans versus nonhuman, he thought that the word “diversity” here refers to nonhuman. The phrase “to reduce richness and diversity” as used here, can only be understood in the context of the ecocentric spiritualistic communitarian framework of deep ecology. So, in satisfying vital needs, one does not do so at the expense of the nonhuman world – rather one is taking from the ecosystem as a whole (which he/she is part), defined unitarily or as gestalt whole. This means that no one is at a disadvantage; since what is taken is from the community not from an individual. To this extent, the question of interdependency and counter-support does not arise. Naess has stipulated “priority rule” based on two criteria (or principles) to determine how one’s vital interest may be met. These criteria are: vitalness and nearness. According to him:

The more vital interest has priority over the less vital. The nearer has priority over the more remote – in space, time, culture, species. Nearness derives its priority from our special responsibilities, obligations and insights... It may be of vital interest to a family of poisonous snakes to remain in a small area where small children play, but it is also of vital interest to children and parents that there are no accidents. The priority rule of nearness makes it justifiable for the parents to remove the snakes. But the priority of vital interest of snakes is important when deciding where to establish the playgrounds. The importance of nearness is, to a large degree, dependent upon vital interests of communities rather than individuals. (NAESS 1994, 111)

Apart from that, Naess addresses this principle to human beings because these are those who put the environment at risk. Nonhuman beings appear to already know how best to satisfy their vital needs without risk to the environmental – at least on the scale that humans have managed. Meanwhile, it is important to look at Mangena most significant question, namely: How does deep ecology define “vital needs”? Naess has maintained that deep ecology is not a rigid framework and would

therefore not attempt to prescribe some authoritarian creed on how everyone should satisfy vital needs. On the basis of this conviction, Naess avers that the term “vital needs” is deliberately left open-ended to allow for considerable latitude of judgment by individuals based on some context-specific factors (1995, 69). This has enabled deep ecologists to escape the ‘snare of contextlessness’ that John Rawls fell into. Kyrian Ojong, Asira Asira and Diana-Abasi Ibanga aver that in defining primary goods, which was believed to apply to all humanity, Rawls ignored context principle, and therefore, chose some materialist desires popular in American materialism (2017, 9). I think the third principle is the main door to deep ecology from an African context because it allows for freedom of choice based on what is acceptable in one’s culture. Despite this, the question still remains: how does one satisfy his/her “vital needs” in an acceptable way?

With regards to the fourth principle, I think Mangena’s concerns here may be tied to the animosity most Africans have towards the suggestion for population control in Africa. And I think Mangena is inspired by Segun Ogungbemi (1994, 207-208) to ask the question – How can one reduce African populations in the midst of its cultural practice of polygamy? I just want to make a passing comment here that Africa must wake up to the realization that significant cause of the poverty crisis in Africa is not necessarily its leadership deficiency, but importantly its unsustainable population leaps. Regarding the claim by Mangena that Principle 4 contradicts Principles 1 and 3 which he believes are tailored to serve human interests; I have shown that problem to have arisen from his misunderstanding of deep ecology as individualistic rather than as an ecocentric communitarian framework. I have already shown that Principles 1 and 3 are not designed to serve merely human interests.

However, Mangena (2015, 7) has raised a very significant question here: “How is this flourishing compatible with a decrease in population?” That is to say, if the richness and diversity of life-forms contributes to the realization of inherent values of the ecosystem, how is such flourishing compatible with human population reduction? To me, this is the strongest problem Mangena has raised about the deep ecology thesis. Naess responds to this question thus: “It is recognized that excessive pressures on planetary life stem from the human population explosion” (1995, 73). In other words, excessive human population is putting the environment at risk; hence to rescue the environment human population must be brought under control. Naess is not saying that a killing program should be inaugurated; rather he expects that “the stabilization and reduction of the human population will take time. Hundreds of years!” (1995, 69). He argues that except human

population is reduced, “substantial decreases in richness and diversity are liable to occur” (NAESS 1995, 69).

I do not think Naess has clearly demonstrated how human population reduction will enhance the richness and diversity of life forms. Naess links higher rates of nonhuman species extinction to human population explosion (1995, 69). Naess has not provided any empirical studies to prove this assumption. However, one can draw from simple observations of the society to affirm the truth of the claim. We can say, for example, the more human beings are born, the more they require social services in housing and other amenities; this requires destruction of the environment (with its attendant species and ecosystem destruction) in order to make such provisions available. Therefore, if more human beings are born in inverse relation to available provisions; then more forest and wilderness areas shall be destroyed (with its attendant species depletion) to accommodate them. Despite this syllogism, one can still go on to argue that exponential growth in human population will not put the environment at risk. Some scholars argue that nature has a way of checking or balancing the populations of all life-forms in the planet, and taking care of itself without any human input (LOVELOCK & EPTON 1994, 144-145; OGUNGBEMI 1994, 208). This counter-argument is akin to Mangena’s claim that it is the spirit world that stretches out its invisible hand to balance out the ecosystem against human threats (2015, 13). But should we wait for blind fate (and ancestor-spirits) to provide answers to our problems?

Mangena agrees with the deep ecology thesis on Principles 5, 6, 7, and 8 that there is need for changes in the social policie. However, he accused deep ecologists of “standing on the fence” rather than taking a rigid stand on the matter. He argued that they should “initiate the change through advocacy” in order to pressure governments to implement eco-friendly policy changes (MANGENA 2015, 8). Mangena was not explicit with the phrase “standing on the fence”. I think it is better to ‘stand on the fence’ than to ‘sit on the fence’. “Standing on the fence” means you are active or at least make yourself available to be counted, and that you are concerned with events around you. But “sitting on the fence” suggests that one is unconcerned with events happening on both sides of the fence. I think what Mangena meant by “standing on the fence” is that the deep ecologists are not taking sides. If that is what Mangena meant, then he is correct. The deep ecology movement does not take sides with any of the extremists – either Interferentists or anti-Interferentists. Naess maintains that deep ecology’s approach to environmental education and advocacy is that of complementarity. He says, “deep ecology supporters must acknowledge that we sometimes have a one-sided view”, and should therefore, incorporate what they

find essential in other movements (NAESS 2000, 50). Bill Devall also says deep ecology assimilates the best in other types of environmental ethics (1980, 315). It is not an ‘all or nothing’ game. Deep ecology allows for flexibility and latitude among members of different cultural groups.

The ‘Interferentists’ argue that nonhuman beings (considered individually) are life-forms without ends in themselves, hence human beings can continue to use them arbitrarily to serve their interests. The ‘Anti-Interferentists’ argue that nonhuman beings (considered individually) are ends in themselves, hence human beings should not interfere in their life development. These are two extreme positions in environmental ethics movement, and deep ecology is not taking sides with any of them. Deep ecology uses the term “non-interference” but it does so not to imply that human beings should not modify the earth but to put on the spotlight the nature and extent of such interference (NAESS 1995, 69). So, deep ecology charts the middle course. In permitting sustainable interference, deep ecology says it is done to allow individual species (humans and nonhumans) to satisfy “vital needs”; not by feeding on each other but by drawing from the ecosystem considered holistically.

Lastly, I do not see what other forms of advocacy Mangena demands of the deep ecology movement. Except Mangena is calling for violent advocacy; his accusation that deep ecologists do not engage in advocacy is simply not true. Deep ecologists are not engaging in some academic pretensions. Rather, they are one of the most active advocacy groups in the world today; and have caused eco-friendly policy changes in many countries. Principle 8 states: “Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to try to implement the necessary changes”. This means that deep ecology calls for positive direct action, not just to demand for changes, but to lead the change. This is counter-intuitive to Mangena’s Shona/African version of deep ecology which depends on “the spirit world [to] ensure that policy changes with regards to safeguarding the interests and needs of the nonhuman world are implemented” (2015, 13) - a sort of abdication of responsibility. Chigbo Ekwealo argues that ecological security “would be through restraints which an individual must initiate” (2017, 122). Lawrence Ezemonye and Martin Ogbe also hold that it is up to human beings to figure out how to change their habits ecological-wise; because “many of the paths to [ecological] stabilisation run straight through our daily lives” (2011, 349). Naess affirms that “supporters of the deep ecology movement are activists within the general ecological movement”. He views deep ecology as a sort of nonviolent movement consisting of activists who rationalize their belief by standing up,

speaking up and leading the virtue (NAESS 2000, 59). Devall avers that deep ecologists are not calling for the violent overthrow of established institutions or government (1980, 314, 316). The eight basic principles of deep ecology were launched in April 1984 by George Sessions and Arne Naess. Since then the movement has made tremendous progress in the field of environmental ethics.

### **Mangena's Shona/African Version of Deep Ecology: Some Problems**

Mangena (2015, 8) averred that “there can be no doubt that the idea of deep ecology exists in the Shona [African] environment”; but that there is doubt that it exists in the form articulated by Arne Næss, Bill Devall, and George Sessions. On the basis of that premise, he set forth to articulate what he views as Shona/African version of deep ecology. I shall re-present Mangena's ideas here; thereafter I shall show how inconsistent the Shona version is to the modern African environment.

Mangena made a confessional statement that after reviewing several literatures published in Zimbabwe or by Zimbabweans, he could not find any mention of the phrase “deep ecology”; even though most of them had discussed the subject of ecology from various academic viewpoints (2015, 8). However, there are indigenous literatures that provide important insights into Shona-African conceptualization of deep ecology (MANGENA 2015, 9). Mangena began his construction of Shona-African version of deep ecology, by drawing out certain taboo-suggesting proverbs/adage in Shona culture and analyzing them to show their deep ecology credentials. I must confess that this a novel approach to deep ecology in Africa; but it is not a new approach to constructing environmental ethics for Africa.

Mangena argued that the African version of deep ecology is anchored on two principal frameworks: first taboos, and second, cosmology. He argued that anchoring the African version of deep ecology on taboos is important, because the protective values of taboos “forbid members of the human community from performing certain actions such as eating some kinds of food, walking on or visiting sacred sites, cruelty to non-human animals and using nature's resources in an unsustainable manner” (MANGENA 2015, 9). He also argued that violations of these taboos may invoke the wrath of the spirit world against the human community, with punishments that may range from bad luck, disease, drought and even death (MANGENA 2015, 9). Hence, he concluded that observance of taboos promotes a set of behaviours that fosters a desirable environmental ethic.

Mangena has provided two examples of taboo-suggesting proverbs/sayings to ground his thesis. The first one is: *Ukawetera mumvura unorwara nechirwere chehozwe*, if you urinate in water you

will be infected with *Bilharzia*. According to him, this proverb “is meant to dissuade people from abusing water sources, a behaviour which may lead to diseases,” particularly because urine contains some nitrates that can cause the accumulation of algae, which is dangerous to aquatic life (MANGENA 2015, 9). The second one is: *Ukauraya Shato mvura hainayi*, if you kill a python there will be no rainfall. Mangena argued that “python is among those animals that are slowly becoming extinct and so they need to be protected and so the taboo will help in protecting this endangered species” (2015, 10). He averred that the efficacy of this taboo/saying is quite evident because human beings need rainfall for survival, hence they must honour this saying.

The other ground where the African version of deep ecology is anchored, according to Mangena, is cosmology. This refers to cultural view regarding the structure and origin of the universe. Generally, African metaphysics holds that reality (the universe or cosmos) comprises variety of spiritual and physical beings that are interdependent and hierarchically related. The reality of spirit is central to African traditional metaphysics. Mangena argued that indigenous Zimbabwean society has a cosmology that is different from that of the Europeans; and based on a philosophy “that recognises the harmonious trinity of nature, society and the spirit world that are in a symbiotic relationship, that is, they are interdependent” (2015, 10). He named these spirits to include “animal spirits, human spirits, clan spirits as well as territorial spirits”; that are hierarchically related to Mwari which is the supreme spirit (MANGENA 2015, 10).

He argued that land is the melting pot of communications between spirits, and it is also the abode of ancestor-spirits that are consulted through libations to ask for spiritual guidance; for this reason, lack of care for the land may invite the wrath of the spirits (MANGENA 2015, 11). Sadomba avers that “land is strongly connected to the spirit world as it harbours infinite secrets and so it demands caution in interacting with it” (quoted in MANGENA 2015, 10). Mangena argued that lands are social spaces that link the dead with the living; and that “sites like rocks, caves, mountains and rivers are places where territorial spirits stay as they do their job of protecting the environment through the enforcement of moral codes of behaviour” (2015, 11). He maintained that “it is not just left to human beings to decide whether or not the non-human world is worth respecting, the spirit world has a say as well” (MANGENA 2015, 12). This, according to Mangena, is what gives intrinsic worth to land. In fact, he maintained that “since the non-human world also participates in the sustenance of nature, it follows that this world has intrinsic value” (MANGENA 2015, 10). On the basis of these arguments, Mangena claimed that:

The Shona environment has a different form of deep ecology which is onto-triadic as it involves the participation of the living, the living timeless and Mwari/Musikavanhu/Unkulunkulu (Creator God). This is totally different from the deep ecology that is enunciated by Næss, Devall and Sessions which is based on the idea of personal ethics and it only involves the participation of the living and has no invisible agent that ensures the implementation of policies required to build a sound and deep ecological ethic. (2015, 12)

As I pointed out earlier, this is a novel approach to deep ecology, namely: attempting to embed deep ecology thesis in specifically African cultural forms. Naess as well as Devall and Sessions had expected and desired this, for they had encouraged people from other cultures to elaborate their own versions of deep ecology (DEVALL & SESSIONS 1994, 115; NAESS 1995, 70). Drengrson avers that different people and cultures have different mythologies and stories which can support the platform of deep ecology and work for solutions to environmental crisis (1995, 3). Therefore, Mangena's project still falls within the framework of deep ecology even to the extent Naess, Sessions and Devall framed the original thesis. However, I have identified a number of problems that may render the Mangena version of deep ecology impracticable. First and foremost, I find unattractive, the way Mangena rehashed some ethnographic materials in order to pin them to African philosophy. I think the time has come for African philosophers to begin to raise questions about the notion of spirit as it is conceived in African traditional philosophies, religions and cultures. Such questions may include determining whether the claims held about the efficacy of spirits in the African cultures can be proven to be true. African philosophers cannot afford to continue to narrate cultural ideas uncritically. The time has come for us to raise questions about the beliefs we inherited from our fore-parents. We cannot continue to romanticize legends and myths without interrogating them; otherwise we are not philosophers but some culture-spokespersons.

Having said that, let me scrutinize some of the claims Mangena has presented as Shona-African version of deep ecology. Let me begin by observing that the proverbs Mangena mentioned were common-sensical sayings among the people, and not a command of the law as such. (This observation does not preclude the possibility that some people might have been inspired by it to act it out in real time). Mangena argued that the taboo-suggesting proverbs were designed primarily to foster eco-friendly attitudes and behaviours among

members of Shona/African society (2015, 9). But I doubt the sincerity of this claim. One obvious question one must ask is: Were the taboos invented to protect the environment or for non-environmental anthropocentric purposes? Are we not excessively romanticizing here? Take for example the proverb – *Ukawetera mumvura unorwara nechirwere chehozhwe*, if you urinate in water you will be infected with Bilharzia – which Mangena claimed was designed to protect the water bodies and the aquatic life-forms therein. Indeed, the proverb, if it was enforceable taboo, could have led to protection of water bodies and some aquatic life-forms. But those were just instrumental values to secure the environment for human use mainly. There is nothing in the proverb that suggests some ecocentric inherent values. It says; “if you urinate in water you [human being] will be infected with Bilharzia”; not that aquatic life-forms would be affected.

The second proverb is: *Ukauraya Shato mvura hainayi*, if you kill a python there will be no rainfall. Mangena argued that “python is among those animals that are slowly becoming extinct and so they need to be protected and so the taboo will help in protecting this endangered species” (2015, 10). I think that this claim cannot be proven or sustained. One obvious question that can be raised here is: Was this taboo meant to protect the python for ecological reasons? In fact, it is quite evident that the proverb-taboo does not place any intrinsic value in the python at all. Obviously, the proverb-taboo suggests that without the possible consequence of drought, killing of python would be allowed. Like the first proverb-taboo, the second proverb-taboo sounds anthropocentric rather than ecocentric; for the taboos are justified exclusively in terms of their effects on human health and wellbeing.

The other set of questions concerns how Mangena interpreted land ecology in relation to ancestor-spirits. Mangena averred that Shona/Africa society holds the view that the cosmos or universe comprises physical entities and spirits that are mutually interdependent in hierarchical order (2015, 10). On the basis of this claim, he argued that deep ecological thesis that would be practical in the African context must accommodate the notion of spirit in its analysis. I do not have problem with that, except that Mangena should not claim that the view holds true for every African. As we shall see later in this work, many modern Africans do not believe in the notion of ancestorhood. However, what I find inconsistent in the views of Mangena is his attempt to interpret ancestor-belief in ecocentric terms. Mangena projected the view that land is the melting pot of communications between spirits, the social space that links the dead with the living; and that sites like rocks, caves, mountains and rivers are places where territorial spirits stay (2015, 11). For this reason, with land is their abode, the ancestor-spirits

have vested interests in its sustenance; and human beings must protect the land for the sake of the ancestor-spirits in order to avoid incurring their anger. Therefore, he argued that since the spirit world also participates in the sustenance of nature, it follows that nature has intrinsic value (MANGENA 2015, 10). There is a problem with this view.

First, I think Mangena's usage of the concept "intrinsic value" in his analysis appears dubious. Intrinsic value is generally defined as the quality that is innate or inherent in a thing, independent of interests external to it; even if such interest is that of an ancestor. I am not aware of another definition of intrinsic value apart from this one; and Mangena did not give us another definition either. The view that the ecosystem derives its intrinsic value from the interests of the ancestor-spirit bewilders thought. If land has intrinsic value, then it should be independent of the interest of the ancestor-spirits. I think Mangena's thesis would have been more appealing if he had said that the ancestor-spirits also contributed to the richness and diversity of the ecosystem, since as Ifeanyi Menkiti (2004) says "they are still very much part of the living community"; and not that ancestors' vested interests give intrinsic value to it.

Conversely, the ancestors' interests are merely human interests, since the ancestors are human beings stretching their lives in the form of ancestor-spirits. Menkiti notes that the "ancestors are themselves still continuing persons... not other-worldly non-persons, but persons in other worlds" (2004, 327). For this reason, one can argue that this view is anthropocentric because whatever vested interest ancestor-spirit has about land is human interest.

One can see the non-ecological action of the ancestor-spirits in their self-centredness and greediness in terms of their irrational demands and exercise of wrath. For instance, if rhinoceros (one of the Zimbabwe's most illegally poached animals) are extinct, it does not matter to the ancestors as long as such extinction does not impinge on their interests. The ancestor-spirits, rather than being interested in the wellbeing of the nonhuman animals, are interested in feeding fat on them. Munamoto Chemhuru observes that "in Zimbabwe, traditional Shona communities... kill certain species of animals as sign of respect and sacrifice to traditional chiefs, ancestors and God" (2016, 244); following this, there have been increasing seizures and killing of pangolin in Zimbabwe as offering to gods and ancestors (CHALLENGER & HYWOOD 2012). Pangolin is one of Zimbabwe's animals noted for its proneness to extinction.

Mangena further averred that "land was the abode of the ancestor spirits to whom people would pour libations from time to time

in order to ask for spiritual guidance” (2015, 11). Now, the obvious question for this view is: Was libation requiring purity of land for its acceptance by ancestors? Is there a record indicating that ancestor-spirits rejected libation because the land was polluted or the nonhuman life-forms living in/on the land are facing extinction? I think we need to stop romanticizing the so-called ancestor-spirits or stop giving them credit for ecological values they do not possess.

Despite this, I think that Mangena’s version of land ethic may be said to be potentially useful in some communities in Africa. There may be many people in the rural communities in Africa that believe in the version of land ethic articulated here. Lands are not absolutely dead things, but it does not also contain the potency of life in them to be as active as the life-forms that live in them, whose progenies we are. He, who destroys land, destroys life and existence itself.. No doubt, sacred sites can bear the marking of eco-friendly consequences. I think if African communities had set apart mountains and forests as sacred sites, it was not to protect the vegetation in an ecocentric sense as claimed by Mangena; although, such religious beliefs may bring collateral benefits of an ecological kind. However, one should also note that most of the sacred forests in Africa were set aside as “evil forests”, that is, fear sites, said to be occupied by the most violent spirits in the land to whom human and animal sacrifices were offered. Therefore, the suggestion that the sacred sites possess ecological credentials is still shaky, since it still demanded animal and human killings, in the form of rituals, to be kept sacred.

### **Conclusion**

There are three reasons Mangena’s Shona version of deep ecology will not work in the modern Africa. One, the ancient ecological practices promoted in Mangena’s work were embedded in African traditional religions which drew support and adherence from the traditional people. In modern Africa that may no longer be the case because most of the traditional religions have lost significant followership. Majority of modern Africans are devotees of Islamic and Christian religions which in turn denounce practices embedded in traditional religions. Two, many modern Africans have lost touch with traditional knowledge system due to their formal training in Western education. Hence, they will be more comfortable interpreting reality with models in Western education rather than through proverbs. Three, the notion of nature sacralisation is ancestor-based, which will demand animal and human killings, as ritual of deference, to be effective. On the contrary, modern African societies are governed by laws that do not support such practices.

Naess rightly observes that “government in Third World countries [Africa inclusive] are mostly uninterested in Deep Ecological issues” (1995, 70). This is partly so because the sort of environmental ethics currently being promoted by some African scholars disconnect from contemporary circumstances in modern Africa. Further, they are based on ecological awareness we inherited from traditions which to a great extent is antithetical to modern circumstances in Africa. As long as African environmental ethics remains at the mythical level (at the level of ancestor-spirit) it runs the risk of being both unrealistic and irrelevant as the basis of an effective environmental ethics. It is part of the reason I think that it is lamentable that Mangena’s work would attempt to tie African environmental ethics to ancestor-spirits, a worn-out notion that is unacceptable to much of modern Africa. This period in African philosophy is that which challenges the limit of mythical interpretation of the world as we must work out new philosophical frameworks in which the myriad of African problems can be comprehended and resolved. And not to continue to reclaim un-reckoned ancient templates that are tied to some vague notion as objective spirits.

I think Mangena’s Shona version of deep ecology is potentially dangerous to the African ecology. As his article clearly projected, Shona version of deep ecology narrows the vision of the traditional African philosopher to those wild areas or portions of the biosphere that are of interest to ancestor-spirits; rather than looking at the wellbeing of the entire biosphere. Devall avers that, for deep ecology, designating some portions of the earth as sacred areas is not enough in building environmental ethics or rescuing the environment from ecological crisis (1980, 315). Rather than abandon the forest for evil spirits to inhabit (as in the case of “evil forests”) or the mountains for ancestor-spirits to colonize, deep ecology encourages human beings to participate in the experiences of the mountains, trees, animals – sharing in their joys and sorrows, interests and needs, and soaked in their consciousness. This means the interest of the environmental ethicists should not be limited to some specific territories but should extend to include the entire global ecosystem in a cosmic gestalt sense. It is important to note that one cannot be an African environmental ethicist without simultaneously being concerned with ecological matters and interests in other parts of the globe. African philosophers should not simply think of African environmental ethics as a laundry list of African ecological issues. Her interest should extend and significantly include the ecological and social issues in parts of the world hither and thither. African environmental ethics should synchronize with environmental ethics in other parts of the world. All people in all parts of the world are relationally trapped in the same ecological turmoil. However, the configuration of the problems is

context-specific (FRANCIS 2016a, 4). Hence, the approaches to resolving it cannot be centralized.

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