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Living a sustainable life: African and Old Testament proverbs in dialogue

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Introduction

Many scholars (Awuah-Nyamakye, 2012; Jean-Pierre, 2013; Weiskel, 1973) have observed that traditional societies usually relate positively to the environment. The premium placed on life and communal living by such societies has always been seen to be crucial in sustaining their existence. However, because their epistemology went contrary to Western scientific reasoning, the knowledge base of traditional societies was branded as unscientific, and accordingly unreliable for development practice. As a vision of ideas of how change in society is best achieved, development theory and practice (such as growth, dependency and structural adjustment theories) (Rapley, 2007) undergirded by Western scientific thought was championed as the key to unlocking the doors of underdevelopment which characterised many societies in Africa.

Consequently, since independence in Africa, many countries such as Ghana and Nigeria have modelled their development agenda in line with Western based patterns (Killick, 2010; Olusanya, Ate, & Olukoshi, 1988). Although mindful of the wisdom inherent in the traditional values and practices, African leaders largely failed to integrate traditional concepts into the so-called modern development practice. Admittedly, some successes were chalked, evident in the area of technology, medicine, and infrastructure. But the failures too cannot be ignored (Haverkort, 2007). Particularly alarming was the realisation that Western development practice, with its emphasis on economic growth, was largely responsible for the economic inequalities, and the increasing ecological problems the world is facing (Norgaard, 1994; White, 1967). The

need for a paradigm shift in development theory and practice became not only urgent, but also imperative. When the concept of sustainable development was popularised in 1987, through the Brundtland Report, many hailed it as a better alternative to the existing growth-oriented development models. Conceptualised as the development that meets the needs of today without compromising the needs of future generations (Kendie & Martens, 2008), sustainable development was attractive because of its boldness in addressing the nexus between the social, ecological, and economic dimensions of development (Robinson, 2004). Unlike previous debates which centred on whether development and environment concerns contradicted each other, sustainable development revolutionised the debate to how development can be achieved by not compromising the welfare of the environment and societies (Lélé, 1991). More so, sustainable development was not only concerned with the present, but also looked to the future.

With some few years into the introduction of sustainable development, it became the mantra of development practitioners and theorists. In the words of Lélé (1991: 607):

“SD has become the watchword for development planners, the theme of conferences and learned papers, and the slogan of developmental and environmental activists. It appears to have gained the broad-base support that earlier development concepts ... lacked, and is poised to become the developmental paradigm of the 1990s”.

Upon close observation, however, the principle of this newly found paradigm had always been present among traditional societies (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009; 2012; Mawere, 2014). Branded as irrational, and unscientific, the way of life of traditional societies was left out of the debate on the best way to achieve development. But it has become increasingly clear that knowledge cannot be a monopoly of an individual, a group, or a culture. If the world is to achieve the

development it craves, conscious effort is needed to bring all ideas on board, including indigenous knowledge and Western science in a mutual partnership (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2014).

This chapter examines the indigenous knowledge of Akan¹ and Ewe² people of Ghana in order to unearth principles which promote sustainable lifestyle. Dei (1993: 105) defines indigenous knowledge as

“the cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and worldviews of local peoples as distinguished from Western scientific knowledge. Such local knowledge is the product of indigenous peoples’ direct experience of the workings of nature and its relationship with the social world. It is also a holistic and inclusive form of knowledge”.

This form of knowledge has widely been perceived as offering possible alternative for progress among the world’s poor (Lanzano, 2013). Over the last 20 years, Indigenous Knowledge has moved from the periphery to the centre, attracting development agencies such as the World Bank (Briggs, 2013). As a concept, indigenous knowledge has not escaped its fair share of criticism. Lanzano (2013), for instance, points to the difficulty among scholars of indigenous knowledge in their choice of concepts or terms which best described their object of study. Concepts such as ‘indigenous’, ‘traditional; and ‘locality’ have been put across. But each of these concepts has its own ideological problem (Lanzano, 2013). On his part, Briggs (2013) cautions that practitioners have often accepted too quickly the claims of indigenous knowledge without much criticism. He contends that very often, indigenous knowledge has been conceptualised in a simplistic and naive manner, therefore “it has turned out to be less helpful as a development tool than has been supposed or hoped for” (Briggs, 2005: 110).

¹ The Akan constitute 47% of Ghana’s population and is the largest ethnic group in Ghana. The Akan ethnic group is made up of the Asante, Assin, Akwapim, Bono, Ahafo, Kwawu, Akyem, Wassa and Fante. The Akan occupy the southern parts of Ghana, mainly in the rain forest and coastal belts of the country (GSS, 2013)

² The Ewe ethnic group is found in the south-eastern part of Ghana. They make up 13% of the country’s population.

Despite these criticisms, indigenous knowledge carries with it the advantage of bringing into development discourse voices from the margins. These voices may be uncritical, unscientific and crude, but they nonetheless represent the lived experiences of societies. Underlining the concept of indigenous knowledge is the conviction that every acquired knowledge deserves consideration and evaluation for the good of society. This comes close to the concept of participation, where every individual is considered as capable of producing knowledge for the benefit of society. Indigenous knowledge provides development practitioners the opportunity to treat individuals as not only recipients of knowledge, but also, producers of knowledge (World Bank, 2004).

Indigenous knowledge appears in many forms; however, we focus on the medium of proverbs as a basis to investigate traditional values which promote sustainable lifestyle. Generally, a proverb is a short wise saying, believed to contain a truth. One incontestable definition of proverbs is yet to emerge, but it is evident that a proverb integrates peoples' experiences, their culture, and their understanding of nature. What makes proverbs a unique tradition is its ability to condense so much meaning into few words (Mieder, 1999).

The method used is literary analysis of selected sayings of relevant proverbs to the subject of sustainable lifestyle and sustainable development. We rely on secondary data, that is, collections of Akan and Ewe proverbs by scholars. The Akan and Ewe peoples are selected because the two are part of the largest ethnics groups in Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). Also many of their proverbial traditions have been put in collections (Opoku, 1997; Dzobo, 1973; 1982).

Suffice to indicate that the analysis of Akan and Ewe proverbs will be done alongside biblical proverbs to explore how both traditions complement each other in promoting sustainable living. It has become important, if not imperative, to include the Christian tradition into the discussion such as this because Christianity has become part and parcel of

the cultural landscape of Africa (Höschele, 2007; Mbiti, 1986). In discussing African life and thought, Christianity and Islam have sometimes been sidelined. The reality, however, is that Christianity and Islam have become part of African way of life, and at times making it difficult to separate African elements from these two traditions. A complementary effort between African and biblical traditions has the advantage of bringing to the fore how African and biblical proverbs cohere to promote sustainable living. Existential reality in Africa indicates that African people resort to both their African traditions as well as either Christianity or Islam in everyday lives. Failure to recognise this development leads to a partial appreciation of what defines the lives of Africans. Besides, several scholars point out the close affinity between the cultures in the Bible and African societies (Fontaine, 1985; Golka, 1993; Westermann, 1995).

This chapter hopes to affirm the view that principles of sustainable living are inherent in the beliefs and values of traditional societies. It emphasises that government, and development practitioners need not only pay attention to this, but also take advantage of it to foster genuine growth based on the principles of sustainable development. They are to look within the culture of the people and use the values and knowledge of the people as vehicles of change, instead of resorting to Western concepts which many times fail to connect with the people.

In order to achieve the above set goals, the chapter is structured into four parts. The first explains briefly the concept of sustainable lifestyle. Following is a discussion on African wisdom traditions, with specific focus on Akan and Ewe proverbs. It aims to identify and probe into the traditional principles which inspire sustainable lifestyle. Next is a probe into how biblical wisdom traditions throw light on sustainable lifestyle. Emphasis is placed on selected biblical proverbs which bear testimony to sustainable lifestyles among ancient Israelites. The final part

engages the two traditions in a way that the traditions find grounds of commonality and complementarities between each other.

Sustainable Lifestyle: A Step towards a Better World

Promoting sustainable lifestyle is an important aspect of sustainable development, which takes seriously how economic growth can be consistent with ecological and social needs. Our way of life is now widely acknowledged as the root cause of unsustainable practices (Leonard & Barry, 2009; White, 1967). Most humans want to drive in cars, live in homes with all the modern gadgets which make life comfortable. What we fail to recognise is that over 6 billion people depend on planet earth for livelihood: but there is a limit to planet earth's ability to meet our increasing demands. In satisfying our needs and desires, through the consumption of natural resources, we sometimes compromise the earth's ability to replenish itself (Harris, 2002). Coupled with this is the fact that the earth's natural resources are not only finite, but also fragile (Martin et. al, 2012). Do we continue to live our lives, and care less about the consequences of our choices? Or do we encourage ourselves to work towards addressing the challenges that confront our quest to develop and the effects it has on the environment? The concept of sustainable lifestyle is one approach in addressing the complex nexus between socio-economic concerns and environmental interests.

According to Bedford, Jones and Walker (2004: 48),

“Sustainable lifestyles are patterns of action and consumption, used by people to affiliate and differentiate themselves from others, which: meet basic needs, provide a better quality of life, minimise the use of natural resources and emissions of waste and pollutants over the lifecycle, and do not jeopardise the needs of future generations. Sustainable lifestyles should reflect specific cultural, natural, economic and social heritage of each society”.

Sustainable lifestyle focuses on the way we live (Scot, 2009). As humans, we share similar needs and aspirations though with some variation on their degree. Many people maintain their lives by nourishing themselves and their children, having access to shelter, and living healthily and happily. However, the manner in which they achieve these needs and aspirations needs to be held in check. Sustainable lifestyle requires a shift in behavioural patterns. It obliges individuals to inculcate the concept of sustainability into their daily life and decision making. Why drive to work when the workplace is within a ten minutes walk from home? Why use air conditioners when good ventilation can be achieved by the size and number of windows put on a building? Simple choices as those above cumulatively play a key role in improving the state of the environment.

Drawing its presuppositions from the concept of sustainable development, sustainable lifestyle focuses on daily life changes that seek to address the economic, social, and ecological imbalances (Sahakian & Wilhite, 2014). It embraces principles of efficient use of natural resources for a better now and future. Basic values such as honesty, compassions, justice, and freedom, accordingly, are essential for promoting sustainable lifestyle. Below we explore how the values and principles of sustainable lifestyle are embedded in African and biblical proverbs.

African Wisdom Tradition: Akan and Ewe Proverbs on Sustainable Lifestyle

Akan and Ewe societies are endowed with many wisdom traditions, including traditional songs, proverbs, folklores just to mention a few. These wisdom traditions are important sources for indigenous knowledge. As indicated by scholars (Andan, 1992; Kendie, 2010; Kimilike, 2008), indigenous knowledge are invaluable sources for ideas for social, economic, and spiritual transformation. The genre of proverbs is a conspicuous part of the body of wisdom within the two societies. Proverbs serve as an avenue for many African communities to express ideas and thought without necessarily being plain in their speech. Proverbs help in understanding the inner thought and feelings of the African (Boadi, 1998;

Dzobo, 1973; 1982). Proverbs contain values and norms which give clues to what motivates, guides, and influence the behaviour of members of a society (Avoseh, 2012). The Akan has a saying: *obaynansafo yebuno be na yenka n' asem*, meaning, “a word to the wise is enough.”

Among Africans, proverbs act as a catalyst of knowledge, gives wisdom and helps in moral and ethical formulation. As a source of a people's values, proverbs cover a wide range of issues such as belief in God, ancestors, human person, cosmos, environment, development, the future and so on (Asante, 2002; Opoku, 1997). Kudadjie (1996: 2) commenting on the African proverbs makes this point thus:

“Proverbs touch on all conditions of life: wealth and poverty, health and sickness, joy and sorrow; occupations: farming, hunting, fishing, building, trading and so on; and other kinds of activity: healing, cooking, walking, sleeping, marriage, childbearing, upbringing, etc. there are proverbs which speak about and to all manner of people: kings and citizens, nobles and slaves, women and men, children and adults, apprentices and master craftsmen, and so on”.

Proverbs help us to unlock hidden truths, clarify vision and unify different perspectives. They add humour and help to diffuse tension on otherwise sensitive situations (Ndlovu and Ncube, 2014).

Relying on collections of Akan and Ewe proverbs, we discuss their role in promoting sustainable lifestyle. The selected Akan and Ewe proverbs reveal aspects of sustainable lifestyle within these societies. They stimulate ideas on several issues which ordinarily would be ignored, but which hold serious consequences for a sustainable world. We select two proverbs from each of the communities to show how these two Ghanaian societies convey their idea of sustainable lifestyle. Suffice to add that there are more proverbs which speak to

the idea of sustainable lifestyle and sustainable development. The choice of the selected proverbs is a matter of convenience, since they appear in collections.

Akan proverbs

The Akan as with other African societies is rich in proverbs that are used to convey a number of truths to the people. These proverbs cover all spheres of life's situations. We give the proverb and its meaning and then draw implications for sustainable development.

Nea wɔnom hɔ no wɔnnware hɔ

Lit. Translation: Whatever is drunk one should not bath near it

Meaning: One should always do the right thing

Water is life and its use must be sustained for posterity. Among the indigenous Akan, water is used for a variety of things. It is used for washing, bathing, cooking and more importantly to quench thirst. Its pollution through bathing would jeopardise its use for drinking by those downstream. Brauer (cited in Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009: 33) makes a case for the availability of portable water for sustainable development. He opines:

“The availability of freshwater is a key to sustainable development and an essential in health, food production, and poverty reduction. Without an adequate supply of safe water, all other development efforts are doomed to fail”.

This proverb, accordingly, encourages the Akan to ensure that they avoid those acts that would compromise their future. For them, a society that is unable to access water is likely to perish. What is more, unsafe water is as dangerous as not having water. Literally, the proverb requires members of the society to value water and recognise its importance for community development. Figuratively, it is cautioning people against any improper behaviour that

endangers society. Central to the proverb, therefore, is one's ability to conduct one's self in a way that would be beneficial to both the community today and in the future. People, many a time, tend to misuse properties meant for the whole community and thereby deny future members of the community usage of such facility. The above proverb, therefore, encourages the Akan to be responsible in their actions so as not to jeopardise the survival needs of future generations.

Wusum brode a, sum kwadu bi, nea obi nim nea obegu kɔm

Lit. Translation: when you cultivate plantain, cultivate banana as well for you do not know which of them will save you in times of famine

Meaning: always have an alternative plan at hand

Plantain is an important staple food among the Akan. Plantain is used for all manner of food varieties among the Akan. It is, for example, an important component in the preparation of *fufu*, (a local dish), made from the combination of cassava and unripe plantain. In many Akan societies, *fufu* cannot be prepared without plantain being added. Banana is part of the tropical fruits. When unripe, banana has the characteristics of plantain and can be used in place of plantain in the preparation of *fufu* in the event of shortage in the supply of plantain. Recognising their ability to be used alternatively, the proverb advises the Akan to have alternative plan (s) in order to deal with any unforeseen occurrences. Another Akan proverb which has a similar meaning is “*adi di daa ye kyen adi preko*” which literally means: “it is not good to eat all that you have in one day”. This proverb “sums up the traditional Ghanaian [Akan] understanding of the concept sustainable development [as well as sustainable lifestyle]” (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009:28).

The message these two proverbs convey is important for policy makers in Ghana in particular, and Africa in general, who have the tendency to make one-fit-all policy without

thinking of alternatives in the event of the policy failing. For instance, currently, Ghana is facing a lot of challenges on her energy front. If policy makers had not banked all their hopes on hydro to generate power and had thought of an alternative alongside the hydro generating plants, the country would not be in the current difficulty. The proverb is admonishing us to be mindful of our decisions and think of the future implications of what we do today.

Ewe proverbs

Menye vovo na kutae wogbea alo dona o

Lit. Translation: it is not because of fear of death, that you should stop sleeping

Meaning: even though we know that death will eventually come, that should not be a justification for not planning for long term events

Death is the inevitable end of earthly life. Every one of us will embrace it at the appointed time. The fact that we will die does not mean that we should be afraid to sleep. The Ewe uses this proverb to inform the people not to be afraid to plan because we do not know what the future holds for us. The fact that one will fail in an endeavour does not mean that one should be afraid to plan for the future or to make other endeavours in life. Many African countries are facing hardships today because of their failure to plan for the future. We are more concerned with fulfilling today's desires than thinking of the next generation.

Afesi be yemenya gbe sig be x]t] ade ye de nu o, eya ta yede do do

Lit. Translation: The house-rat says he does not know when his landlord would send him away packing, that's why he bores his own hole

Meaning: we must prepare for the future since we do not know what will happen to us.

Among traditional Ewe, this proverb is used to teach members of the community the need to make provisions for the future. The proverb is tasking people not to be complacent but strive to ensure that they are prepared for the future. There is always the tendency for people who have official accommodation to fail to make provisions for their future. Many civil servants residing in official bungalows have retired and have nowhere to go since they had failed to make plans for their own accommodation during the time which they were still employed. The proverb teaches that as a person, one should not rely solely on the benevolence of others as they may one day turn their back on you. This proverb also gets to speak to African countries that always depended on handouts from their so-called development partners. Many a time, when these development partners face challenges of their own, they are unable to fulfill their pledges thereby throwing the budgets of these countries off gear. Ghana today is back to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) looking for a bail out for its economic problems. The country could have avoided this embarrassing situation if it had managed its resources well. This is a principle that is applied to sustainable development. Government must not rely on development partners alone to meet the developments needs of its own people, but must put in place measures to ensure that these needs would be met through careful planning. The proverb in a way teaches us to be prudent in our choices as what we decide today will impact on our future and generations yet unborn.

Biblical Wisdom Tradition and Sustainable Lifestyle: The Case of Proverbs

Wisdom tradition in the Bible is represented by three main books namely; Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastics. A unifying concept among these books is the idea of “wisdom”, known in Hebrew as *Hockmah*. An adequate definition of this term eludes biblical scholars (Crenshaw, 1998). For Williams (1962), *Hockmah* is an attitude underpinned by proper conduct, which in turn is based on knowledge. Fox (2008) sees *Hockmah* as an approach to reality. One that perceives the human mind not only as an intellectual power, but also having

the inherent ability to “illuminate darkness and guide us alright” (Fox, 2008: 3). On his part, Crenshaw (1998: 3) explains that the underlying spirit of *Hockmah* is the “search for specific ways to ensure personal well-being in everyday life, to make sense of extreme adversity and vexing anomalies, and to transmit this hard-earned knowledge so that successive generations will embody it”.

The book of Proverbs (subsequently to be referred to as Proverbs) is the foundation to Israelite wisdom traditions (Childs, 1979). One striking unique feature of Proverbs is its presentation of “wisdom” as a main topic on its own amidst its numerous and diverse maxims and observations. “Wisdom” as a topic is scarcely touched on elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature (Fox, 2008). For Proverbs then, it is not just a matter of presenting traditional truths, but also deliberating on what embodies wisdom.

Important to wisdom is the formation of character. According to Scott (1971: 52), Proverbs “is not indoctrination but illumination and education in the true meaning of the word, to awaken the mind, kindle the imagination and train the judgment”. Among many things, Proverbs is designed to help its readers to achieve success, by avoiding the snares and dangers in life (Blank 1962, 857). The didactic nature of Israelite proverbs and the emphasis on character formation is crucial for achieving sustainable lifestyle. The complexity surrounding the world’s problems which have necessitated the consciousness of sustainability needs major shifts in peoples’ perspectives and way of life. It is here that Proverbs proves to be relevant even in our times. Interested in optimal behaviour for individual and societal good, Proverbs provides us the opportunity to interrogate how ancient Israelite wisdom can help shape our journey towards a sustainable future. Below, we explore selected sayings in Proverbs which address behavioural changes in the areas of economic, social, and ecological spheres of life.

Interested in optimal life of its audience, Proverbs pays attention to economic activities, since they form the basis for the use of material resources to support and enhance social structures. Proverbs' interest in economic activities, however, is not just an observation of how ancient Israelites made a living. On the contrary, the sayings delve into values and standards that should guide the economic footprint of Israelite society. A case in point is Prov. 11:1. It reads:

Dishonest balances are an abomination to the Lord; but complete scales are his delight.

The theme of this saying is honesty in business dealings. Business fraud was strongly condemned in the Israelite society. From the Torah (Lev 19:36; Deut 25:15) to the Prophets (Amos 8:5; Mic 6:11), and the Writings (Prov 16:11; 20:10), dishonesty in business transactions features as an important topic. In Prov 11:1, two economic behaviours are pitched against each other. The first is dishonest, insofar as it seeks to offer one partner of the transaction an unfair advantage, while the second is honest because both partners have a fair transaction. The Hebrew word *mirmāh* translated as **dishonest** also connotes **evil**. Thus, a person of a *mirmāh* character seeks to deceive a victim in order to harm him or her (Walkte, 2004). Such a deceitful practice is an **abomination** (*tô'ēvāh*) to the Lord. By contrast one who engages in business transactions with the mind of *šālēm*, translated here as **complete** (but could also mean **fair** or **just**), pleases the Lord. By describing dishonest business practices as an **abomination to the Lord** (*tô'ēvāh yēhwāh*), the sage stresses on the degree to which such practices were repugnant and destructive. Unfair dealings in business are injurious against those who are defrauded. Ultimately, it destroys the society.

Values of honesty and integrity emerge as foundational for good economic practices and peaceful society. Profit making is central to successful business, but it should not erase the fact that community interest is paramount. In other words, economic interest should not override social and community values: rather economic goals should be pursued in tandem

with them (Mawere, 2011). Business men and woman need to adopt fair practices in their dealings, since anything contrary hurts the poor, and compromise our ability to achieve a sustainable world (Mawere, 2011).

Upholding the importance of economic lifestyle guided by the values of honesty and integrity, Israelite sages also paid attention to social behaviours that enforced societal harmony. Thus, the book of Proverbs places a high premium on social relations. It affirms the core tenet of the Bible –that is humans cannot live in isolation from each other. This is especially true for the poor who need help of others to make life meaningful. Good social networks among the poor enable them improve upon their ability to access resources and to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Prov. 21:13 carries such idea in a profound way. It reads:

He who shuts his ear from the cry of the poor; he also will call and not be answered.

Strong in its rhetorical appeal, the saying focuses on one's responsibility towards the poor and indeed all others. It has a threefold structure with three interrelated themes. The first part concerns the act of not lending an **ear** ('ozen): that is the deliberate decision of not listening to the poor. Following is a convergence between the subject and the object: they both seem to be in a distress. However, there is also a contrast in the sense that in the first part, the crying (*zē'āqāh*) is carried out by the poor. In the second, the calling (*qārā'*) is done by the one who refused to listen to the poor. Ending the saying is a repetition of the negative action in the first part: **not being answered** (*wēlo ' yē'āneh*). The cry of the poor in the first part of the saying and the call of the subject in the second part correspond to convey a sense of distress. That is they both suggest the importance of attending to one another for a harmonious, peaceful and sustainable society.

Importantly, Prov 21:13 asserts that the refusal to attend to the poor is an anti-social behaviour. It has the ability to harm society (McKane, 1970). Generally, Proverbs is strong on its condemnation of insensitivity towards the poor. According to Westermann (1995: 44), the denial of assistance in Proverbs is “not merely an issue of omission that is being criticized; rather, the person’s whole orientation to life is being characterized”. Literature on climate change reveals the lifestyle inequalities that confront our world. On the one hand, there are the rich with their luxurious and plentiful expenses, which contribute most to climate change through their anthropogenic activities. On the other hand, there are the poor who struggle to provide the basic human needs for themselves and their families, and yet are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Prov 21:13 conveys the message that refusal to help the poor damages the corporate life of the society. Such negative action harms the socio-economic supportive system that guarantees the stability of society (Kimilike, 2008).

As an agrarian society, ancient Israel paid attention to proper use of her land and livestock. Proverbs, for instance, throws light on good agricultural practices, with particular interest in their ethical dimensions. Farming involves at every stage decisions that bear directly on the state of the earth and its living creatures and non-living entities. Thus there is need to shape our agricultural practices with good and sustainably acceptable values. Poor agricultural practices could result in depletion of water resources, soil erosion, and fertilizer and pesticide contamination of water bodies (Davis, 2009). On the side of animal farming, poor practices lead to discomfort of animals, which compromise their ability to grow, survive, and re-produce (Good Practice Note, 2006).

Focusing on animal farming, Prov 12:10 admonishes farmers to be prudent in the care for their flocks. It reads:

The righteous knows the life of his animal; but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

The subject of the first part, **the righteous** (*ṣadīq*), who is likely to be the farmer, is connected to his animals through the verb **knows** (*yôdē'a*). The Hebrew word (*yāda'*) which is commonly rendered here as **to know** has a wide range of nuanced meanings ranging from possessing information to having sexual intercourse. In this context, it means caring for (cf. Murphy, 2002). By extension, caring for an animal will include but not limited to knowing an animal's condition that is whether it has eaten or not, and paying attention to its other needs. This same understanding can also be extended to the caring of the environment and the symbiotic relationship between the latter and human beings. To undertake these activities is to please God. Other texts in the Bible also promote this sympathetic and symbiotic relationship with animals. For example God is pictured as compassionate towards animals as he provides rains for the growth of pasture for the animals (cf. Deut 11:14-15). Similar ideas are portrayed in Deut 22:6-7; 25:4, and Jonah 4:11. The compassionate act of the righteous is contrasted with the insensitiveness of the wicked. Couched in an oxymoron, the opening of the second clause **but the tender mercies of the wicked** (*wērahāē rēšā'im*) ridicules the **wicked** (*rāšā'*). The wicked person is by nature merciless. His cruelty towards his animals could be manifested in his refusal to feed the animals or provide appropriate shelter for them.

With its simple idea, Prov 12:10 bears an important message for today's farmers, especially those in animal farming. That is the act of farming requires right character. It is not an activity that any individual can venture into. This message is crucial, not only because right attitude towards farming ensures success, but also because it intrinsically connects the farmer to nature. Farming with an attitude that connects one to nature is sustainably viable, in the sense that productivity is not what drives the farmer, but rather the healthy relationship between the land and its people (Leopold, 1966).

African and Biblical Proverbs in Dialogue

Because of the existential reality of African Christians resorting to both their traditional heritage and that of the Bible, there is the need to engage these two traditions critically in order to stimulate our perceptual reasoning towards sustainable lifestyle. The analysis of the Akan and Ewe proverbs, alongside biblical proverbs shows that there are enough resources in terms of tenets, values, and principles to drive Africans towards a sustainable world. For instance, emerging as central to both tradition is a strong orientation towards the future. The future has a stake in the present. In other words, present actions have a bearing on how the future turns out to be. From the perspective of Akan and Ewe proverbs, the future only exists as a potential. It is never a guarantee of success or failure. With this understanding, the traditional Akan and Ewe societies place high premium on the present. The present is key to ensuring a successful future. The Ewe proverb on the house-rat and the landlord, for instance, supports this view. Not knowing when the landlord will come knocking, the house-rat prepares beforehand. It is almost like keeping one eye on the present and the other on the future. Thus, the two (present and future) fuse together and become inseparable as individuals negotiate their way through life. From the biblical point of view, although not conspicuous in the selected sayings, the concern for the future is projected in a nuanced manner. Paying attention to the character of individuals, the sayings strike a connection between one's character and one's future. Present behavioural patterns cumulatively draw the moral shape of the future. For instance, Prov 11:1, condemns conducting business transactions with a dishonest character. The global financial crisis of 2008 testifies to the danger of ignoring the complexity of human behaviour in financial matters (Reavis, 2009). For Prov 11:1 a better way of securing the future is paying attention to current modes of behaviour.

Both African and biblical sayings place premium on the human person. The focus on the human person should not be mistaken for human superiority over other creatures or nature in general as deep ecologists have pointed out (Naess, 1973). Rather, the focus is to point out that humans are the agents of change in the march towards a sustainable future. It is their actions and inactions, which determine the quest to achieve a true sustainable world. For instance, the Akan saying, *Nea wɔnom hɔ no wɔnnware hɔ*, which proscribes bathing in drinking water raises the important issue of individual responsibility. It indicates how one's actions have societal repercussions. Thus, the saying promotes the idea that humans are intricately connected, and the earlier we accept and imbibe the wisdom of our interconnectedness, the better it will be for us, as we aim towards a sustainable world. Similarly, Prov 21:13 upholds the need to pay attention to relationships between humans. Through its negative rhetoric, it pushes further the positive notion that humans need to be each other's keeper. This message needs attention if significant progress can be made towards achieving a sustainable world. Since poverty is a major contributor to unsustainable practices, bridging the gap between the rich and poor becomes imperative. For Prov 11:1 reaching a helping hand to the poor (or the one who cries for help) is the right thing to do not because it is good to share what you have, but because it is a fundamental part of humans to help each other.

Concern for the environment is also displayed in African and biblical traditions. In many African societies, the natural world is a medium for experiencing the divine. Spirit deities reside in rocks, caves, water bodies, and mountains. Accordingly, many of these natural bodies are treated with reverence. Although the selected Akan and Ewe proverbs do not overtly show concern for the natural world, the Akan saying on bathing in water bodies speaks to contemporary developments on the use of water bodies in Ghana. Several water bodies in Ghana, such as the Pra River and the Ankobra River, and the Bonsa River have

become sites for “galamsey” operations (illegal mining) (Kusi-Ampofo & Boachie-Yiadom, 2012). Also, people defecate near water bodies, a practice common with people living along the coast of Ghana. Besides their immediate effect on humans, such practices threaten the ecosystem of these natural resources. Prov 12:10 teaches that our relationship with the natural world, especially animals, should be based on the true spirit of care and love. Knowing the life of an animal, as the saying indicates, suggests a proactive step on the part of humans to acquaint themselves with the concerns of animals and natural life in general in order to give them the necessary protection and care (cf. Dewitt, 2000).

Lastly, it should be pointed out that an overarching principle within the life and thought of African and biblical world is the belief that the physical world is in communion with the spiritual world. For African traditional societies, spirit beings are densely part of the physical world. As Mbiti (1969: 74) puts it, “... it is a unit within the physical, and that these two intermingle and dovetail into each other so much that it is not easy, or even necessary, at times to draw distinction or separate them”. From the perspective of the book of Proverbs, although wisdom is very much anthropocentric in orientation, it is also at its core theocentric (Waltke, 1979). The world is a creation of a God who expects that everything in it continues to abide within the good of creation. Clearly, both traditions value the role the spirit world plays in shaping the lives of humans on earth. For many Africans, the reality of a spiritual dimension to life defines their cultural experience. Therefore, it is a step in the right direction when development programmes find ways to factor in people’s spirituality into them. Important advantage spirituality offers for development is the ability to influence the heart. If sustainable lifestyle deals with behavioural changes, then spirituality (which resolves itself to the heart) can be used to push ahead these behavioural changes.

Conclusion

African and biblical traditions contain gems of wisdom that can aid our quest to live sustainably with each other and the environment. Rather than brand the epistemologies of these traditions as unscientific and unreliable, we should find innovative ways to factor in their ideals and visions for society into mainstream development agenda. Many traditional Africans continue to hold on to their African heritage as well as take seriously the biblical traditions. African leaders together with academics should approach both traditions with open minds, be critical always, and more importantly explore creative ways to factor them in our development agenda. Many people hold the view that African countries continues to reel in poverty because they fail to take advantage of their assets. Perhaps it is not too late to start paying attention to what surrounds us. Very often, development practitioners have placed emphasis on Africa's natural resources, neglecting the fact that humans that oversee the resources are the key agents, and their actions ultimately shape the future. This chapter, therefore, concludes on the note that African leaders and academics should pay more attention to the values and traditions of the people. They should bring these values and traditions to the fore of development discourse and practice, especially in the area of governance. Finally they (African leaders) should be seen as embodiment and custodians of African values.

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