

Environmental Issues and Concerns and how they surface in Wangari Maathai's

Environmental Advocacy

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed how Wangari Maathai explored her environmental advocacy in Kenya. The study included 10 speeches, articles, and lectures of Wangari Maathai on the environment and development as searched from selected websites. The interpretivist approach guided the process of studying the textual data. Specifically, the study employed content analysis to identify the environmental issues and concerns that surfaced in Wangari Maathai's environmental advocacy.

The study findings imply that physical environmental issues of plastic pollution, climate change, environmental degradation, food shortages, greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, water scarcity, ozone layer depletion, biodiversity vulnerability and agricultural production vulnerability abound in Kenya and by extension in Africa. However, beyond issues and concerns on the physical environment, Wangari Maathai pursued themes on the environment, namely: governance and leadership, community development, socio-cultural, as well as Pan African perspective in development in her texts.

She calls for measures to maintain, protect and conserve, as well as judiciously use existing natural resources. The measures include ensuring strong policies to cover critical areas of need to forestall the impact of physical environmental issues. It also includes ensuring social justice to ameliorate inequality issues, political stability, continuity, and most especially enthroning a transformative governance and leadership system. It also calls for the crucial role of women in any economy to be revisited and not overlooked, while leadership must recognize not just the connections among especially the physical issues and concerns, but also the intersection among good governance, peace, and the environment.

Background and Rationale

Environmental advocacy is considered vital to the preservation or protection of the environment. It sees people as agents of change within their communities, tackles the root cause of poverty and can also change the power structure and the justice system. (learn.tearfund.org).

Kenyan and 2004 Nobel Peace Laureate, Prof. Wangari Muta Maathai (1940-2011), through her leadership of the Green Belt Movement of Kenya, East Africa, remained committed to environmental justice for her native Kenya and became the voice for other African countries as well.

Kenya Country Profile

Kenya is an African country in East Africa.

The World Bank in Kenya (2020) reports that the country continues to face key development issues that include poverty, inequality, climate change, continued weak private sector investment, and vulnerability of the economy to internal and external shocks (<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/kenya/overview>).

Kenya continues to tackle its environmental issues such as deforestation, soil erosion, desertification, water shortage, degraded water quality, flooding, poaching, and domestic and industrial pollution. Agricultural chemicals and industrial wastes adversely affect its water system. Poaching and human encroachment threatens the habitat of wildlife species. Overexploitation reduces the country's timber resources by half. Illegal dumping of wastes and inadequate rubbish collection persists. Floods submerge houses, damage crops, and cause

latrines to overflow and contaminate water resources (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_issues_in_Kenya).

In her speeches and articles, Wangari Maathai raises some of these key development issues and environmental problems in Kenya.

Literature on Wangari Maathai has extensively dealt on insights from her campaign (Ochieng, 2017; Gioversi, 2012; Presby, 2013; Muthuki, 2006; Scott, 2013). Wolbert (2011) researched about her image and its influence on gender. A number of scholars have investigated the perceived outcomes of her activism (Wagner, 2016; Harper-Shipman, 2019; Erica et al., 2012; Goodman, 2005; DeLap, 2013; Hunt, 2014; Nagel, 2005). Other researchers underscored her cultural antecedents and connections (Ochwa-Echel and Onyango, 2019; Ebila, 2015; Chirindo, 2016); Smulders, 2016; Kushner, 2009). From the literature reviewed for this study, there are no results on how Wangari Maathai's advocacy can illuminate discourse on advocacy for the environment especially with emphasis on specific issues and concerns on the environment. This study seeks to bridge this identified gap.

Research Objectives

General Research Objective

To understand how advocacy fits in the context of communication for development, this study sought to analyze how Wangari Maathai's advocacy surfaced environmental issues and concerns in Kenya and other African countries, and in the world. It was also necessary to know how she analyzed this to promote the underlying themes and environmental issues in her texts.

Philosophical and Theoretical Grounding

Rationalism

The study is built on the philosophy and theories of rationalism, empiricism and interpretivism.

Interpretivism

Interpretivism emphasizes qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis. It assumes that access to reality is only through social constructions. Secondary data research is also popular with interpretivism philosophy and involves collecting and analyzing data by rigorously developing precise and useful language for describing, conceptualizing, interpreting, explaining and critiquing recorded communication (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011 quoting Waite, 2007; research-methodology.net).

Methodology

This study therefore employed a qualitative methodology using the interpretivist approach. Digital fieldwork on Wangari Maathai's texts was conducted from August 5 to August 25, 2020 by an internet search. The search spanned YouTube, Facebook and possible websites. The Green Belt website that contained the key speeches and articles of Wangari Maathai was first found. The fieldwork involved reading all the speeches, lectures, and articles of Wangari Maathai on the website. Texts on the site were copied and transformed into transcripts for coding and analysis. The researcher began to make notes of observations as well as preliminary analytical notes of the data.

Digital fieldwork continued with extensive background study on Professor Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement of which she was leader. The study process continued once the researcher had enough knowledge about the background of Wangari Maathai as well as about events leading to the founding of the Green Belt Movement.

Site/Texts for the Study

Data of the study consisted of speeches (i.e., addresses, lectures) and articles of Wangari Maathai. The Green Belt Movement is the organization led by Wangari Maathai. The movement has an official website (<https://www.greenbeltmovement.org/wangari-maathai/key-speeches-and-articles>) dedicated to key speeches and articles of Wangari Maathai. The website contains all the essential information about Wangari Maathai's speeches and articles as well as the mission of the Green Belt Movement, who they are, what they stand for, their vision, and goals, and the different programs they implement to achieve them.

RELATED LITERATURE

Advocacy as Communication Strategy

An advocacy is usually an action that is taken in favor of, or on behalf of others. It is an action taken to argue for, or defend a cause. A strategy on the other hand is usually a process to identify, protect, leverage and renew the potential or capabilities of an organization or a set of people. Advocacy as communication strategy is about accelerating progress towards the achievement of the goals of a particular cause and the set strategies towards achieving the goals (undp.org).

Advocacy for communication therefore recognizes the crucial role of approaches/strategies/techniques. For effectiveness, it places emphasis on policies and management (which includes accountability, governance, and leadership), as well as perspectives that are related directly to the cause for advocacy. Such causes from experience may include resource allocation, capacity building, human resources, providing enabling environment, and the recognition or preservation of pertinent values.

Advocacy in these instances combine social networking and mobilization, interpersonal communication and negotiation and sometimes uses the media for the purpose of mounting public pressure (Servaes, 2010).

Environmental Advocacy

Environmental advocacy involves the raising of awareness for the environment on any issue or concern that is considered vital for the preservation or protection of the environment. Such issues may include any of the following; pollution, deforestation, climate change, environmental degradation, and resource depletion. The environmental advocate is therefore dedicated to pursuing such projects which tend to benefit the needs of earth.

The advocacy is pursued to influence policies, systems, structures or people, for the purpose of effecting change. It involves communicating with appropriate authorities to act in a way that is fair and just.

Research Studies on Environmental Advocacy

Cantrill (2009) presented a categorizing scheme and reviewed studies concerning environmental advocacy. The framework is used to synthesize related research and theory,

identify barriers to effective advocacy, and suggest practical applications in the field of environmental communication. He admitted previous attempts to study the varying dimensions of environmental advocacy and the resultant fragmented understanding of how to deploy communication in service of the environment.

Grossman (2008) in his study on environmental advocacy in Washington, attempted a descriptive and comparative analysis of 92 Washington environmental organizations and more than 1,600 other advocacy organizations. The study revealed that the structure and behavior of environmental groups is the same as that of constituency interest organizations and differs in only a few systematic ways. He was of the opinion that environmental representation matches the broader patterns of organized interest advocacy in Congress, the administration, and the media.

Leonard (2013) explored the relationship between conservation and environmental justice in South Africa. He draws on empirical analysis in Durban and Johannesburg, with conservationists and environmental advocates. The study observed that the idealization of the natural environment as a virtual garden of Eden during colonization and apartheid in South Africa continued to influence mainstream conservationists focusing purely on nature – excluding environmental justice concerns. He was of the opinion that if issues of environmental justice are neglected, then biodiversity is also at risk. He suggested that conservationists and environmental advocates forge linkages by strategically networking and also negotiate between divergent ideologies to engage on a common platform for a more holistic green agenda.

Risley (2013) analyzed the collective action frames used by members of Chilean non-governmental organizations (NGOs) while engaging in policy advocacy. The focus is a large-scale dam project along the Bío Bío River that generated controversy for more than a decade due to its impact on the environment and indigenous communities. The research argued that the environmental advocates' reliance on certain frames hindered their ability to influence policy making. They framed the neoliberal model as "pathologically" growth centered, unjust, and destructive. Additionally, advocates were confronted by counter frames portraying them as foes of modernization. Though compelling, the groups' frames set them on a collision course with the policymaking establishment. In contrast, members of groups advocating for children used more effective discursive strategies and achieved a greater presence in policy debates.

Hartmann (2010) critically examines the perceived threat of 'climate refugees' and 'climate conflict'. The paper locates the ideological roots of these concepts in development theories and policy narratives about demographically induced migration, environmental refugees, and environmental security. The author establishes that alarmist rhetoric around climate refugees and conflict has been deployed by a variety of actors. These actors include U.N. agencies, development NGOs, national governments, security pundits and popular media. The study also underscores the strategic use of climate refugees and climate conflict by U.S. defense interests and challenges the portrayal of climate change as a security threat which could further activate the provision of development assistance and distort climate policy.

Environmental Issues and Concerns that Surface from Wangari Maathai's Environmental Advocacy

The study employed content analysis to identify the environmental issues and concerns that surfaced in Wangari Maathai's environmental advocacy. The identified issues and concerns were found to support and reinforce the themes that emerged from Wangari Maathai's texts.

These were: 1) physical environment issues; 2) governance and leadership issues; 3) socio-cultural issues; 4) community development issues; and 5) Pan African related issues.

Rules to guide coding included looking for every phrase or quote that suggested environmental issues and concerns that were most relevant to Maathai's environmental advocacy. Since the categories had been determined, the search was specific so as to keep the study on track. It was also decided that coding should be basic and should target only the existence of concepts and not frequency of concepts. Concept occurrence was written down manually for easier recognition of error in category construction. At the end of the coding process, codes were analyzed using the relational analysis method. This was to be able to explore the relationships between identified concepts and connect them for meanings to emerge.

Physical Environment Issues

The study identified physical environmental issues on plastic pollution, climate change, environmental degradation, food shortage, greenhouse gas emission, deforestation, water scarcity, ozone layer depletion, biodiversity vulnerability, and agricultural production vulnerability. Many of the issues were inter-related.

Against the backdrop of these seemingly negative realities in Kenya and in Africa, data also revealed that Kenya and indeed Africa has factor endowments in terms of good soil quality, natural resources and wealth. The strength of African indigenous knowledge systems and practice was also established. However, the gradual depletion in quality of these factors was traced to the colonial experiences of Kenya and Africa during which productivity culture and commercialization replaced the communal and simple living approach to life of the African, and consequently resulted in the loss of her values and eventually the displacement of the original African cultural identity.

Socio-Cultural Issues

With the adoption of a foreign cultural system, the stability and cohesiveness of communities that underscored the African culture and identity were torn apart. Even though the societies gained their independence, colonialism was seen to have returned in a new and benign form called neocolonialism. With the buying over of few African elites at the time, corruption became endemic and opened the door for inequality, illiteracy, unemployment, media monopoly by government for propaganda and misinformation, and further widened the gap between the elite who had grown richer through corruption, and the poor, who had suffered systemic disempowerment.

Governance and Leadership Issues

When the realities of environmental degradation, food shortages and depletion of resources and other environmental challenges began, the international community of institutions and agencies showed up with aid in the form of financial and technical assistance. However, it was not only the physical environment that was sick, but civil society was also weak. Governance from the African side of the divide was also defective. All of this also happened while the world economy including Africa's, was ailing. The challenges therefore call for maintaining, protecting and conserving as well as judicious use of natural resources.

Community Development Issues

While the global north seemed to have a better grip on their realities, with policies and regulations in place to cushion the effects of climate change and its attendant issues and concerns, Africa was engrossed in battling the shared destinies of unemployment, inequality,

poverty, and several conflicts which centered around the sharing of dwindling environmental resources often among ethnic groups and communities.

Coupled with the conflicts, Kenya and Africa as a whole had no strong policies for food security. There was also no visible policy support or regulations to build the capacity of small-scale farmers, neither was any policy to combat the challenges of climate change. It was discovered that if all of these measures were in place, political instability and lack of continuity in governance would have been a hindrance to smooth implementation. A causality is established between institutions and development.

In the face of this, social movements arose and mobilized ordinary people to take the reins of their environment in their own hands by resisting these destructive systems to the biodiversity. Part of their grievances was that development had brought no visible changes in their lives and to their environment due to corruption, misgovernance and complicity. Some recommended action plans especially for reforestation. They succeeded in presenting themselves and the movement they represent not as seeking to be 'beneficiaries' of development but more as 'stakeholders'.

Even though they were ready to adopt innovative foreign concepts that were environmentally friendly, they were more in support of embracing embedded practices of their local culture that help the environment. They stand for the protection of their physical, political and cultural identity against encroachment by others. Their ultimate goal is that culture should be incorporated into development paradigm for its gains to be far reaching. In addition, many called for justice for the small-scale farmer and empowerment for women who were seen to be managers of the home front.

Pan African Related Development Issues

This was not a Kenyan phenomenon but represents the African experience. There is a call for African governments to work together to fight corruption and the lack of sustainable management of resources and bad leadership that brings underdevelopment. Most importantly, it is believed that agriculture, for which Africa is noted requires good policy attention.

Wangari Maathai in the texts becomes a vanguard for articulating and upholding these expressed issues and needs. She hypothesizes a negative relation between exploitation and development. What seems to underline her advocacy is the articulation that her recognition for the Nobel Award for peace in 2004 was because world leaders had come to recognize that development, natural resource use and the environment needed to be managed together because they had become inseparable. Unlike in times past when each could stand alone, development efforts cannot succeed today except they are established on the contexts of available resources and environment. Rather than have a unilateral view of environment, her view is a holistic view that embraces socio-cultural, governance, and Pan African centered views.

To Wangari Maathai, leadership must recognize not just the connections among especially the physical issues and concerns, but also the intersection among good governance, peace, and the environment. While she believes that democracy is critical for effective management of environmental issues and concerns, the environment is much more than the physical environment. Its issues and concerns are subject to the conditions of socio-cultural, economic, political, and other possible variables.

It is clear that in espousing the virtues of Agroforestry as a means of sustaining the environment, Wangari Maathai's outspokenness and courage was able to drive the point home to the target audience of the speech that while development projects were conceived and seemingly dedicated to the purpose of benefitting the poor and the marginalized countries, many were without doubt aware of its ineffective management which posed drastic social,

economic and environmental hazards for affected communities and also especially vulnerable groups and the poor. In the texts are also clear indicators of a call to re-examine what had been earlier taken for granted. The texts made substantial effort at deconstructing development/social change, and in the process demystified the phenomenon of development from the earliest methods and goals of diffusion. They also critically painted the picture of participation and the skepticism that has welcomed not just the participation fringe of social change and further gives pictures of how best to define or see participation against the backdrop of impoverished and disconnected indigenes from an apparatus that purports to be in their aid.

Environmental Issues and Concerns

The study findings imply that physical environmental issues of plastic pollution, climate change, environmental degradation, food shortages, greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, water scarcity, ozone layer depletion, biodiversity vulnerability and agricultural production vulnerability abound in Kenya and by extension in Africa.

The challenges therefore call for measures to maintain, protect and conserve, as well as judiciously use existing natural resources. The measures include ensuring strong policies to cover critical areas of need to forestall the impact of physical environmental issues. The areas include food security, building the capacity of small-scale farmers and combating the challenges of climate change.

It also includes ensuring social justice to ameliorate inequality issues, political stability, continuity, and most especially enthroning a transformative governance and leadership system. Social movements want to be seen and treated as stakeholders on environmental issues and concerns and not beneficiaries. Culture should be incorporated into development paradigm for the gains of development to be tangible and enduring.

The crucial role of women in any economy should be revisited and not overlooked. Leadership must recognize not just the connections among especially the physical issues and concerns, but also the intersection among good governance, peace, and the environment and also know that the environment was much more than the physical environment.

Environmental Issues and Concerns

The study identified the existence of physical environmental issues of plastic pollution, climate change, environmental degradation, food shortages, endemic habitats, deforestation, water scarcity, ozone layer depletion, endangered marine land, biodiversity vulnerability and agricultural production vulnerability in Kenya and by extension in Africa. It also confirmed the reality that some of the issues were inter-related.

However, it was not only the physical environment that was sick, civil society was weak, governance from the African side of the divide was also defective. All of this also happened while the world economy including Africa's, was ailing. The challenges, therefore, called for maintaining, protecting, and conserving as well as judicious use of natural resources.

The realities that emerged showed that Kenya and Africa as a whole had no strong policies for food security. There was also no visible policy support or regulations to build the capacity of small-scale farmers, neither was any policy to combat the challenges of climate change. It was discovered that if all of these measures were in place, political instability and lack of continuity in

governance would have been a hindrance to smooth implementation. A transformative governance and leadership were lacking.

In the face of this, social movements arose and mobilized ordinary people to take the reins of their environment in their own hands by resisting these destructive systems to the biodiversity. The need for some social justice was expressed. Some recommended action plans especially for reforestation. They succeeded in presenting themselves and the movement they represent not as seeking to be 'beneficiaries' of development but more as 'stakeholders'. Also, they were more in support of embracing embedded practices of their local culture that help the environment. Their ultimate goal is that culture should be incorporated into development paradigm for its gains to be far reaching. In addition, many called for justice for the small-scale farmer and empowerment for women who were seen to be managers of the home front.

It also came with a call for African governments to work together to fight corruption and the lack of sustainable management of resources and bad leadership that brings underdevelopment.

It was also discovered that movements advocated for a leadership that must recognize not just the connections among especially the physical issues and concerns, but also the intersection among good governance, peace, and the environment and that the environment was much more than the physical environment because its issues and concerns are subject to the conditions of socio-cultural, economic, political variables.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, it was deduced that Wangari Maathai's brand of advocacy is capable of offering a process of observing, organizing, reflecting as well as propagating environmental issues and concerns and ensuring its values are imbibed.

Recommendations

The study recommends a more visible policy that guards environmental communication education and practice in terms of encouraging more training focus and clarification on what constitutes environment, to be able to determine the scope under which practitioners are prepared to operate. It is recommended that such policy thrust should consider not just the issues and concerns of environment as those related to the physical environment alone, but as a holistic one that embraces governance and leadership, socio-cultural factors, as well as community development. Perhaps most essentially, such policies are better positioned within the connection of good governance and peace. With this in place, practitioners are better able to approach the field of practice with a well-rounded perspective that will reflect in their advocacy articulations

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