

Linking Biodiversity and Language Loss in Africa: Toward a holistic framework for community-based conservation in Uganda

MOSES MUHUMUZA¹ AND ANNETTE ISLEI^{1*}

¹Mountains of the Moon University, P.O Box, 837 Fort-Portal Uganda

*Corresponding Author – Email: annetteislei@gmail.com

Conservation approaches in Africa have varied from total exclusion of the human population from their traditional lands to projects that include community development. However, loss of biodiversity continues. This is all the more alarming as Africans (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) depend on biological resources to a very great extent. Critical appraisal of approaches hitherto implemented to address the problems, revealed that biodiversity conservation is influenced by foreign perspectives, frameworks, and education systems predominantly developed and presented in foreign languages. In contrast, ingrained in African cultures is African traditional ecological knowledge, which is believed to have maintained sustainable utilization of biological resources for many years.

This paper presents ongoing fieldwork into the beliefs and traditional ecological understanding of Bantu communities in the Rwenzori Mountains, Uganda, the impact of the National Park on their lives, and conflicts with foreign based conservation practices. As the official language, and language of education, English is equated to knowledge, and people have been made to believe that their languages are inferior. There is conflict both between language and knowledge systems, and between National Park management systems and traditional social structures. Furthermore, correlation between utilization of biological resources and language literacy shows the dominant use of English presents difficulties in interpretation and implementation of conservation programmes. These results challenge a popular opinion that poverty and human population are solely responsible for the loss of biodiversity in Africa. We suggest that conservation approaches need to stem from African traditional epistemologies, and then be coordinated with national administrative systems. We urgently need research into TEK with the help of the surviving elderly, the custodians of African tradition. Protection of bio-diversity needs to interlink with community development, cultural revival and reform of educational curricula.

Key words: Linking, Biodiversity, Conservation, Foreign, Language