



# African Religious Value of Solidarity, the Way for Environmental Conservation: A Case of Kenya's Kakamega Forest

Joyce Bukokhe Mulunda  
University of Nairobi, Kenya  
Joy.oripah@gmail.com  
ORCID: 0000-0001-6097-6433

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## Abstract

Standing in solidarity with and for the Earth is crucial for ecological conservation and preservation, particularly in the face of ongoing environmental crises such as pollution, deforestation, and climate change. Historically, solidarity empowered nations, to achieve significant milestones, including independence across Africa. However, current negligence of our Mother earth has led to severe consequences, including food insecurity and natural disasters, causing significant distress to the planet. This paper advocated for solidarity in the integration of Indigenous African knowledge as a powerful remedy for environmental degradation. African indigenous values, rooted in community unity and solidarity, have proven effective over time. Africans believed that taking care of their environment demanded solidarity with the living, the dead, the unborn and with flora and fauna. This traditional societies therefore emphasized collective responsibility for the environment, fostering teachings that were passed down through generations. For instance, the Luhya community in Kenya exemplified this approach through their commitment to conserving Kakamega Forest, the last remaining tropical rainforest in the country. This article explored the Luhya's solidarity as a means of preserving their ecosystem. The paper hypothesized that the unity among the Luhya had played a vital role in sustaining the Kakamega forest. By applying Afroecosolidarity theory, the research suggested that a harmonious relationship between humans and nature was essential for environmental sustainability. The endeavour argued that the ecological crisis faced today was fundamentally a moral issue, advocating for community-based solidarity as a solution to conservation challenges. Additionally, the paper highlighted the efforts of Indigenous peoples in managing their environments, aligning with Principle 22 of the Rio Declaration. Through qualitative research methods, data was gathered from both primary and secondary sources to reinforce the argument that collective action rooted in Indigenous values can effectively address contemporary ecological challenges. The ultimate goal was to demonstrate that solidarity within communities is key to ecological preservation and to safeguarding our shared environment, emphasizing the interdependence of humanity and nature.

**Keywords:** - Afroecosolidarity, ecosolidarity, Indigenous Knowledge, Solidarity, Values.

## Introduction

Solidarity, which is often defined as unity is a concept that transcends cultural and geographical boundaries. Across the globe, from grassroots movements to international collaborations, solidarity has played a central role in achieving remarkable feats, including environmental conservation efforts. The foundation of solidarity lies in recognizing human interdependence. Throughout history, global interdependence has become increasingly evident, shaping our



modern era. Solidarity not only corrects injustices but also fosters cooperation on global challenges. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, nations united in solidarity to combat the virus, demonstrating collective strength in adversity. Similarly, solidarity has driven movements against systemic injustices like apartheid in South Africa and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) in communities across Africa. Solidarity has also seen various nations come together to address matters on environmental degradation and climate change. In Africa, women theologians have united under the Circle of Concerned African Women led by Mercy Amba Oduyoye to fight for women liberation, promote their education and address the current issues facing the world. In the Bible, the Israelites, stood in solidarity, made a cry to God and he rescued them from the oppression of the Egyptians.

Solidarity within the human community is similarly, a fundamental concept deeply rooted in Christian belief. According to Romans 13:9-10 and 1 John 4:20, Christians uphold the principle that all people, created by the same God, are interconnected as one. This belief is summarised in the commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself." Pope Pius XII, in his 1939 encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*, introduced the term "solidarity," emphasizing that the first chapter of Genesis establishes the law of human solidarity by revealing our shared origin and common likeness as beings created in the image of God. He argued that our shared capacity for reason further underscores our unity and mutual responsibility, defining solidarity as an intrinsic bond among all human beings.

Furthermore, the word "solidarity" itself is derived from the Latin word "solidum," suggesting the creation of cohesion and unity among individuals (Beyer, 2004). Scholars have equated the concept of solidarity to the philosophy of ubuntu, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life. Ubuntu, prevalent in African thought, acknowledges that each person's existence is intertwined with others, promoting mutual respect and community well-being. African solidarity is equally evident in celebrations where all community members were invited. This philosophy of Ubuntu thus holds significant implications for sustainable development, particularly in Africa, where communal harmony is seen as essential to environmental stewardship.

It is worth noting that in traditional African society, the aspect of solidarity extended beyond human relations to include a profound interconnectedness with nature. This holistic view perceives nature as the dwelling place of gods, spirits, and ancestors, imbuing environmental stewardship with spiritual significance. Thus, abusing nature is considered a disharmony that invites disaster, reinforcing the imperative for sustainable practices. This collective spirit has not only preserved ecosystems but also nurtured sustainable practices that harmonize human activity with nature. From this discussion, it is evident that solidarity corrects injustices, conquers poverty, builds peace (Hummes, 2006) and hence the way to conservation.

It is against this backdrop, that this article explores the role of the Luhya religious solidarity in conserving Kakamega forest biodiversity through examining how solidarity values embedded in African culture can inform and enhance contemporary environmental efforts. Kakamega County is home to people from various ethnic groups, with the majority being Luhya. Due to migration and intermarriages, it was observed that different people from different ethnic groups live adjacent to the forest. The majority of people living



adjacent to Kakamega forest are the Isukha who are part of the Luhya subtribes. Other communities from Luhya subtribes living adjacent to the forest include the Batsotso and the Kabras, and due to migration, we now have the Bukusu, Idakho, Banyore, and Bamaragoli, among others. The endeavour noted that these communities are rich in African religious knowledge that, when tapped, can be vital in conserving the forest.

This African religious knowledge, according to Okpalaenwe, can be divided into three parts: The first one being values, secondly traditions, customs, norms, and beliefs, and lastly physical or material things (Okpalaenwe, 2019). Values define who a person truly is. The paper sought to identify the values upheld by these communities and evaluate their contribution to the conservation and sustenance of the Kakamega forest. This article will thus discuss the value of solidarity among the Luhya, who are the indigenous group in the area, and have been there for centuries, as central to conserving the Kakamega forest ecosystem. Since the community members at the moment include a few people from other ethnic groups, it will be prudent to also explore their contribution in the preservation of Kakamega forest ecosystem. Additionally, the paper will also uncover insights that promote a sustainable future where human and ecological well-being are mutually upheld.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Environmental conservation has emerged as a pressing global concern. Due to climate change, we have recently witnessed floods in most parts of the world that have led to deaths, displacement of people, destruction of infrastructure, emergence of diseases and food insecurity. These concerns have prompted diverse nations to unite in solidarity against injustices to the planet by humans and advocate for the preservation of Mother Nature. The collective urge to protect our nature has equally seen different religions coming in to advocate for respect and protection of natural resources. Christianity and the Jewish religion in their urge to protect nature make reference to the book of Leviticus which highlight animals, birds and insects that should not be eaten among them owls, hawks, camels and others. The Hindus on the other hand especially the Aka tribe are known to conserve their natural resources using their indigenous knowledge. They collectively worship some supernatural powers *ubro* or *ubram* that are believed to inhabit some sacred groves called *Panchavati*. It is believed that anyone who interferes with the grooves will face death.

African societies have also not been left behind in using their African traditional religious knowledge in the conservation of their flora and fauna. The Luhya community in Kenya, renowned for its rich cultural norms and practices including taboos and regulations, has employed indigenous wisdom for generations to preserve the ecosystem (Mandillah & Ekosse, 2018). Kakamega Forest, found in the Western part of Kenya and the last tropical rainforest in Kenya boasts of a rich ecosystem of animal, bird and indigenous plant species that are only unique to it. It is worth noting that this forest has people inhabiting in and around it, yet, unlike the MAU forest in Kenya, this forest is relatively intact. This leads us to the question, what is it that the Luhya of Kenya have done in solidarity using their indigenous religious wisdom to sustain Kakamega forest?

Further research shows that this indigenous knowledge used by the Luhya community to conserve Kakamega forest resources is underutilized and insufficiently documented (GOK, 2001). Therefore, this article aims to delve into and document this indigenous knowledge to promote sustainable conservation practices, with a particular focus on the African value of solidarity. Additionally, considering the dominant patriarchal system (nature prevalent) in many African



communities, including the Luhya, this study also seeks to explore the role of women in the conservation of Kakamega Forest using indigenous religious knowledge.

### **Kakamega forest**

Kakamega Forest, the only tropical rainforest remaining in Kenya, is located in the Western part of Kenya in Kakamega and Vihiga counties. It was officially gazetted and designated as a protected area by the government in 1933, and it is 35 KM from Lake Victoria. The Forest sits on 14,800 hectares of land, of which 11,000 hectares have indigenous trees (Kenya Forest Service, 2015). Furthermore, it is an important catchment area for Rivers Yala, Nzoia, and Isiukhu, as well as a natural habitat for various species of animals (Kenya Forest Service; 2015). It is home to 510 butterflies and 488 bird species compared to other forests in Kenya and the world. The Forest is considered the largest medical hub in Kenya, and the rivers flowing through it are the main source of water used by residents in the area. These rivers equally have fish, which provide food for community members. Similarly, the Forest has contributed to the high rains in the area. Thus, Kakamega forest has been of great importance to the community. As Peter Black notes, it is okay to allow communities to benefit from the forests as this not only helps them to meet their economic and social needs but also challenges them to mind their future needs without damaging the environment. Peter calls us to change our hearts and save the planet for our children and future generations. He believes the ecological crisis is moral (Black & O'Neil, 2004).

Kakamega forest ecosystem is also a unique sanctuary for many endemic insects, birds, and plants, with between 10 to 20% of the animal species in the Forest being nationally unique and have attracted many eco-tourists (Kenya Forest Service, 2015). With such benefits from the Forest, among others that the study explored, there is a need to protect and preserve this Forest. The findings in this article will go a long way in conscientizing the community on the significance of the forest and the need to conserve it. Further research shows that Kakamega Forest was declared a Central Government Forest in 1964. By 1967, the Forest had three small nature reserves: Isecheno (295 ha), Yala (460 ha), and Kisere (458 ha). The reserves were created to protect the Forest near these areas from exploitation. The Kenya Forest Service (KFS) governs them. In 1986, 18 forest fragments were declared at Buyangu National Reserve (3,812ha), which was put under the management of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). Game rangers regularly patrolled it to enforce the conservation and protection of wildlife resources (Deisser & Njuguna, 2016). In 1995, the International Union of Conservation of Nature (I.U.C.N.) ranked the Forest as the third highest priority for conservation among Kenya forests due to species richness and habitat rarity. To ensure the sustenance of the forest and its species, this article will discuss the indigenous value of solidarity among the Isukha, Batsotso and Kabras, which are the main Luhya subtribes living adjacent to the forest, with an aim of unveiling how they have been and can be significant in conserving and sustaining Kakamega Forest. These findings would be helpful in not only the conservation of Kakamega forest ecosystem but also the conservation of other forest ecosystems elsewhere, hence promoting life.

### **African Indigenous Knowledge System in the Conservation of Forests**

According to Wijssen and Marcos (2010), indigenous knowledge is the “pre-missionary” or “pre-colonial” perceptions of life and the world lived by African people. Other scholars have further noted that Indigenous knowledge refers to a social, political, economic, and spiritual dimension of a local way of life that has been built up and passed from one generation to another (Chitando et.al., 2022). Ikeke (2021) further explains that Africans had their indigenous religion, indigenous beliefs, values, practices and worldviews that guided their day to day lives before the advent of



the Whiteman to Africa. From this, it is certain that African indigenous knowledge is not dead, it is not inferior and neither is it satanic as the missionaries portrayed it. There are many places in Africa where indigenous beliefs and practices predominate. This indigenous wisdom has, for generations been used to protect the communities' natural resources.

To quench their thirst for conservation, most communities across Africa have developed a culture of taboos, rituals, beliefs, and practices that guide people's relationship with nature. Rukeh affirmed this when he observed that all cultures worldwide had values and taboos that defined human behaviour and guided people's interaction and usage of natural resources (Rukeh, 2013). These taboos or rules are always enshrined in a people's religious beliefs and values and are vital in enhancing biodiversity conservation (Ibid.). Eneji supports Rukeh's opinion and further notes that African beliefs and taboos have been essential in conservation because they have contributed to Africans treating nature as sacred (Eneji, et al., 2012). From this discussion, it is clear that indigenous people are aware of their role in the environment and the spiritual dimension attached to it, hence their tendency to nurture our common home (Obasola, 2013). Similarly, they understand that protecting the earth calls for a common responsibility, oneness and unity of all community members (Odira, 2013), for as J.S. Mbiti nuances "I am because we are" (Mbiti, 1970).

Research has shown that Congo basin, located in Africa, has been referred to as one of the lungs of the earth (Francis, 2015). With her rich cultural heritage including her ecological wisdom and worldview, Africa should be on the forefront to foster for a sustainable environment especially as the world is facing a global ecological crisis. Studies have however, shown how environmental conservation efforts have undermined the role of cultural and religious heritage in ecological protection. They note that cultural and religious efforts would compromise objectivity, scientific investigation, and professionalism, is too naive, paranoid, and lacks critical rationalism (Alokwu, 2017). This article explores the importance of African wisdom in conservation of forests hence the need to embrace it. The paper argues that African religion is integral in providing people with the knowledge necessary for environmental care (Obasola, 2013). This article proposes that African communities and scholars should fight for the survival and preservation of African Religious values and practices in sustainable development. Pope Francis warns that, the loss of cultural practices is a major determinant of environmental degradation, whereas keeping the culture is crucial to the environment's survival (Francis, 2015.) Preserving indigenous wisdom is not an individual effort but a communal effort and responsibility that this article explores.

### **Theoretical framework and Methodology**

This article adopts the theory of Afroecosolidarity as articulated by Mark Omorovie Ikeke (2021) in his PhD dissertation. Afroecosolidarity derives its name from three components: "Afro" representing Africa, "eco" signifying ecology, and "solidarity." According to Francis (2005), ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. Solidarity, in this context, denotes unity and interconnectedness not only among humans but also with all living beings, plants, animals, and entities within the cosmos. The environment encompasses everything that surrounds an organism.

Ecosolidarity means human beings standing in solidarity with and for the earth. Human beings are the most rational beings among all the creation and as it is, they should stand in solidarity with the earth to preserve all creation. Afroecosolidarity therefore means, standing in solidarity with and for the earth using African values. In other words, Afroecosolidarity, extends this principle by advocating for environmental stewardship rooted in African values. In this paper, we have used this theory to discuss how the Isukha, Kabras and Batsotso have stood in solidarity with and for Kakamega forest to ensure its sustainability. The theory suggests that practicing ecosolidarity, guided by African values can address environmental challenges in Africa and promote long-term



environmental sustainability. Data for this study was gathered through primary and secondary sources, employing methodologies such as questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews, and observation. The sample population was selected using snowballing and purposive sampling techniques

### **Isukha, Batsotso and Kabras environmental values of solidarity**

Solidarity is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good of each individual. It is when people come together to support each other and work towards common goals. Solidarity also entails having the knowledge that each individual person is responsible for all human beings and all that matter to them (On Social Concern, no. 38). This means that, we are a human family and we are entrusted to one another's care. From our theory above, solidarity is deeply rooted in communal values. These values are observed by community members knowing that as rational beings, they are responsible for the wellbeing of their environment, an aspect defined as ecosolidarity. Communities have long practiced working together to preserve their environment and sustain their resources. This is especially true for places like Kakamega Forest, where neighbouring communities (Isukha, Batsotso and Kabras) have historically joined forces to protect the forest's rich biodiversity and ensure its sustainability for future generations. This paper, discusses how the concept of solidarity in African society has contributed to environmental conservation efforts, focusing on the unique case of Kakamega Forest. By understanding how solidarity has been used in the past and its potential for the future, we can appreciate its role in maintaining the ecological balance and cultural significance of this important natural heritage.

Firstly, in the section below, we shall discuss how the Isukha, Kabras and Batsotso have applied the theory of Afroecosolidarity in protecting Kakamega forest. In the words of Sr Regina, many simple and ordinary things are very useful in keeping the community united. These include; community projects, gatherings, felicitations and planning (Kaitholil, 2012). These social activities not only serve the interests of people but are avenues for environmental preservation, and in this case, preservation of Kakamega forest biodiversity.

### **Ecosolidarity evidenced in Luhya community associations, projects and celebrations**

Unity and solidarity of the Isukha, Batsotso and Kabras with Kakamega forest are values that were observed during the data collection exercise. To ensure that they have a platform that enables them to stand in solidarity with the environment, these communities have come up with associations, one being the Community Forest Association (CFA). The association was formed in adherence to the principle 22 of the Rio Declaration that states that community members should be given an opportunity to conserve the forests using their indigenous knowledge (Rio Declaration; 1992, Principle 22). The community members welcomed this call because living and working together was their way of life, a virtue that was passed down to them by their elders. The association has helped to strengthen their relationship with nature by taking responsibility for its attractiveness, productivity and sustainability (Odira, 2013). In this association, members give a registration fee of Ksh.200 bob and a monthly fee of Ksh.100 bob. This fee enables the community members to access the forest and benefit from its resources while protecting it for their future children.

Some of the things they collectively enjoy from being members of the association include, but not limited to, collection of firewood, grazing, growing crops and tree seedlings in the forest, getting employment opportunities for instance as forest warders among others. In the association, members undergo trainings on sustainable development and are thus aware that the survival of the forest is purely their responsibility. The urge to stand in oneness with this forest has pushed them to set rules and regulations based on their indigenous knowledge to govern their interaction



with the forest. One of the proverbs that guides them is Rwandan, which states that no one throws a stone where he/she has placed his/her jar of milk (*Ntawe utera ibuye aho yajishe igisabo*) (Opongo, et al., 2021). Based on this proverb, the CFS members are not allowed to carry a panga while entering the forest to collect firewood. They believe that Were or Nyasaye, their Supernatural Being, who together with other spirits and ancestors inhabit the forest. Cutting down trees is not permitted because it interferes with the dwelling place of their supernatural being and this can attract some misfortunes and curses. This belief is also seen among the Ashanti of South Western Ghana who believe that trees housing spirits, were not felled without performing rituals. In this regard, such a custom had a protective effect on trees such as odum (*Chlorophora excelsa*), (Aya & Waswa, 2016).

Similarly, the association follows the Luhya indigenous taboos that restrict them from cutting trees due to the value they attach to each tree. To start with, a tree called *Lusiola* (*Markhamia lutea*) and *Omutoto* (*Ficus thonningii*) are not cut because cutting them attracts curses from ancestors. *Lukhuvu* (*Dracaena fragrans*) tree is often used to make the bulls fierce during the Isukha bull fighting ceremony and is thus treated as sacred while *Luvambo* (*Nuxia congesta*) tree is used after birth to protect the new-borns lives from the evil. Significantly, community members are warned against using *Murembe* (*Erithrina abyssinica*) and *Omusangura* (*Rhus natalensis*) tree for cooking as they may lead to quarrelling in the homestead, cause divorce and death, vices, that were not welcomed by elders. *Mararandura* was another shrub believed to cause the swelling of a woman's breast, while *Nangoso* (*Sapium ellipticum*), caused one boils all over the body if used in cooking. These are just but a few restrictions that have played an essential role in the Sustenance of fauna in Kakamega forest depicting that human solidarity with the ancestors and nature is what brings about life (Magesa, 1997). The CFA members are only allowed to pick firewood that has fallen on the ground. They are also supposed to be mindful of others and collect only one head of firewood per person, an aspect of *ubuntu*. Picking the ones that have fallen ensures that the forest resources are not interfered with. The article is advocating this afroecosolidarity for the conservation of not just Kakamega forest but other forests elsewhere.

Apart from collection of firewood, the association members grow tree seedlings within the forest, which, they use for reforestation. A number of these trees are often indigenous trees and others have medicinal values hence reforestation helps to ensure that specific species are not extinct. The members are aware that all species are precious, with irreplaceable value, and thus have an inherent right to exist, (Magesa, 2014). Furthermore, some CFA members have been given a role of training other community members on the need to grow trees in their homesteads as a way of reducing dependence on the forest. They therefore sell the seedlings at a cheaper price to them or sometimes donate to them to promote afforestation. Planting trees is an indigenous virtue that showed honour to the supernatural. The high rainfall in the area is pegged to this fact and trees are thus considered as life.

Furthermore, the association members apply the afroecosolidarity theory by coming up with a rota that allows majorly male members of the association to patrol the forest daily to ensure that the forest is free from encroachment. In traditional African society, it was the duty of men to offer security to the community members and in this paper, it is evident that this virtue allows the men to not only offer security to their families but also to the forest to ensure its longevity even to the future generations. The members of the association moreover, provide a home for bees by setting beehives in the forest where bees feel safer and protected. The honey from the hives is normally sold and the returns not only help the association members but also used in the maintenance of the forest resources. Their actions are in line with pope John XXIII who notes that human beings are born to live together and to work for the good of one another (Pacem in Terris, No. 16), and in this case working for the good of nature.



Apart from the association, festivals, rituals and celebrations in African communities formed a part of their day to day life, depicting the true meaning of Ubuntu. Mbiti defines rituals as repeated symbolic behaviour (Mbiti, 2015). When a child is born in an African home for instance, the whole clan celebrates the baby, who signifies continuity of the lineage. The child is either named after the ancestors to signify that life does not stop at death or is named according to weather seasons revealing the intrinsic relationship between human beings and nature. Wachege asserts that among the Agikuyu, women welcome a new born in the community with ululations (Wachege, 1992). It saddened the community members to have a woman or man who was impotent. Traditional herbs including *mukombero* (*Mondia whyteii*) were given to boost their fertility. Young people were equally warned against cutting down some trees like *kumukomosi* (*Vangueria irifausta*) that could cause infertility. Significantly, expectant women among the Luhya were not supposed to cut down trees because it was believed that in the same way they were shortening the trees' life, even the life of the child in their womb would be cut through miscarriage. The Luhya therefore valued life and believed that when a child was born, he/she needed to be cleansed and protected from the evil people. This was made possible by bathing them in herbs from *Luvambo* (*Nuxia congesta*), *intana* (*Pipers opeluntlotum*) and *lundua* (*Euphobia calendabrum*) trees. The medicine was equally to protect them from premature death.

These herbs were harvested from Kakamega forest only by medicine men. Specific parts of the tree were harvested to ensure that the life of the tree was not interfered with. As such, medicine men were required to plant the herbs both in the forest and in their homes to avoid overreliance on the forest for as Odira puts it, if everyone keeps a wild shrub around their home, the world will turn greener and become a beautiful habitat for every creature (Odira, 2013). It is worth noting that the traditional herbs were not only essential during birth but also during other rites of passage. *Enguu* (*Microglossa pyrifolia*) and *shituti* (*Ehrelia cymosa*) tree leaves were for instance used to heal wounds on the circumcised. Apart from the community having the role of protecting their children from the evil people, it was also their role to instil discipline in them. This ensured that the generation they were raising respected all, including nature hence promoting afroecosolidarity. The young people were most especially asked to respect and take care of the elderly. This is because the elders were the custodians of the indigenous wisdom and advocated for peace in the community. They ensured that all communal rules and regulations were followed to the latter. It was thus the duty of the young people to fetch water for older people, clean their houses, and even cook for them. This role prepared them in taking care of their environment, which was as vulnerable as the elders hence afroecosolidarity.

### **The value of solidarity as expressed by the Luhya women in conserving Kakamega forest**

It was the dream of the late Prof. Wangari Maathai, when she started the Green Belt Movement, to see all women taking part in the conservation of forests. As child bearers, they would understand the pain of our Mother Earth and stand in solidarity for her and with her to fight all injustices against her. Wangari Maathai was pained that in the past, people had plenty of food, firewood was all over, and the trees clapped in happiness as they swayed and danced to the song of the sky yet this was not the case today. Forests had been cut down, rivers suffocated with rubbish and the soil cracked dry due to rising temperatures (Wangari, 2014). Scientists have further observed that at least half to 80% of the world's animal, insect, and plant species are found in rainforests, yet these forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate (Rwiza, 2021). This has made many species to become extinct, and others listed as endangered in Africa most of them being from tropical forests, (Hilty et.al., 2019).





Following her call, The Isukha, Batsotso and Kabras women within the CFA have teamed up to jealously guard Kakamega forest using their indigenous wisdom. In this association, women form the biggest market for the seedlings sold and donated by the CFA. Having been empowered through the association, these women have planted trees in their homesteads to ensure that they do not strain the forest ecosystem by entirely depending on it for firewood. In traditional African society and even Biblically, it was believed that it was the duty of a woman to build her home. It was asserted that a foolish woman broke her home with both of her hands. Some of the indigenous trees grown by these women in the homesteads include shisimbari, a tree that was known to keep demons at bay. The women are equally required to plant trees *khuluhya* (A place set aside in the homestead believed to inhabit ancestors) and no one could cut this trees for fear of running mad. The women had also taken the role of planting fodder for their animals to prevent them from taking the animals to graze in Kakamega forest.

Apart from planting trees, women, within the association underwent a training on population control or use of birth control pills as a way to reduce pressure on the forest resources. Some of the birth control methods included the use of traditional medicine, that was harvested both in the forest and in their home shrubs. Additionally, women from this association, were trained on using improved cooking stoves/*jikos* to ease pressure on firewood use. They have been taught how to make these *jikos*, which only use a little firewood. With this knowledge, the women in the association move from door to door to educate other community members, sell and or make the *jikos* for them and in this way, the longevity of the forest is guaranteed.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has discussed that the African religious value of solidarity with nature is significant in sustainable environmental conservation and remains relevant in addressing modern challenges. The findings imply that the African Traditional Religious value of solidarity is not outdated; it plays a crucial role in conserving ecosystems, such as Kakamega Forest, and others globally. This value fosters an interconnectedness between humanity and nature, promoting mutual respect and responsibility. Communities are therefore encouraged to work in solidarity, as collective action can lead to far-reaching impacts locally and globally. Embracing this value can inspire broader environmental movements, ensuring a more sustainable future for generations to come. Ultimately, it is through shared commitment and respect for nature that we can create a more sustainable world.

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