




Climate Change, Gender, and Mental Health: African Eco-psychological Perspective

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Abstract

Global climate has changed over time, resulting in the change of precipitation patterns due to greenhouse emissions from fossil fuels. The devastating effects of the resulting global warming and climate change are pervasive. Both the earth and all that lives in it have become the victims of human' obsession with 'power over', profit and greed. Middle and low-income countries are more on the receiving end of these adverse effects of global warming than the high-income countries who happen to be on the giving end of the emissions. While the environmental, physical, social, and structural effects of this change have been researched and documented, there has been comparatively little research about how climate change and mental health intersect to affect the relationship between human health and the entire ecological system. It is therefore the thrust of this paper to pursue this nexus with the view to delineate the extent to which climate change intersects with mental health, particularly in low-income countries, to widen the inequality and vulnerability gap between peoples and countries. Even then, some groups – more than others – tend to become more vulnerable to mental health conditions than others. And these are more often than not, given inadequate or no attention as they are either concealed in the broader space of health services in general or under emergencies and disaster contexts. This desk top study adopts an African eco-psychological framework within the context of Goal # 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals to underscore the importance of socio-cultural considerations in mitigating the impact of climate change on mental health.

Keywords: African eco-psychological, Culture, Global Climate, Global warming, Greenhouse emissions, mental health.

Introduction

Climate change constitutes one of the most pervasive events that continue to pose a severe threat to the entire globe. Climatological events that are taking place around the world are of such magnitude that the threat to the earth and all that lives in it is there for all to see. The change of precipitation patterns as a result of greenhouse emissions from fossil fuels, mainly attributed to human activity, is all to blame for warmer temperatures and the consequent sea-level rise as well as melting of snow in some parts of the globe (Mikhaylov et al., 2020:2897-



2898). Different regions are however affected differently by this situation. Some parts have experienced cyclones, severe floods while others have been hit hard by droughts and melting glaciers (Palm & Bolsen, 2020:8). Despite these glaring indicators of the intensity of increasing temperatures and their deleterious effects, naysayers, skeptics and profiteers are still not ready to let go off the gains that accrue as a result of greenhouse emissions. The last couple of Conferences of Parties (COPs) have made commitments, what remains is the translation of these ambitions needed to save the planet and to channel the finances to help the countries, especially the vulnerable ones, to avoid loss and damage (Moodley, 2023). However, until such time that the earth is relieved of the burden of greenhouse gases, the earth will continue to be pounded by the weather unpredictabilities, the likes that we are experiencing presently.

While the effects of climate change are pervasive, low-income countries are the most vulnerable due to what Adeola et al. (2024) call low capacity to adapt and the presence of multiple stress factors. The devastating effects of the heavy floods that engulfed Southern and Eastern Africa in recent times are but some of the signs of the on-the-horizon environmental catastrophe (SADC Secretariat, 2024; Centre for Disaster Philanthropy, 2024). In Zimbabwe, the 2019 Cyclone Idai wreaked havoc and caused irreparable damage and loss of life (Chirongoma, 2021). In recent days, heavy floods and landslides associated with the El Niño, visited upon Eastern Africa where a million people were reportedly affected. This was in addition to the same El Niño that manifested in dry spells in Southern Africa at the beginning of this year 2024 (www.worldweatherattribution.org) affecting, in the process, crop production, food security, access to water, and outbreak of diseases.

The common variable of these catastrophes is that it has a gendered dimension, in that, women and girls especially in “the global South are the ones who are bearing the brunt of the global ecological crisis.” (Chirongoma, 2021:84). While this nexus between climate change and gender is well documented, it is their intersection with mental health that has not received much attention despite its glaring presence. It is this intersection that this paper intends to explore with a view to interrogating the intersection between climate change and mental health with specific reference to women and girls who are always on the receiving end of the devastating effects on climate change in the Global South (Adeola et al. 2024; World Bank 2014; Mukurazhizha & Matanga, 2022). This interrogation is done with, in mind, Goal # 3 of the Sustainable Development Goals which focuses on health and well-being. To that end, this paper, which is a desktop review, adopts an African eco-psychological perspective.

Methodology

We have adopted a qualitative desktop research methodology in this study. The data used was a literature review of mainly secondary sources on the intersection between climate change and mental health and the extent to which this intersection zooms in on the gendered dimension of climate change. From the analysis of the literature, it is evident that the interpretation of the causes and effects of climate change is dependent on the cultural and spiritual contexts of those affected by the adverse effects of global warming. In the context of Africa, given a different world-view, the eco-psychological framework was used to interpret the data which resulted in varied mental health outcomes that are culture-specific.

Climate Change and Gender Nexus

The relationship between climate change and gender is well researched and documented. Not only is it a subject of scholarly research, it has also excited policy makers and leaders of countries. Scholars have underlined the gendered nature of climate change (Rao et al., 2019; Dibakoane et al. 2022; Adeola et al., 2024). They are agreed that women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men. Not only do they constitute the majority of the



world's poor, but they depend more on natural resources for their livelihood which are more often than not, threatened by climate change (UN WomenWatch, 2009). Almost all the Conferences for Parties on Climate change (COPs), too, have underscored the fact that women's vulnerability in the face of climate change is a global concern as Zack (2022) observes:

Explicit and implicit social norms and laws have imposed differentiated powers, roles, and responsibilities on women and men in all aspects of life. Girls and women – especially those living in the Global South – bear an unequal responsibility for securing food, water, energy, and other vital resources as well as for caring for the young and elderly – all of which place them at greater risk of experiencing detrimental climate impacts. For example, girls and women often suffer the most when heat waves, droughts, severe storms or other extreme climate events strike. They face physical and mental health complications, bear the burden of travelling farther to collect scarce food, water, and firewood, and are often forced to stay behind in disaster-prone areas to care for the vulnerable (<https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/gender-equality-in-2022-the-best-the-worst-the-most-surprising-and-most-ridiculous>)

In the Global South, unequal distribution of economic power between men and women exacerbates women's reliance on men for financial support which has also been adversely affected by climate change's destruction on infrastructure and the loss of meagre jobs (Adeola et al., 2024:36). Cyclones, heavy storms and rains have become a common occurrence in Southern and Eastern Africa. Cyclone Cheneso and Gamane in Madagascar have left that country in devastation leaving the most vulnerable population food insecure and dependant on humanitarian aid (www.acaps.org, 2024). In equal measure, Cyclones Idai, Kenneth and Hidaya have brought the same kind of devastation in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, Burundi and Ethiopia. The Coastal provinces of Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape in recent days, have not been spared and have become extremely vulnerable to torrential rains, storms and floods. In the process, there are loss of lives, displacements, damage of critical infrastructure, inaccessible health facilities, scarce water and sanitation services, infectious and waterborne diseases (National Sea Rescue Institute, 2024).

These changes with intense rainfall, rising temperatures as well as extreme weather conditions affect more women who constitute the poorest and most vulnerable group in the global South in general and Southern Africa in particular (United Nations Climate Change, 2020). It is worth noting that most households in the rural areas do not only comprise women, they are also headed by women. In the event of these poverty inducing conditions, women are more vulnerable to all kinds of abuse. SADC (2020:7) document further observes that:

Women and girls are more likely than men to die during a disaster due to cultural and behavioural restrictions, affecting women's mobility and socially ascribed roles and responsibilities (e.g. caring for children, elderly or sick, and the fact that they do not necessarily learn how to swim.....) Women are also highly susceptible to experience sexual and gender-based violence as well as other forms of harassment and abuse in its aftermath.

The above quote which represents a practice in some Eastern and Southern African countries further buttresses the climate change – gender nexus with women more on the receiving end of its adverse effects (IOM, 2017:25).

Chirongoma and Chitando (2021) writing from the context of Zimbabwe bring another dimension to the nexus. Other than the statistics which revealed higher numbers of women



among those who lost their lives in the Cyclone Idai, women were also responsible for most of the care giving and humanitarian work in the wake of the Cyclone (Chirongoma & Chitando, 2021:68). This variable is not unique to Zimbabwe. It is equally true with other African countries affected by the effects of climate change. In fact, this study referred to above represents a convergence of religion, culture, gender and mental health. Though the latter is not the focus of Chirongoma and Chitando's reflection, that it is an issue worth serious attention is patent not only in the case of Cyclone Idai but in other similar cases of climate-change-induced devastations.

African Eco-Psychological Framework

African Eco-psychological framework constitutes the lens guiding the reflection undertaken in this paper. Eco-psychology is premised on the fact that humans are an integral part of the ecological system. Humans and the environment or Mother earth are intricately connected. The health of the natural world is therefore dependant on our mutually respectful and healthy treatment of each other and vice-versa. In fact, disregard of Mother Earth is tantamount to self-disregard. Similarly, taking care of the environment is as good as taking care of ourselves as we are logically part of Mother Earth (Kamidin et al., 2010:80).

Our disconnection from the natural world, therefore, is to blame for the destructive environmental behaviour (Berry et al., 2023:3). Drawing on the Pauline metaphor of the body, we could say Mother Earth is one body with many members and that all the members of the body, though many, are one body. "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together." (1 Corinthians.12:12,26). A lot of violence that is being meted on the environment is a result of human's psychological and spiritual disconnection from Mother Earth. It is a disregard of our vital and integral place in the body, that is Mother Earth.

Infused with an African element, the eco-psychology becomes what Ramose (1996:63) calls greater enviroing wholeness. This is where the human universe as seen by an African becomes a fluid habitation of interactive forces, animate and inanimate (Eze, 2017:625). An African worldview is made up of the living, present and living dead which includes the unborn, or otherwise yet to be born as well as the non-living (Irele, 1996:16). African eco-psychology therefore is a brand of psychology that appreciates the humans' integral place in the universal vitalism where all parts of the universe are intricately interconnected. As Kanu (2021:5) observes,

It establishes a connection between the ecosystem and the African spirituality, which is the African's consciousness and relationship with the supernatural. This consciousness and relationship with that which is spiritual now becomes a basis for a responsible and humane relationship with and management of the environment. It is anchored on the African worldview of spiritual connectedness of reality, and thus, the sacredness of the eco-system.

It goes further to recognise the role of an African worldview in defining the scope and the intensity of the interconnection between the different parts of the universe and their spiritual worth. Within this worldview mental illness is understood in terms of disturbance in the cosmic world. This may result from disharmony in relationships, immoral behaviour or undermining of communal value systems and therefore angering the ancestors (Karimi & Eschenauer, 2006). Treatment in this context is about restoring harmony and balance between the estranged parts of the cosmology. This framework will provide us the facility to explore areas within the African worldview which traditional Western psychologies have not been able and are still not able to connect with as they manifest in the interaction between climate change and the Africans.



Climate change, Gender and Mental Health

That climate change is one of the largest threats to human health and that it intersects with gender has been widely acknowledged (Stone et al., 2022; Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence, 2022:3-4; Fruttero et al., 2023:2,3). Physical health impacts have been appreciated and widely researched (Haines et al., 2006:592; Etzel et al., 2024: 1). It is within that context that heat stroke, asthma, cardiorespiratory conditions resulting from excessive heat, prolonged pollen seasons and air pollution respectively, have been given the seriousness and attention they deserve (Stone et al., 2022:228; Hayes & Poland, 2018). It is regrettable that the intersection between climate change and mental health has not been given the same serious attention, despite growing signs of the gravity of this phenomenon particularly in Africa. This, despite the featuring of health and well-being, as important component of the Sustainable Development Goals and its target #3.4. The accentuation of mental health in target #3.4, notwithstanding, its reception and reflection in some National Health Policies in Africa, lacks the urge that matches the mental challenges that result from adverse climactic conditions that Africa are faced with.

Even with this lethargy, there is growing realisation that there is a clear association between climate change and mental health. The depletion of the natural, social, spiritual and economic structures on which the population depends, account for much of the surge of climate change-induced mental health challenges. Stone et al. (2022:229) observe that extreme weather conditions negatively impact mental health resulting in feelings of fatalism, fear for the future (eco-anxiety), and grieving for the home that is there but destroyed and unfamiliar (solastalgia). Atwoli et al. (2022:87) concur that anxiety disorders, post-traumatic disorder, suicidal ideation, violent behaviour towards oneself and others, and depression are also common in situations of unusual weather conditions. While the intersection between climate change and mental health may be a global connexion, its manifestations and effects are better understood within contexts in which they occur. Stone et al. (2022:230) observe:

Globally, women experience a high prevalence of mental health challenges, particularly depression and anxiety [28]. These experiences of depression and anxiety could be due to specific risk factors that women face, such as gender-based violence, socio-economic disadvantage, subordinate social status, and the responsibility to care for others [28]. Climate change amplifies these pre-existing gender inequities and may intersect with other forms of marginalization

The disproportionate manner in which this connexion impacts women, particularly in Africa cannot be ignored. Because of Africa's vulnerability, the effects of mental health are more acute on women than men.

Climate Change and Mental Health through the lens of African Eco-Psychology

To the above reflections, we wish to add the spiritual and uniquely African dimension to mental health that has been marginalised in mainstream, Eurocentric analytical perspectives. Fifth Edition of the DSM (Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 2022) has featured, in appreciation, the element of culture that has been missing in the previous manuals. It notes that there are different, culture specific interpretations of symptom presentations influenced by individual's background and socio-cultural context (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Already in 1997, Johann Beuster, writing from a South African context – in a revealing article, had observed that South Africa was a pathological society fragmented as it were into separate racial and cultural groups. White South Africans, as he puts it, are “living in a Eurocentric illusion while alienating themselves from the African context in which they live” (Beuster, 1997:4). The psychology that was taught and is still taught in



South African Universities and all other African Universities, was/is Eurocentric in content and perspective. Its emphasis on the rational, logical and intellectual elements of the psyche totally alienated the transpersonal and spiritual components of an African worldview (Beuster, 1997:5). In the process, it divests indigenous Africans from their historical and experiential realities (Chitindingu & Mkhize, 2016:74).

It is to these unique features of an African psychological context that we wish to address ourselves within the framework of Climate change and its effects on mental health in the light of Sustainable Development Goal #3. It is to be noted that studies on the exploration of African indigenous belief systems and their usefulness in the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters, abound (Diawuo & Issifu, 2015; Mwaura, 2008; Kaya & Koitsiwe, 2016; Betzen, 2013; Naamwintome & Millar, 2015; Aniah, 2014; Crawhall, 2016). Though useful, they do not go as far as making reference to the impact of climate change on mental health. Chirongoma and Chitando (2021) have come closer in their study on African specific interpretations of natural disasters. Their study above, has laid bare the religious and indigenous spiritual interpretations of the Cyclone Idai which are often glossed over by mainstream Eurocentric interpretive lenses. The interpretations that emerge from their reflections about what happened in Chimanimani and Chipinge point to the importance of taking the context into serious consideration in understanding people's plight. This present study goes further to glean indigenous mental health components from such interpretations.

Straddling two Mental Healthworlds

Colonisation brought with it the throttling of political, social, economic, educational and health structures of the colonised indigenous peoples. The aim was to create a monoculture with its proclivity to what Lartey (2002:322) calls a colour-blind and culture-free world. Within such an environment, all humans in a given situation are seen as basically the same in terms of norms, values, cultural beliefs and practices. It was thus the same within the realm of health which, from the coloniser's perspective, was seen as an independent commodity which is unrelated to the social, economic, political and spiritual realms. This perspective has not only divested the indigenous people from their own natural milieu, they have also caused serious fragmentation to their health environment which demanded that attention be paid to their spiritual and relational dimensions as well as the inter-relationships between the different parts of the cosmos, seen and unseen (Masamba ma Mpolo, 1991).

Germond and Cochrane (2010) writing from the context of Sesotho culture, observe that the western understanding of health falls far too short of capturing the Sesotho conceptualization of what *bophelo* (Life/health) represents. *Bophelo* in its proper context overlaps and intersects socio-spatial configurations of the person, the family and homestead, the village, the nation, the religious realm, the ancestors, and the earth. For any one person to fully exist and have *bophelo*, the latter must be found in all the above socio-spatial arrangements at the same time (Germond & Cochrane, 2010:309). It was within this context that they coined the term healthworld to explain the complex dynamic expressed by *bophelo* without losing the essential aspects of holism and ecology. Within this healthworld, an individual that exists outside his/her social and religious contexts is as good as dead. Put differently, there cannot be individual wellness or *bophelo* if there is no *bophelo* in the other configurations of the cosmos (Idemudia & Adedeji, 2023:4).

The advent of a new culture has forced an African to be contend in what Buhrman (1986) calls living between two worlds. It is a condition of tension that is described in terms of being 'caught' or 'suspended' and with negative social, emotional and mental health consequences. It is in this sense that we can talk of straddling two conflicting healthworlds, the result of which causes unbalanced inhabitation of the cosmos which leads to a void in the African psyche or mental debility.



Mental health-loaded interpretations of Adverse Climate Conditions

The question that Chirongoma and Chitando (2021) are posing in their topic, “What have we done to our mountain?”, implies a feeling of collective guilt for doing something that people should not have done to their Sacred Mountain. Guilt, in psychology, is understood as an emotional experience that occurs when a person believes or realizes that they have compromised their values or have done something wrong. Chirongoma and Chitando (2021) flesh out the cause of this guilt as a desecration of the sacred clay pots at the sacred cave by the overzealous Christians who claim ownership of these sites as God-given. In another place, Musoni (2016) concurs and goes on to emphasise that there is a silent war raging on around the sacred sites in Zimbabwe. It is a war between the indigenous people who seek to protect the sacredness of their heritage on one side and the Christian groups who claim God-given right to the place to purify and restore to a Christian God on the other. All of these people have a collective identity but with varying interests. Their collective feeling of guilt presupposes a collective identity shared by a group bonded together by culture and worldview (Ferguson & Branscombe, 2014:252-253). A stressor for this feeling of guilt is attributed to violation of cultural mores which has collective implications.

On another note, Chirongoma and Chitando (2021) recount another episode of the killing of the *mhondoro* (the lion that embodies the spirit of the ancestors and inhabits the sacred mountain) by a farmer who aimed to protect his animals that were being devoured by the lion. In that process he violated the ancestral spirits that inhabited the *mhondoro*. As per the indigenous interpretation, the farmer’s failure to appease the spiritual realms through offering and sacrifice, led to the devouring of his livestock by a *mhondoro*. When the farmer eventually killed the *mhondoro*, that was the final blow that unleashed ancestral vengeance on the collective (Chirongoma & Chitando, 2021:79). The interpretation of the violation of the ancestral spirit finds its way into the indigenous people’s psyche. In their own reckoning, the catastrophe of Cyclone Idai is associated with, amongst others, the killing of the *mhondoro* which happened to be a sign – in a series of misfortunes – of ancestral dissatisfaction.

Climate Change and Culture specific Mental Health Conditions

The above two episodes are not only interpreted by the indigenous people as an invitation of the wrath of the ancestors but also as an obvious cause of distress and guilt on the people. As seen by Chirongoma and Chitando (2021:75) the destruction of the clay pots as well as the killing of the *mhondoro* did not sit well with those who uphold traditional African worldview. On account of the intricate connection and mutual dependency between the humans and the environment, any violation by any one member who is part of a bigger whole will, directly or indirectly, impact the collective. No one can anger the ancestors and get away with it. If not him/her, the community will bear the brunt of the ancestors’ wrath.

In this case the violation by the Christian zealots as well as a farmer, who are in some way, part of the collective, has adversely impacted the ecological system. In the process, the community has suffered the devastating effects of the Cyclone. By commission and omission, the people who share the common identity have reneged on their obligation to maintain the sacredness of the mountain, and have, therefore, called tragedy upon themselves, in the form of Cyclone Idai. This feeling is expressed in a form of a rhetorical question that carries the psychological weight of a punishment that results from people’s moral indifference (Chirongoma & Chitando, 2021). This is what psychopathology is in an African context (Ayuya et al., 2015:57). It represents what Mpofu (2006) dubs a psychologically unhealthy state of living in disharmony with the forces of nature.

A study that was conducted in Kenya, South Africa, Swaziland (Eswatini) and Tanzania, revealed that people in those communities believed that disasters only came when one was



not at peace with God and the spirits and that hydrological hazards are released by specific deities and God in response to people's infraction of cultural taboos (Mwaura, 2008). It is not uncommon in Lesotho and other countries to hear the chief demanding of women to cover their heads during funerals or for funeral not to go beyond midday.

The reasons given have to do with forfending of natural disasters that may result from violation of traditional taboos which in turn upset the cosmic balance. In another study done in Limpopo, South Africa, Mufamadi and Sodi (2010) confirm that disregard for cultural norms can lead to mental illness. Similar other experiences manifest in various ways in different African settings but pointing to one common denominator that differing worldviews require pluriform mental health interpretations and culture-specific interventions (Adebayo et al. 2024; Shan & Ji, 2024)).

Chirongoma and Chitando (2021) cite 2251 houses that were destroyed by the raging storms. That only the Church buildings survived the floods, paints a picture of utter desolation where no other house or building except the Churches and presbyteries were spared. This phenomenon brought about what is known, in psychological circles, as solastalgia. It is described by Warsini et al. (2014) as a type of grieving for the homestead and land that no longer resemble the home they knew and loved. The diverse context of Africa, in general and Southern Africa in particular, renders a homestead a sacred space where not only the ancestors were invited to inhabit but also where burial sites of still born babies exist. Such places cannot just be evacuated without doing proper rituals. The reason according to Irele (1996:16) is that an African worldview is made up of the living, present and living dead which includes the unborn, or otherwise yet to be born as well as the non-living. Given their holistic cosmology and dependence of the living upon their ancestors as well as identification with some aspects of nature, such grief on the loss of housing, livestock and farmland gives a different psychological perspective to what could have been an ordinary solastalgia (Rakotsoane, 2009). It is not just a climate-induced distress, it is a loss of one's place and wellness (*bophelo*) in Ramose's (1996) greater environing wholeness. From an African perspective, it causes a great deal of psychological distress that can be left unattended at one's peril.

These episodes are reflective of the clash of cultural traditions and beliefs between indigenous people and Eurocentric interpretations or of straddling two healthworlds. This creates, as it were, a disharmony between the people and the ancestors as well as an unbalanced inhabitation of the African cosmos where violence by the living is meted on the ancestors. That in itself is a manifestation of a mental disconnect or cognitive dissonance whose treatment may not lie solely in the rational and logical elements common in mainstream, clinical psychological discourse.

Given the intercultural context in which we live, with a predominantly western mental health orientation, these troubling tensions seem unavoidable. They cannot, however, be overlooked. On that note, Wright et al. (2021:1) counsel that creating the conditions for meaningful relationships is, therefore, essential to bringing into creative and dialogical tension the differing worldviews that are informed by different ontologies and epistemologies.

The study by Chirongoma and Chitando (2021) further establishes the thesis advanced above that climate change and gender intersect. That women and children constituted 80% of those who suffered most as a result of the disaster, goes to confirm the very same thesis. They put it so aptly thus:

From an African eco-feminist perspective, it is also important to interrogate the fact that women in the Global South are the ones who are bearing the brunt of the global ecological crisis. Such a status quo should spur African governments



and African religious leaders to make concerted efforts towards putting measures in place to reduce the carbon footprint whilst paying particular attention to the plight of women and girls whose quality of life has been further diminished by the perpetually increasing ecological disasters (Chirongoma & Chitando, 2021: 86)

It is patent that climate change and gender nexus is skewed against women. The emphasis of their inclusion in decision-making on issues around climate change is therefore very critical if any meaningful mitigation of climate induced conditions is to be achieved.

Conclusion

For some time now it has become patent that the entire globe is engulfed in the effects of tyranny under humans' profiteering tendencies (Leshota & Sepere, 2022:5). Warm temperatures and consequent rising sea-levels, melting of snow, cyclones, severe floods and droughts undoubtedly a protest of the earth, place the blame at the doorstep of human agents who have abused and continue to abuse the Earth (Leshota, 2021:131). The devastation that results from this abuse of power manifests in various ways in its effects on humans and the entire ecological system. While no part of the globe is spared from the effects of Climate change, countries in the global South have suffered most of the devastating effects of this environmental crisis.

Climate change and its intersection with gender has been widely researched and documented with its disproportionate effect on women and girls more than on men. In equal measure, the physical health effects of climate change have also been acknowledged and documented. This is not true of the effects of climate change on mental health. Even in those rare cases where it is acknowledged, it is skewed in favour of Western psychological orientations while marginalising other worlds psychologies, particularly African psychologies which are better placed to deal with African culture-specific-symptoms presentations aligned to people's socio-cultural context.

The adoption of African eco-psychological framework has helped us to identify and glean indigenous mental health components that emanate from African specific interpretations of climate-change-induced calamities. It has emerged from this perspective that the interconnectedness between the different parts of the universe is vital for the harmony and balance in the universe. Interpretations of the effects of Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe and other climate disasters from other parts of Africa lend themselves to an African understanding of a human universe as a fluid habitation of interactive forces. The disturbance of anyone aspect of the force affects the whole and lack of *bophelo* in one affects the entire system. Unless this variable is taken into consideration in dealing with climate change and its effects in Africa, the mental health of an African will continue to remain an elephant in the health room of Africa and indeed the entire globe and thereby reverse the little gains of Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal # 3 under target # 3.4.

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