



THE CONTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION(A.T.R) TO THE  
ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AS KEY TO POVERTY REDUCTION, WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO MHONDORO DISTRICT IN MASHONALAND-WEST PROVINCE

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This is a study of the contribution of African Traditional Religion to the environmental crisis as key to poverty reduction. The study focuses on the areas of Mhondoro-Ngezi and Mubaira District. The environmental crisis and the poverty crisis are among the major challenges the people in Mhondoro are facing. This study argues that, the Shona people of Mhondoro conserve the environment well through their taboos, totems and belief systems. Taboos and totems have been used successfully to promote natural resource conservation, that is, the land, animals, water bodies, mountains, forests and trees. The study argues that, these practices are helping in the reduction of poverty in Mhondoro.

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## DEDICATION

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.

ATR- African Traditional Religion

WHO- World Healthy Organizations

EMA- Environmental Management Agency

WWF- World Wide Fund

LAA- Land Apportionment Act

LRP- Land Reform Programme

PRFT- Poverty Reduction Forum Trust

UNEP- United Nations Environment Programme

FTLRP- Fast Track Land Reform Programme

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS.

African Traditional Religion- ATR is a familiar term in African Universities, Colleges and schools, but the term is difficult to define because of different scholar's views on religion. African scholars consider it as one religion whilst those scholars who are not African understand it as Africans religions. An African is one who is born and bred in Africa. Traditional means indigenous, that which is aboriginal or foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practiced by Africans today, J.Awolalu (1976). The term religion is difficult to define. The very first problem is the question of the term 'religion' itself. Africans have no separate field regarded as religion in the strictest sense of other societies. One cannot separate African culture from religion, these two are intertwined. There are many definitions of the term religion but in general religion can be defined as the strong belief in one god or gods.

Environment-refers to all natural and man-made resources found in the atmosphere and lithosphere which include water, soil, minerals and living organisms, Rockstrom (2009).

Shona- refers to a member of a group of peoples inhabiting parts of Southern Africa, *Oxford English Dictionary*. The Shona comprise over three quarters of the population of Zimbabwe, and smaller groups live in South Africa, Zambia and Mozambique.

Poverty- is the scarcity or lack of a certain (variant) amount of material possessions or money. Poverty is a multifaceted concept, which may include social, economic and political elements, Haymes Stephen (2013).



## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Mhondoro is a tribal area in Zimbabwe with the region font code of Africa/Middle East. Mhondoro is in Mashonaland West Province. There are two parts of Mhondoro, that is, Mhondoro-Ngezi (where ZIMPLATS or Ngezi mine is located) and the other part is Mhondoro Mubaira where there is Rio Tinto High School and St Marks. Therefore, the focus of this study is to examine the contribution of African Shona to the environment and to see whether this is reducing poverty or not.

### 1.2 AREA OF INVESTIGATION

The area of investigation is phenomenology of religion particularly on ATR, the environment and poverty reduction. This study focuses mainly on the contribution of African Traditional Religion (Herein after referred to as A.T.R) to the environment especially on the aspects of poverty reduction, with special reference to the Shona people of Mhondoro-Ngezi and Mubaira.

### 1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The issue of environmental crisis is a reality globally and Mhondoro is not spared from such a phenomenon. The environmental crisis has resulted in poverty due to erratic droughts being experienced in the area. It seems as if policy makers and authorities are ignoring the

contributions that African Traditional Religion is doing in solving the environmental issues as well as it can do to exacerbate the crisis. This study mainly focuses on ATR's efforts in reducing this crisis.

#### 1.4 AIM

The aim of this study is to conscientize people about the contribution of ATR to the environmental crisis.

#### 1.5 OBJECTIVES

To achieve such an aim, the following objectives should be met;

- a) To analyse the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe at large and especially in the context of Mhondoro-Ngezi and Mubaira.
- b) To examine the contribution of ATR towards the environment
- c) To evaluate the contribution of ATR towards poverty reduction in Mhondoro-Ngezi and Mubaira.

#### 1.6 JUSTIFICATION

Much research has been done on the contribution of ATR to the environmental crisis in general, but however, this dissertation contextualise the issues of ATR's contribution to the environment

and poverty reduction among the Shona people of Mhondoro. Poverty is a threat to the well-being of the people of Mhondoro hence any research directed towards the reduction of it, is justified.

## 1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the *Collins English Dictionary*, methodology is a system of methods and principles for doing something, for example, for teaching or for carrying out research. Therefore, research methodology can be defined as a way to solve the research problem, that is, steps that are followed by the researcher in solving the research problem. In this research, I will employ the following methodologies; the Historical Critical Approach, Phenomenological Approach Method

### 1.7.1 HISTORICAL APPROACH METHOD

Hanks. P (1979), defines this method as, “the process of establishing general facts and principles through attention to chronology and to the evolution or historical course of what is being studied”. This study focuses on the historical background of the phenomenon. In this case, the abuse and the exploitation of the environment is the main cause of poverty that has caused the suffering of people. This view is supported by Mwikamba.C.M (2000:31) who argued that, “Whenever humanity acts as the absolute ruler over nature rather than as its partner, whenever humanity decides to develop independently of God and nature- humanity is doomed.” Human activities seem to be the main cause this environmental crisis hence it is important to investigate

the history of the humanity's interaction with the environment. The historical critical method seeks to figure out questions on how the environment have been treated by the people. The advantage of using this method is that, the past is traced as history ought to judge the past and instruct the contemporary world as well as the future. However, on the other hand, this method may be biased, it may be based on false facts, evidence can be lacking since history is written from the perspective of the sponsor. Therefore, it is difficult to find objective history.

### 1.7.2 PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

This approach is chosen because it involves researching on the phenomenology of religion. Scholars argue that, people who started to use the word phenomenology were not in the field of religion, but they were from the field of philosophy. The origin of this approach in the study of religion can be attributed to scholars such as Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye, William Brede Kristensen and Gerardus Van der Leeuw. The phrase, 'phenomenology of religion' was coined by Saussaye in 1887. W.B.Kristensen was greatly influenced by Saussaye's work, which caused him to research in the field of phenomenology of religion. More so, Van der Leeuw was greatly influenced by Kristensen.

According to J.L.Cox (1992:25), “phenomenology in its twentieth-century form, is a philosophical movement attributed to the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).” The French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty described phenomenology as a “style of thinking” (cited by Bettis, 1969:2). The phenomenological approach focuses on the individual's own testimony. Grbich.C (2007:7), define the phenomenology of religion as, “an approach that attempts to understand the hidden meanings and the essence of an experience together with how

participants make sense of these.” It emphasizes on the quotation of W.B.Kristensen(1960) , “ that we can never experience someone else's religious tradition as the believer experiences it, what then is left for the phenomenologist of religion, is to acknowledge that, 'the believer is always right'- even though the believer may on an occasion appear to have been disastrously wrong.” This study will take seriously the believer's point of view, not thinking that the believers are unsophisticated, that is, what they say on how they treat the environment. The word ‘phenomenology’ is derived from a Greek word, *phainos*, meaning that which appears. This research will apply key concepts such as; epoche, eidetic vision, empathetic interpolation, naming and describing the phenomena. These concepts will not be discussed in depth, but they will be briefly defined.

#### 1.7.2.1 EPOCHE

The word Epoche is derived from the Greek verb *epecho*, ‘I hold back’ as propounded by E.J.Sharpe (1975:224). The word in effect means, 'stoppage, suspension of judgment, the exclusion from one's mind of every possible presupposition' as asserted by Sharpe. According to Sharpe, it is also called 'bracketing', whereby an object which is present to consciousness is reduced to the pure phenomenon by 'putting in brackets' or excluding from further interest those elements which do not belong to the universal essence. He further notes that, its importance in this connection is that it emphasizes the need to abstain from every kind of value-judgment, to be present to the phenomenon in question purely as an impartial observer, unconcerned with questions of truth and falsehood. To support this, Ezra Chitando(2001:38-49) pointed out that, “the phenomenological system endeavors to bracket out all biases, pre-conceived beliefs and

prejudices, and refrains from evaluating truth-claims by religions, while attending to the adherent's point of view'.”

#### 1.7.2.2 EMPATHETIC INTERPOLATION

Cultivating empathy is required to come up with accurate data. Religion is a sacred phenomenon, therefore suspension of judgments need to be shown and enter into the feelings or shoes of the Shona people and in order to grasp and possess the knowledge of what they actually know and believe on reducing the environmental crisis. In this study, norms and taboos of the Shona people of Mhondoro-Ngezi and Mubaira are to be respected. To support this, J.L.Cox (1992:30) argued that, “by naming objects, noting relationships and describing processes, the phenomenologist claims to build the structure of reality not from presuppositions about the world but from observed phenomena themselves'. Although the beginning point of philosophical phenomenology is subjective, its goal is to describe and understand the world objectively as asserted by Merleau-Ponty (1969:27-28).

#### 1.7.2.3 EIDETIC VISION

According to Sharpe (1975:224), the term 'eidetic vision' is derived from a Greek noun, *eidos* “that which is seen, and hence 'form', 'shape', or 'essence'.” He further notes that, in phenomenological parlance, eidetic vision is the observer's capacity for seeing the essentials of a situation, or in the case of a phenomenon, its actual essence as opposed to what it has been, might have been, or ought to be. To add on, Clive Erricker (1967:40) purports that, 'eidetic vision presupposes epoche, introduces the capacity to see 'objectively' the essence of the phenomenon, but also addresses the issue of the subjectivity of perception and reflection'.

## 1.8 DATA COLLECTION

There are a wide variety of methods of data collection, in qualitative research, including interviews (Individual or group), visual analysis (for example, from books or videos). However, in this study, data will be primarily collected through interviewing different people, that is, people who deal with the environmental issues. An interview can be considered as a direct method of obtaining information in a face-face situation. According to Dornyei (2007), a good qualitative interview has two key features, it flows naturally, and is rich in detail. To attain this, it is therefore necessary to remember that one will be there to listen and not just speak. Patton (2000:404-5) also asserts that, if respondents are uneasy and become upset, the interview can be cancelled and postponed.

There are many advantages of using interviews. One will get first-hand information. Interviewing people is cheaper than sending out questionnaires which need to be printed and costs a lot of money. Enables the researcher to clarify issues and questions in a relaxed atmosphere with the interviewee and relate to each other personally. They also capture the behavior and emotions of the participant. However, interviews reduce truth value since many people are afraid of being victimized by their church leaders. Language and cultural barriers can hinder the interviews also.

Furthermore, there are certain principles to be followed during the research process. The major ethical issues in conducting research are beneficence of no harm to the participant, obtaining an informed consent and respect for anonymity and confidentiality. Obtaining an informed consent is the major ethical issue when conducting social research. According to Clarke (1991:4),

informed consent seeks to incorporate the rights of autonomous individual through self-determination. It also seeks to prevent assaults on the integrity of the patient and protect personal liberty and veracity. According to Beauchamp (2001), the ethical principle of beneficence refers to the Hippocratic 'be of benefit, do not harm'. Beauchamp suggests that, the principle of beneficence includes the professional mandate to do effective and significant research so as to better serve and promote the welfare of the constituents'. The last principle is that of anonymity and confidentiality. This is closely related to the rights of beneficence, respect for the dignity and fidelity. Levine (1976) advocates that confidentiality means that individuals are free to give and withhold as much information as they wish to the person they choose.

## 1.9 LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue concerning the contribution of ATR to the environmental crisis is not new. Scholars such as T.O.Ranger, M.F.C Bourdillon argue that Africans are environmentally friendly, however, on the other hand scholars such as Nisbert.Taringa(2006) argued that Africans exploit the environment, the view that Africans are environmental friendly is romanticising the religion for Taringa. African worldview is spiritual and realizes that God is the creator and sustainer of the universe. African spiritualism (the belief in the supernatural) creates respect for animals, reverence for forests, rocks, mountains, and rivers. African Spiritualism gives an explanation as to why certain places are revered and certain activities tabooed. Also it opines that natural phenomena have spirits that define the relationship between humans and nature that is inter-linked and interdependent, Sibanda (1997). Consequently, Africans do not interfere with what they do not understand or control, Sibanda. They relate all this to a Superhuman Being, and an Omnipresent God who controls its processes. The preceding leads to respect for natural



environmental resources. According to Kaufman (2000), this belief is strongly held by the Luhya of Kakamega District, Kenya, who continue to use their spirituality to conserve the Kakamega Forest. The idea of the Luhya selecting a specific place used for their spirituality was a normal practice of their religiosity. However, in trying to respond to the current global call on environmental conservation, the Luhya's way of spirituality has been recognized as a way of environmental conservation. Consequently, because God is in nature, human life is seen as being sustained by natural resources that also demand his efforts to sustain them. This gives the participatory nature of the world of which the Africans are subjected to, hence, they see their religion as life, Kaufman. This clearly shows that many scholars wrote something on African religion and the environment, however, they did not link this with the concept of poverty reduction.

Moreover, scholars show that Africans set taboos and norms to protect the environment. Taboos are passed orally from generation to generation, and have a functional role to the society. They vary from place to place due to environmental determinism, depending on the social, cultural and economic organization of a particular community, A. Shorter (1987). Therefore the aim of this study is to fill the gap left by scholars who wrote on ATR and the environment.

Scholars such as N. Taringa critic the view of African as environmentally friendly. According to him this attitude all these scholars such as J. S. Mbiti, and Ranger were romanticizing ATR. For Taringa, yes, Africans protect the environment but on the other side it is shrouded in obscurity. Land is considered as something that is important in Africa. The chief is the one who allocates the land to the people, so it cannot be sold or transferred to another. However, Taringa argued that we can also see that there is a discriminative attitude toward the environment. The land

outside a particular chiefdom may not be sacred for people of another chiefdom. The chiefs family may even protect some animals of religious significance for consumption only. Taringa did not link this issue with how to reduce poverty, therefore this is the gap this dissertation is exploring. .

Murekezi (2004:1) argued on Christianity's contribution to earth crisis as key to poverty eradication in Zambia. According to him, the environmental crisis and the poverty crisis are among the major challenges the church in Zambia is facing. He argued that poverty and ecological crisis are interrelated. However, a major problem has been that many programmes carried on by the churches seem to focus on poverty alleviation not recognizing the linkage between poverty and ecological crisis. He argued that, unless adequate environmental awareness is carried out, and that Christians understand the relationship between poverty and the ecological crisis people will not manage to break the cycle of poverty in the community. The church efforts to carry out environmental awareness based on biblical and theological foundation teachings are a unique contribution that Christians can offer to the earth crisis as well as to contribute to poverty eradication. This dissertation diverts from Murekezi in the sense that the focus is on ATR particularly on the Shona people of Mhondoro-Ngezi.

Globally, people should be concerned about the despoliation and degradation of our human habitation and environment because each year, according to the World Bank, 2013 report, three million people die prematurely from waterborne diseases, about two hundred thousand children under five die from diarrhea alone, around 1.6 million people die from exposure to cooking stove smoke inside their homes (Take note that most victims are children and women from poor rural families who lack access to safe water, sanitation and modern household fuels), A million people

die from malaria, mostly in Sub-Saharan African countries, a million people die from urban air pollution, Respiratory infections, diarrhea and malaria account for more than 20% of deaths in developing countries, according to the World Health Organization's Burden of Disease report. Therefore it is the aim of this study to show how African Religion is trying to reduce this environmental crisis.

#### 1.10 CHAPTER BREAKDOWN.

Chapter one is the introduction of the contribution of ATR to the environmental crisis as key to poverty reduction, Chapter two is to analyse the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe at large especially in the context of Mhondoro-Ngezi and Mhondoro Mubaira, Chapter three is to examine the contributions of ATR towards the environment. Chapter four is to evaluate the contribution of ATR and poverty reduction and Chapter five is the conclusion of ATR's attitude to the environment as key to poverty reduction.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 AN ANALYSIS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN ZIMBABWE AT LARGE ESPECIALLY IN THE CONTEXT OF MHONDORO NGEZI AND MUBAIRA

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to give an analysis on the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe. Environmental problems have been identified in many places in Zimbabwe which are causing environmental degradation. Environment is a combination of all natural resources both living and non-living that animals and plants depend on for their living. In Zimbabwe, Environmental Management Act (Chapter 20:27) defines environment as all natural and man-made resources found in the atmosphere and lithosphere which include water, soil, minerals and living organisms. The same piece of legislation also states that environment includes the socio-economic and other conditions that contribute to its sustainable usage. However, the environmental crisis is one of the malignant problems that have affected both flora and fauna of the twenty-first century. According to Rockstrom (2009:32), climatic change is just the tip of an iceberg of global ecological crisis related to biodiversity, availability of fertile land, sustainable food production and finite water and energy resources. United Nations(2013) notes that environmental crisis is one of the worst problems faced by people because it has resulted in the depletion of the ozone layer and development of the 'greenhouse effect' due to unmanaged industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and increased emissions. The existence of alarming statistics on ecological devastation of planet Earth and the global social and economic crisis have raised fundamental concerns about the relation between ecological crisis and social problems leading to a situation called 'social ecological crisis' Peeters (2009). According to the Living Planet Report (World Wide Fund for Nature, WWF, 2010) in 2007, the global ecological

footprint had already exceeded the natural coping mechanisms of the planet by fifty percent. As a result, there is discharge of polluting substances into the environment, the distortion of habits for native species and emission of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere resulting in climatic change.

It is of more importance to note that scholars have different views on what is causing the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, more than half scholars agreed that the environmental crisis encompasses main issues such as, climate change, stratospheric ozone depletion, degraded air quality, degraded water quality, scarcity of fresh water, land contamination, deforestation, soil erosion and degradation, land use change, habitat loss, and biodiversity loss. The discussion on the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe has led to serious conflicts amongst different scholars, as they have different views. Aylen (1941:90-120) for example, claimed that during precolonial times and the earlier part of the colonial period, human land use had little detrimental impact on the environment in Zimbabwe because of the extensive nomadic and fallow practices used, which could well provide for the relatively low population densities and the employment of Indigenous soil conservation measures. It could be therefore argued that Aylen would view the environmental conservation crisis in Zimbabwe as the combined result of population growth and the resistance of local communities to the implementation of Western conservation techniques.

However, scholars such as Masaka.D (2011:331-47) blame science and colonialism for the country's conservation crisis. They oppose Aylen's view that human land use practices at the time had little detrimental impact on the environment. They support their arguments by referring to the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, which appropriated most of the fertile communal land

from the majority of the population and converted it into commercial farms for the white settler minority. With an annual population growth rate in excess of 5.5 per cent (IUCN, 1988) and diminishing popular access to land, traditional conservation methods became impractical in the communal areas, as a result, land degradation set in. Masaka similarly argues that the twin sisters of colonization and science are to blame for the conservation crisis in Zimbabwe since the colonization of Zimbabwe and the rest of the African continent was predicated on a treacherous basis of trying to improve the lives of the people of Africa, when in fact it spelt doom to the Africans, and the resource dispossession that impoverished people that had managed to survive within their means prior to the advent of colonialism, Masaka (2011:331).

Zimbabwe is still experiencing a lot of crises as a result of climate change and the depletion of the ozone layer. For instance, the Tokwe-Mukosi floods that happened between 2013-2014, which caused the displacement of a lot of people, for about thousands of people in Southern Masvingo in Chingwizi camp. According to Chikodzi and Mutowo (2014), natural disasters such as that took place at Tokwe-Mukosi in 2013-2014 could have been mitigated by timely dissemination of relevant information concerning climate change and natural disaster. Mangizvo (2015) found that certain practices such as burning of solid waste can lead to the emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide. In-addition Environmental Management Agency (Herein after referred to as EMA) recorded 2573 incidences of veld fires in 2014 which destroyed 1 653 822 hectares and claimed the lives of twelve people. Accordingly, there is an estimated loss of 100 000 to 320 000 hectares due to deforestation. Therefore, basing on the above analysis it is difficult to ignore the environmental component that contributed to the socio-economic situation of today.

## 2.2 DEFORESTATION

This is an issue of great concern in Zimbabwe especially in Mhondoro. Deforestation is the conversion of forest to an alternative permanent non-forested land use such as agriculture, grazing and urban development, Van Kooten (2000). Massive cutting down of trees is practiced especially in Mhondoro-Ngezi. There are factors which are contributing to the cutting down of trees, for instance, illegal settlements, poverty, and power cuts. There is a mine in Mhondoro-Ngezi (ZIMPLATS) so people are cutting down trees to create space for mining activities. Economic downturn is the major cause of environmental crisis in Zimbabwe. EMA is concerned about deforestation because it leads to land degradation. Deforestation negatively affects ecosystems, leading to biodiversity loss, high rates of soil erosion, resulting in the situation of streams and rivers and the disruption of hydrological systems. High rate of poverty in Zimbabwe can be considered as the main cause of the crisis. Loss of economic activities, that is, jobs, have resulted in the poor to rely more on the environment for a living causing over-exploitation of the resources. Poverty Reduction Forum Trust (Herein after referred to as PRFT) told ZWNEWS that the continuous exploitation of the environment is resulting in it being unsustainable leading to more poverty and environmental related problems such as droughts, air and water pollution, deforestation, erosion and poor sanitation. The fact that citizens are suffering from the current economic situation is leading to more environmental degradation. Poor people are forced to depend on natural resources only, for example, firewood, agriculture, water and medicines for survival because they cannot afford to buy goods in shops as things are very expensive.

Activities such as small-scale mining especially along Great Dyke has caused more harm than good to the environment and has worsen poverty as some families have met with fatalities when

the shallow mine shafts collapse lives are lost and families are left more vulnerable. This is evident in areas like Insiza and Whandara in Shurugwi where the majority of the poor are resorting to unsustainable gold mining activities to sustain themselves after the downsizing and closure of mining companies in those areas, Simba Moyo. PRFT says poverty forces one to venture into more extensive agriculture by clearing marginal land for cultivation. This will expose the soil to destructive environmental forces such as erosion and siltation of rivers. Deforestation has caused more soil erosion in Mhondoro-Ngezi, for example in areas such as Zimindo, Chirasavana near Ngezi High School. This is due to poverty as many people cannot afford to electrify their homes or even afford to use gas stoves, therefore there is massive cut down of trees in the area leading to land degradation.

This dissertation would also argue that deforestation is caused by Infrastructure expansion. Road Construction can lead to deforestation by providing an entryway to previously remote land, for example, the construction of the current Harare-Masvingo road caused the cutting down of many trees. The road expansion logging (the logistics of moving wood from the stump to somewhere outside the forest) and illegal logging, where opportunists slash down trees without permission from authorities.

## 2.3 AIR POLLUTION

According to Apina (2003:22-24), increased activities in key social and economic sectors are contributing significantly to air pollution which has gradually grown into a major environmental concern for African policy makers and gained prominence on the region's political agenda. Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production of energy resources by industry, transport



and household sectors have, in particular, been the leading sources of key indoor and outdoor air pollutants. Air emissions are a growing nuisance from Africa's growing Industry, UNEP (2004). In Zimbabwe, industries, gold mining, and platinum and cement production are major factors leading to air pollution to a greater extent. ZIMPLATS mine in Mhondoro-Ngezi is one of the biggest mines that is polluting the air. Lots of clean water is being used during mining to extract the oils from the sand. The sand might also be dumped in clean water causing more water pollution. Also when people are mining gold, water is used to clean dirt and separate the gold from the rocks. Then the water that comes out of this process is dumped back in the rivers and this cause water pollution. Polluted water causes air pollution and this can lead to the rise of temperature.

The manufacturing sector and transportation sector are contributing to the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe. Although the manufacturing sector is responsible for causing air pollution, the transportation sector is increasingly behind recognized as the highest polluter. In 2000, Africa had 2,5% of the total world vehicle population, then 700 million, Apina (2003). There has been a doubling of motor vehicle fleets in the past ten years in Zimbabwe and Botswana, Apina. The problem is that Zimbabweans are importing many vehicles from Japan at cheap price, therefore as a result there is more congestion leading to the environmental crisis. To support Apina, Zimbabwe census report for 2002 notes that, Zimbabwe has experienced a rapid expansion in the national vehicle population and also high energy demands, especially in cities like Harare. Harare is the capital city of Zimbabwe and had a population of 2.5 million people in 2002. It also has a large expanding industrial base and has an estimated vehicle population of 1.2 million, which are approximately two thirds of a vehicle in Zimbabwe.

Moreover, industries are contributing to the environmental crisis to a greater extent because of burning fossil fuels and chemical processes. In Harare there are big industries such as Willowvale, Lonchinvar in Southern part of Harare which contribute a lot to the environmental crisis through dumping of Industrial waste and through gas emissions. These industries are using old technology and equipment and this is contributing to air pollution. There is high rate of economic crisis in the country, therefore industries cannot easily replace old technologies or they do not have abatement equipment to control emissions into the atmosphere.

After the Industrial sector, transportation has become of more importance in people's lives. Trains, cars, shipping vessels, heavy-duty trucks and airplanes burn a lot of fossil fuels to work. Emissions from automobile engines contain both primary and secondary pollutants. This is a major cause of air pollution and one that is very difficult to manage. This is because humans rely heavily on vehicles and engines for transporting people, goods and services. Fumes from car exhausts contain dangerous gases such as carbon monoxide, oxides of nitrogen, hydrocarbons and particulates. There are effects as a result of pollutants for instance, diseases such as heart diseases and chronic bronchitis asthma are likely to affect the people.

## 2.4 WATER POLLUTION

Water plays a crucial role in Zimbabwe because it is the most important key to life. There is no life without water. Without water there is no human, animal or plant life, says a 2006 World Water Authority Website. It is not surprising that water is regarded as precious because of the value that living organisms derive from it. Water is of much importance for both domestic and Industrial purposes. It is a basic commodity in human, animal and plant life such that any slight

deterioration in its natural quality results in negative health and environmental impacts. However, most of Zimbabwe's river systems and dams are heavily polluted to the extent that they are now endangering both aquatic and human life. Speaking during the launch of the Green Business Awards in Harare recently, EMA's director of ecosystems protection, Patronella Shoko lamented the contamination of the country's water bodies as a result of poor waste management practices. Shoko said effluent discharge into water bodies affected general water quality leading to negative health impacts.

Different factors are contributing to water pollution and a lot of people have died as a result of cholera from drinking contaminated water or eating fish products from seriously polluted lakes, rivers and streams. In Mhondoro, there is a river called Ngezi River which is being polluted by people through different activities. Urbanization, that is, the movement of people from rural areas to urban is also another factor contributing to water pollution. The gradual increase of people living in urban areas is becoming a problem to water sources. As people migrate from rural areas to urban areas many factors cause pollution and this lead to the environmental crisis. One can take note of issues such as sewage, inadequate sewage collect and treatment can cause pollution. According to EMA, this results in an increase in nutrients (nitrates and phosphates) in water which causes enhanced plant growth (algal blooms). When this plant material dies and decays the bacteria uses the oxygen in the water. This lowering of oxygen level results in the death of other water life that needs oxygen to survive, such as fish. In Mhondoro people are using bush toilets, when it rains this human waste flows into the rivers and other water bodies.

Moreover, water sources have been contaminated by dumping of solid waste from industries and domestic activities. Industries can distort the color of water. For instance, if the water is mixed

with acids, neutral and alkaline. There can also be accidental water pollution arise from many sources (such as burst pipes and tanks, major leaks, fires and oil spills) and can cause varying degrees of damage, depending on the quantity, toxicity and persistence of the pollutant, and the size and adaptability of the water body.

## 2.5 LAND CONTAMINATION

There are many different factors that can contribute to land pollution. Factors such as waste disposal, mining, urbanization negatively affects the land. Human beings produce huge amount of waste at homes, schools, offices, factories and hospitals. According to Herbert. G (1996:26), even the most sophisticated waste processing plants, which use plasma torches (electrically controlled flames at temperatures of thousands of degrees). To turn waste into gas, produce solid waste products that have to be disposed of somehow. There is simply no getting away from waste: our ultimate fate as humans are to die and become waste products that have to be burned or buried. In addition, if sewages are not treated well there can be land pollution.

Some people are moving in search of green pastures willingly or accidentally as a result of natural disasters, for example, in Chimanimani a lot of people were affected by the cyclone that happened around 15-17 March, therefore they are moving from their place to other places which are not affected. If many people move to urban areas one problem is that, by concentrating people, it concentrates their waste products at the same time, so for example, crudely disposing of sewage from a big city automatically creates water or land pollution, where the same number of people and the same volume of sewage might not create a problem, as asserted by Vincent Pellecchia (2015). More so, each household produces tonnes of garbage each year. Garbage like

papers, cloth, plastic, aluminum and wood is collected and send to the local recycling unit. Things that are difficult to recycle become a part of landfills that hampers the beauty of the city and cause land pollution.

Industrialization can also contribute to land degradation. Industries are forced to produce more goods due to an increase in demand for shelter, food and house. This can cause the production of more waste which need to be disposed of. To meet the demand of many people, that is, the growing population, more industries were developed and this caused too much cutting down of trees. Research and development paved the way for modern fertilizers and chemicals that were highly toxic and led to soil contamination. Mining activities can also cause land degradation. Several land spaces can be damaged during extraction and mining activities.

## 2.6 VELD FIRES

According to the National Disaster Management Centre (2010), veld fires can be defined as fires that occur outside the built up area of an urban area posing the potential of running out of control. Goldammer and de Ronde (2004) propounded that, fire has been used as such by people living in different ecosystems across Sub-Saharan Africa. Africa is the most fire-prone continent in the world leading some environmentalist to call Africa the ‘fire continent’, Nyamadzawo.Gwenzi et al (2013:2). Fire has been used by people in Zimbabwe long ago to prepare the land for farming, hunting and other land activities. Veld fires are becoming a problem in Zimbabwe because they occur accidentally causing disaster in the country. Nkensani (2011) notes that, veld fires can be human promoted whilst at the same time they can be natural.

One can note that, the cause of veld fires are divided into two, that is, natural causes, for example

as a result of lightning and can occur as a result of the environmental pollution and pollutants originating in human activities. However, many veld fires that happen are caused by human activities. Potgieter (2000) asserts that it is not only in inhabitable areas of boreal forest that have tall trees such as birch and spruce growing in the extremely cold climates where fires can be attributed to lightning.

This dissertation argues that 95% of these fires in Mhondoro are not natural but however, they started as a result of human activities. Human causes of veld fires can be divided into accidental and deliberate fires. Deliberate comprise of veld fires that are intentionally lit. They can be used for early burning, improving pasture land, back burning, creation of firebreaks, and land clearance for agriculture, hunting and smoking out bees during harvesting of honey, Nyamadzao (2013).

Veld fires can take place due to failure to control the fires, for instance, fireguards construction using fire as a result in veld fires. One can say this is very true when considering many poor small holders in Zimbabwe who do not have enough resources to prepare the land for farming. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (Herein after referred to as FTLRP) of 2000 resulted in an increased number of veld fire incidences, Phiri (2011:51-60). The FTLRP which was in 2000 encroached into areas that were not previously used for farming resulting in more fire incidences. This was attributed to the poor land clearance practices that were being employed by the resettled farmers.

Furthermore, one can also notes that fire has been used for hunting in Zimbabwe, long back during the time of the Koisan people and right now it is still practiced. The hunting season mainly occurs at the same time with the dry season after harvesting of crops in Zimbabwe. The

presence of haystack and crop storage structures all add to veld fire risk (Southern African Development Community (herein after referred to as SADC) Fire Management Programme 2010). After harvest, veld fires may occur because the land is dry.

In Zimbabwe, there are also places where cattle ranching is practiced and this can also lead to veld fires. Burning of grazing land is also common in Zimbabwe. According to Nyamadza (2013), fire is used to remove invasive species and moribund grasses that are unpalatable to livestock and give way to fresh growth. It is these kinds of fires that are started intentionally that often spread beyond the intended area that turn into veld fires. In Zimbabwe, fires can occur between August and October with the official fire season starting on July 1 and ending on 31 October of every year, EMA (2011). In addition, World Wide Fund (2001) propounded that the indiscriminate throwing away of lit cigarette stubs and disposal of hot ash has also been identified as origins of veld fires.

Moreover, one can also take note of climate change or weather related causes of veld fires. Waugh (2002) defines weather as the state of the atmosphere at a local level usually on a short time scale of minutes to month. Weather explains the aspects of the atmosphere that affects human activity like sunshine, cloud cover, wind, rainfall, temperature and humidity among others. Wind humidity and temperature are the main weather related causes of veld fires, Nkensani (2011). Goldammer and de Ronde (2004) pointed out that wind and direction is the most dynamic variable influencing fire. This is because wind provides oxygen to the fire front distorting the rate at which fuels dry ahead of the fire front. Temperature is also dangerous as it contributes to the risk of veld fires. Therefore in this line of thought it is clear that veld fires are a threat to the environment.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

Therefore from the above analysis of the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe one can infer that many factors are contributing to this crisis and some of the things can easily be avoided by the people. All the above factors causes serious social, economic and environmental damages. Some can also lead to the lost of lives of people, for example, drinking polluted water can cause diseases such as cholera. People can also be urged not to always cut down the trees so as to protect the environment. Veld fires can also be avoided, because EMA is educating the people in different ways. Thus one can say all the above causes of the environmental crisis can be reduced. In the next chapter I will be examining the contribution of African Traditional religion towards environmental preservation.



## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 THE CONTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to show how the Shona people are preserving the environment. Scholars such as J.S.Mbiti, Marthinus.L.Daneel, and Hubert Bucher are of the view that Africans are environmentally friendly. However, scholars such as Nisbert Taringa criticize this view to a lesser extent. Currently, there is high rate of natural resource loss and this is becoming a major threat to the lives of both humans and animals. The loss of each species comes with the loss of potential economic benefits, as well as loss of ecosystem balance, Attuquayefio.D.K (2005:1-18). Therefore, this caused more interests on issues relating to the environment in Zimbabwe. In Mhondoro-Ngezi and Mubaira, the issues of taboos and totems play a pivotal role towards environmental preservation and communal well-being. The issue of environmental conservation and management are among the most important elements of sustainable development. According to Rim-Rukeh, Ierhievwie Agbozu (2013), it is the management of valuable natural resources such as timber, fish, topsoil, minerals, forests, wildlife, wilderness, and watershed areas that enables sustainable development.

Scholars have defined the word conservation in different ways. Usher (2000:1531-35) defined conservation as the maintenance of genetic species, and ecosystem diversity in the natural abundance in which they occur. Thomas (2003:989-98) also thinks conservation is the sacrificing

of immediate rewards in return for delayed ones. Meanwhile Smith and Wishnie (2000:493-524) see conservation as actions that prevent or mitigate biodiversity loss and designed for such purpose. This research defines the term conservation as the act of keeping the environment from being damaged that is ecosphere, fisheries, water bodies, habitat and biodiversity.

### 3.2 TABOOS AS ECOLOGICAL PROTECTORS.

Taboos in Mhondoro are there to protect the environment. The word taboo is derived from the Polynesian term *tabu*, which means forbidden, R.E.Johannes (1978). Taboos are avoidance rules that forbid members of the human community from performing certain actions such as eating some kinds of food, walking or visiting some sites that are regarded as sacred, cruelty to non-human animals, and using nature's resources in an unsustainable manner, Tatira(2000:146-151). These taboos play a vital role in the preservation of the environment. These taboos control the human behaviour, thereby conserving natural resources. No matter how trivial or absurd taboos may appear to the modern mind in details, they contain within them "germinant principles of social progress and moral order" and so "the cornerstone of the whole social order", Cassier.P (1992:106). Zwinoira Tatira.L (2000:146-151) observed that taboos have been used to maintain the values and respect for human life especially the endangered, small and powerless creatures such as pythons and pangolin.

Taboos have penalties for the offenders. Misfortunes are to befall the people who violate the Shona moral code, for instance, misfortunes such as death, drought, diseases, and bad luck. In addition, i interviewed gogo Esilder Ngwino of Mhondoro on the importance of the Manhize mountain in Mhondoro and she said, *pane varume vakarasika vatema miti mugomo reManhize*

*Chikapakapa* (there are certain men who disappeared after cutting down trees in Mount Manhize). This clearly shows that trees are preserved well by this taboos. There are also taboos set to protect animals. This is supported by Michael.F.C.Bourdillon (1976) who asserts that each clan has got a totem belonging to an animal which the clan would not kill and eat. It is strongly believed that eating one's totem will result in the loss of teeth. Taboos are also being used to preserve fruit trees. According to Duri.F and Mapara.J (2007:98-111), some plant species as *muzhanje* and *mutohwe* were not used for fire arguing that they would cause a lot of smoke yet the idea was that these were fruit trees not to be destroyed. Water bodies have also been kept clean and protected by adhering to taboos regarding to the use of water (Chemhuru and Masaka 2010) An act that breaches a taboo triggers a reaction supposedly at a supernatural level. Without this fear of the unknown, young people are generally adventurous, full of doubts and questions, therefore, they end up experimenting this things. To curb the excessive desire to venture, there is a ready consequence for each prohibition. For the Shona people, the environment cannot be separated from the human community.

The role of traditional beliefs in the conservation of a large number of elements of local biodiversity, regardless of their use value, dates back to creation. (Berkes Fikret 2000). Traditional conservation ethics are capable of protecting biodiversity species in particular and the environment in general as long as the local communities have a stake in it. In fact, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (Hereinafter referred to as TEK) systems are infused with practices and concepts, and modes of teaching and learning that can be related directly and indirectly to resource stewardship and conservation at various scales. Chacon R (2012) and Krech (2005) have pointed out that the existence of traditional beliefs/ taboos does not guarantee sustainable

harvest of natural resources. Traditional Religion and cultural practices that are done in most part of African communities are environmentally friendly and sustainable, thus contributing so much to natural resources sustainability and conservation (International Institute for Environment and Development 1992). In Mhondoro, the major tenet of African religion and belief system lies in the belief that the abode of the gods and goddesses is located on rock, streams, pond, trees, land or anywhere they so desire to live within the community. Mhondoro people are environmentally friendly because they believe that the gods and goddesses may cause harm to the family if anyone commits harm both the flora and fauna. This is supported by Shastri.C.M (2002:1080-84) who asserts that, the gods avenge their anger on whoever omits or commits any flaw for which their presence forbids, hence, the cultural system holds to a very high esteem all the precepts of the laws of the gods.

### 3.3 CONSERVING WATER SOURCES

In African Traditional Religion there are certain taboos set to protect water bodies. Africans view water as something that plays a vital role for their sustenance. Water stimulates the life of both humans and non-human lives. Water can be used for many different things, for domestic use, washing, and bathing, irrigation, cooking, and drinking. To show that water is of more importance in both human life and nature, Ashwanden. Herbert (1989) asserts that, water is not only nature's life-giver, but in the widest sense, it is symbol of all the kinds of sap which not only create human life, but also help sustain it. It comes from God, nature and the creator are united in these symbols'. Moreover, to support that water is important, gogo Mirriam Zengeya of Munaku village in an interview she said, *mvura yakatikoshera, ndiwo upenyu hwedu, tinoishandisa kuita mabasa akasiyana siyana, kuumba hari dzekubikira, kubika, kuwacha nhumbi dzedu* (water is

important for us, water is our life, we use it to do different things, that is, to make clay pots for cooking, cooking, and washing our clothes). Through these taboos, water have been kept safe by the Shona throughout history. Duri and Mapara (2007) propounded that "environment management and conservation are not new to the Shona, but they have always been part of their tradition. Therefore, in this line of thought one can argue that the Shona protect water sources such as rivers, springs, dams, wetlands, wells and dams. In Mhondoro there are Ngezi and Muzvezve rivers and people are not allowed to do activities that pollute these rivers.

In addition, the Shona depend more on rivers, wells for washing, drinking, cooking, industrial and agricultural use. One environmental taboo associated with these water bodies is that, *chirongo chitema hachibvumidzwe kuchera mvura nacho nekuti tsime rinopwa* (a black pot cannot be used to fetch water, because the well will dry up) This taboo protects water sources such as rivers, dams and pools. As Ashwanden (1989) sees it, pools, springs and swamps sustain the life of the rivers and they give the vital role. Therefore, such places are regarded as an origin of the fertility of nature. Also, they safeguard human life and are thus to be especially respected as sacred places. For the Shona people, the well (*tsime/mugodhi*) is their source of drinking water that needs more reverence. Wells are also used by boys and girls as places for courtship. The boy maybe asking for some drinking water from the girl who would be fetching water and obvious this is a sign of love for the girl. Thus, amongst Shona girls, no one would want the shame of giving her potential love water using a dirty pot. This taboo is an effort to promote high cleanliness standards in the light of water sources and at the same time, preserving the natural environment. Shona taboos are simply tailored towards deterring people from engaging in unhygienic practices that may contaminate water sources.

Shona environmental awareness takes a spiritual dimension in that ancestral spirits (*midzimu*) are said to be the custodians of nature. Tangwa.G (2006:387-95) notes that, 'within the Africa Traditional outlook human beings tend to be more cosmically humble and therefore not only more respectful of other people, but also more cautious in their attitudes to plants, non-human animals, and inanimate things, and to the various invisible forces of the world'.

The Shona also believe that there are certain animals associated with wetlands for example animals such as *njuzu* (water spirits and python). The Shona believe that these animals keep these waters on behalf of *varipasi* (underworld). Wrong doers maybe drowned in the pool by these animals. They also use the water for ritual purposes, for instance, for healing purposes, can be used for cooling avenging spirits and initiating spirit possession. Therefore all this clearly shows that the importance of water is causing the Africans to preserve the environment.

### 3.4 CONSERVING ANIMALS

In Mhondoro there are certain taboos set to protect non-human animals. The Shona people believe that spirits operate in the human world through animals, birds and fish. People of Mhondoro use taboos and restrictions towards particular animals. There are animals which are considered as totemic animals, therefore these animals are not to be killed, for example, lion(*shumba*), elephant(*nzou*), buffalo(*nyati*), monkey(*shoko*), fish(*hove*), crocodile(*garwe*), hippopotamus(*mvuu*), antelope(*shava*) and so on. Wild pigs are also important in Mhondoro. Taringa Nisbert (2006) notes that the appearance of wild pigs in the vicinity was a sign of the presence of *vekunyikadzimu/mhondoro* in an area. Taringa adds on that an attempt to harm or kill these animals in the royal family attracted serious misfortunes such as drought, pests and human/

livestock diseases. Taringa (2006), link the Shona myth of origin with these totemic animals. He notes that, the animals related to aquatic life are associated with the beginning of the Karanga Shona, as a result the Mwedzi myth of origin is often associated with the Karanga. They trace their origin from *dzivaguru* (the great pool). So each aquatic species is believed to be their progenitor (*mutupo*/totemic-animal). Other Shona groups claim their beginnings in the terrestrial region. For example, the Mbire Shona have a creation myth centered on the great monkey (*shoko*). So the different clans derive their primogenitors from terrestrial species. (Nyanjeka. Tumani. M 1996). The people of Mhondoro believe that if certain totemic animals are killed, the family can easily be affected by mysterious diseases and wounds. In addition, the Shona who share the same totem consider themselves as relatives. Members of the clan are not allowed to eat their totemic animals. Jah Prayzah's song which says, *kana wandida here, ndodya mutupo wandinoera ndopera meno* (if you love me, i can eat my totemic animal and lose teeth) clearly shows that animals are of more importance in the African Traditional Religion. Sekuru Chidyamafuta Munaku of Munaku village said, *hazvitenderwi kudya mhuka yemutupo waunoera nokuti chitendero chedu chinotiudza kuti unobva mazino ese mukanwa* (it is forbidden to eat your totemic animal because according to our culture one will lose his/her teeth) (Interview 2019). Moreover, if one breaks the taboo may experience some other harm, for instance, Alec.J.C.Pongweni (1996:9) asserts that, the totemic animal has a taboo attached to it or to parts of its carcass such that the totem bearer is forbidden to eat. Infringement of this taboo has certain concomitant magical sanctions, such as loss of teeth or leprosy (*maperembudzi*).

Totemic animals are killed by the Shona for special rituals or their skins are used for ceremonial dress for chiefs or when diviners perform rituals for public interest. Totemic animals have

mythical and religious significance. Some animals which are not totemic animals are associated with bad omen, for example, tortoise, hyena, owl and these animals are used by witches during the night. However, sometimes these animals are killed in large quantities. In Mhondoro, there is Mount Manhize and it is believed that this is the place many wild animals live. Therefore, at this juncture, one can infer that the Shona have a positive attitude towards nature because of how they conserve the animals. Traditionally, religion plays a vital role in linking people to the natural world.

For the Africans, religion has been a source of environmental conservation and protection, although environmental exploitation exists at a lesser extent. The Africans understand their relationship with the environment. By virtue of the fact that the Africans recognize that spirits inhabit nature, there is the tendency to nurture and take care of it. Grim.John.A (2001) asserts that, “to analyse religion as a separate system of beliefs and ritual practices apart from subsistence, kinship, language, governance and landscape is to misunderstand indigenous religion.” Therefore, the respect of the environment still subsists among the African people. Hence, Grim(2001:44-60) purports that, “what is evident, however, is wherever indigenous people have endured, they have maintained a loving experience of place and an understanding that spiritual forces capable of leading humans into both utilitarian and self-understandings abide in all of these places.”

Taringa observed that Traditional African Religious cultural animals and birds are given prominence in spiritual, sacred, health, soteriological and identity matters. Taringa considers the meaning of specific animal symbols in Shona Traditional Religion with reference to belief in *mashura* (omens). This belief revolves around specific animals being connected with bringing



messages of life, death, social customs and practices and also cases where some animals are actually believed to be deities. Furthermore, there are also snakes which are of more significance in Mhondoro. There are snakes that are preserved by the Shona because of their taboos and belief systems, for example snakes like python, double headed snake. In Mhondoro, python is considered as of more significance because of its medicinal purpose of healing (the Shona use its fat for healing the sick). The python cannot be killed by the Shona even if they see it near their homestead, its appearance signifies trouble. Taringa purports that, no matter which snake a person saw it was not supposed to move and was supposed to be straight and still. If the snake tried to run away or become violent it was definitely a misfortune, probably death or serious illness of some close relatives. The snake's appearance sometimes maybe a sign that the ancestors are not happy. The other snake found in Mhondoro is the double headed snake (*sukuviri*) and this snake is associated with bad omen, it cannot be killed or harm as it is believed that a relative can even die. It is also believed that if a newly married woman dream of any snake of the above it means she is pregnant.

There is a communitarian nature in African Traditional Religion, this is clearly shown through Mbiti's contention (1969), 'I am because we are', and this characterizes the relationship between the individual person and the environment. There are also birds which are important in Mhondoro. For instance, eagle and owl. The owl is closely linked with witchcraft activities, the appearance of an owl is a sign that there is a witch near one's homestead. Chitando Ezra (1996:61) notes that, "birds are closer and nearer to the sky and are regarded as part of sacred manifestations." Thus one can consider birds as important animals.

### 3.5 CONSERVATION OF THE LAND

The Shona of Mhondoro, just like many Africans believe that the land is sacred. For them the land is ancestral. The land is sacred because that is where they bury their dead in the graves. It is the abode of the dead, when the Shona people are counting the people, they also count those who are dead, that is, *varipasi* (those in the underworld). The land is owned by the chiefs and the ancestral spirits. Taringa notes that, as a result the land is personified in sayings such as *pasi ratsamwa*, *pasi panodya* (the land is angry, the land can kill). The African land belongs to the unborn, the living and the dead. The land is located to the people by the chiefs, for example, chiefs Nyika, Mutemeri, Nherera are the ones who distribute the land to the people in Mhondoro-Ngezi. The land is considered as a precious gift to humanity.

Land is viewed as something important by the Shona people to the extent that it cannot be transferred to another and also it cannot be sold. Taringa gave example of a taboo that forbids commoners to eat the flesh of an ant bear because it burrows the land. Another example is that the chief's household reserves the flesh of the side of an elephant on which it lies when it drops dead for consumption, Hubert Bucher (1980). The Shona believe that the land is owned by the ancestors, therefore if they do not treat the land well they believe that they make the ancestors angry and some misfortune such as epidemics and drought might affect the community.

Moreover, the issue of Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe clearly shows that the land is of more importance to the Africans. Land Apportionment Act of 1930 barred the Africans from owning the land outside the reserves. The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 was a segregationist measure that governed land allocation and acquisition prior to independence. The Africans were

deprived their land by the Europeans. Palmer(1977:216) notes that, Land Apportionment Act was a formal adoption of the South African Land Act of 1913 and its informing racist Land Policy towards Africans who believed ‘that the land was theirs until they were deprived of it by the European and now the European is making them pay for what by right is still their property’. This Act was replaced by the Land Tenure Act of 1969. The purpose of the land tenure Act was to ensure that each race shall have its own area, neither race may own or occupy land in the area of the other race, except by permit, which shall be issued or refused by a minister of Government when it seems in his opinion desirable. The issue of land Reform Programme clearly shows that Africans cannot be separated from land. Land Reform programme introduced in 1980 benefited many African Shona and they were happy because they wanted that land for farming. Francis.T.Gonese (2002) notes that, Land Reform Programme of 1980 aims to redress historical social imbalances in land ownership and enable the majority indigenous black population to play its commensurate role in the country’s agricultural production.

### 3.6 CONSERVATION OF MOUNTAINS, FORESTS AND TREES

#### 3.6.1 MOUNTAIN AND FORESTS

The Shona people of Mhondoro believe that mountains and forests are important because they believe that, that is where the spirits reside in. Mostly there are sacred groves. According to *Merriam Webster Dictionary* 1999, the word sacred means regarded with great respect and reverence by a particular religion, group, or individual. In sacred groves, that is where the chiefs

are buried. These places are also habitat for ancestral spirits. People need forests for good health, forests take carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and generate oxygen which is a requirement for the survival of human beings. Forests are vital for both human lives and for the survival of other non-human lives that rely on the forest environment for flourishing and their survival. Forests have special significance for many African Shona. Forests are respected because of the Shona beliefs that spirits reside in mountains and forests.

In Mhondoro-Ngezi there is a mountain called Manhize (Chikapakapa) which is considered to be sacred, people rarely hunt in this mountain because they are afraid of disappearing. Even one cannot easily cut down trees in this mountain. In an interview a 95 year old grandmother, gogo Munaku Mujiki on the importance of this mountain said, *gomo reManhize rinoera nekuti dzimwe nguva tinotomboona muchipfuta moto, pane murungu akawira mutsime riri mugomo iri ndiko saka richiera-era* (mount Manhize is sacred because sometimes we see burning fire, there is a white man who died in a well in this mountain, that is why this mountain is sacred). Moreover, important rituals are done in this mountain, for example rainmaking ceremonies led by African practitioners such as mbuya Chimuti who is a n'anga (witchdoctor). Therefore that is why mountain, forests are preserved. At this juncture one can clearly argue that mountain, forests are of more importance to the African Shona of Mhondoro.

### 3.6.2 TREES

In an interview with Sekuru Ngwino Jeranyama of Munaku village on matters concerning trees, he said, *imwe miti ine gomarara haitenderwi kutema nekuti munogona kurasikirwa nemwanakomana mumhuri yenyu* (there are certain trees which are not allowed to be cut down

because a family might lose a son). The Shona also have taboos concerning the cutting down of certain trees. They believe that all big tree belong to the ancestral spirits. This is supported by Daneel M.L (2001:90) among the Karanga Shona. He notes that, virtually all large trees (*miti mikuru*) were protected as they belonged to the samarombo-ancestors who were believed to dwell in the tree branches. There are certain trees they use when performing rituals of bringing back home the ancestor, for instance, trees such as *muhacha* (*curatellifolia*). *Muhacha* tree is also important in the sense that the Shona perform their rituals under this trees, for example, rainmaking ceremonies are performed under *muhacha* tree. *Muzeze* is also another tree with religious significance. *Muzeze*'s branches are used after the burial of the dead for ritual purification. Fruit trees such as *muonde* and *muzhanje* are not allowed to cut as they are meeting places for rain-making ceremonies. These trees can only be cut with the ritual permission from sacred practitioners/ religious leaders such as chiefs and n'anga. Therefore, in this line of thought it is clear that the African Shona of Mhondoro preserve the environment.

### 3.7 CONCLUSION

The focus of this chapter was to examine the contribution of African Traditional Religion towards environmental preservation. The introduction of taboos and totems and some traditional belief systems are helping in Mhondoro to protect the environment. Taboos play a vital role in the preservation of the environment. This is because they are used to protect water bodies, animals, land, mountains, forests and trees. Africans view water as important, that is why they are trying to protect water bodies by using taboos. Water stimulates the lives of both human and non-human lives. The issue of totemic animals is also protecting animals, as one cannot kill, eat his or her totemic animal. This shows that they are related to animals. This chapter has clearly

shown that the land is important by the fact that it belongs to the living, unborn and the dead. Mountains, forests and trees are also preserved by certain taboos. Thus one can infer that African Shona of Mhondoro-Ngezi and Mubaira are contributing towards environmental conservation

## CHAPTER 4

### AN EVALUATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION TO POVERTY REDUCTION IN THE LIGHT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

After the research and findings in chapter two and three on the contribution of African Traditional Religion towards the environmental preservation, in this Chapter i am evaluating the contribution of ATR towards poverty reduction in the light of environmental preservation. This chapter clearly shows that the Shona of Mhondoro preserve the environment because of their taboos and totems. The Shona have taboos which protect water bodies, mountains, forests, trees, land, animals, birds and snakes. Therefore, water bodies are treated well, the land is believed to belong to the unborn, living and the dead, and there are totemic animals which are preserved and trees and mountains which are protected well. The preservation of trees by the Shona helps to reduce poverty in the sense that they get medicines and fruits from these trees. Sometimes they sell these fruits and medicines to obtain money for household goods. The land is used for agriculture, thus one can note that this helps in the reduction of poverty. This chapter argues that some African Traditional Religious beliefs and practices helps to reduce poverty whilst others do not.

The rural poor often depend on biodiversity for a wide range of natural resources and ecosystem services essential for their well-being. Environmental conservationists, development practitioners and policy makers often have differing opinions on how-and whether to link environmental conservation with poverty reduction. Fisher and Christopher (2006) illustrates the magnitude of the overlap between biological priority sites and poverty in an attempt to indicate key sites where

win-win outcomes might be achieved. They realized that the link between environmental conservation and poverty is great and needs to be acknowledged. Sunderlin.W (2007) found that there is an important overlap between extreme poverty and key areas of global biodiversity.

#### 4.2 HOW IS THE PRESERVATION OF MOUNTAIN, FORESTS AND TREES HELPING IN THE REDUCTION OF POVERTY IN MHONDORO?

The Shona have always considered the environment as very important and inseparable part of the human community. The Shona emphasizes on the quotation of J.S.Mbiti, "I am because we are", this characterizes the link between the individual and his/her society. Tatira (2000) rightly notes that, "the Shona people realize the importance of preserving the environment as a factor in overall development. This knowledge is manifested in some of the taboos that control child behaviour in relation to the environment". Thus, Shona taboos promotes good human relation and good relations between humanity and the environment. The Shona believe that preserving trees is saving lives as people breathe in oxygen from these trees.

Shona taboos are helping in reducing poverty. These taboos are important in curtailing environmental problems that are human induces. Hence, Shona environmental taboos have an ethical import that is unconsciously passed from generation to generation. For instance, the Shona believe that, *ukatema muhacha mvura haizonaye*, which means, "If you cut down the muhacha tree, it will not rain". I think this taboo of not cutting down the muhacha tree (*parinari curatellifolia*) is based on the view that this tree produces fruits which are very rich in nutrients to both human beings and animals, especially during drought times. According to Duri and Mapara(2007), taboos like that of cutting down of muhacha tree, is still effective up until contemporary times because the Shona people believe that life should be respected, especially



that of non-human creatures that depend on wild fruits for nourishment. The view that fruits from muhacha tree helps during the times of drought is very true. This is because of the drought of 2008 that happened. People had nothing to eat in Mhondoro, they were starving as the economy was hard. This is supported by mbuya Getrude

Hinda of Murambwa village who said, *ndaifumobata jongwe murongwe kunonhonga chakata/hacha mugore ra2008 kuti mhuri iwane chokudya* (i used to woke up early in the morning in the year 2008, looking for *hacha* fruits so that my family will have something to eat). The people were relying on these fruits for their survival.

Moreover, for Duri and Mapara (2007), indigenous fruit trees such as muzhanje (vapaka kirkiana), the mutamba (strychnos species), the mutohwe (azanza garkaena) and the munhengeni (ximena), are not used as firewood. The elders explain that the reasons for not cutting down these trees are because they produce bad smoke, and the smoke can choke. However, for Duri and Mapara, these explanations were coined in order to protect these tree species and ensure a continuous supply of fruits that provided the indigenous people with food and natural sugar, which were important for their health. Taboos associated with the conservation of natural vegetation are there for the benefit of present and future generations. Thus one can note that this is helping in the reduction of poverty in Mhondoro.

Rural income and livelihood strategies are mainly based on biodiversity, hence WRL (2005) suggests that wild income generally contributes between 15% and 40% of total family income either cash or in kind. In Zimbabwe, Cavendish.W (2000), shows that wild income from ecosystems (wild fruits, timber, thatching grass, fodder) contributed 35% of total household income. Focusing on cash income, Lapeyre.R (2011) similarly gives evidence that revenues from

nature-based tourism outperform local farm labour wages for many rural households in marginal areas and support a great number of family dependents. As an illustration Campbell (2002) find that goods and services from ecosystems contribute to two thirds of family income in rural Zimbabwe: 30% from agricultural income from crops and home gardens, 21% from livestock rearing and 15% from wild products from woodlands.

#### 4.3 ANIMALS

In Shona societies, it is violating animal rights to kill, hunt or hurt a totemic animal. The Shona concept of totems is meant to protect and manage the environment. For instance, if one's totemic animal is a lion (shumba) then he/she is forbidden from consuming any animal from the cat family. The observance of taboos promotes a virtuous life that fosters a desirable environmental ethic, while the breaking of taboos leads the moral agent to a vicious life that disregards not only the moral standing of the environment, but also its sustainable, Duri and Mapara (2007).

The World Institute Report (2005), demonstrates that the rural households derive a significant share of their total income from ecosystem goods and services. Such nature-based income, referred to as "environmental income", is the value derived- in cash or direct use- from ecosystem goods and services and is comprised of two components. "Wild income", generated from wild or uncultivated natural systems, such as forests, marine and inland fisheries, reefs, wetlands, and grasslands, and 'agricultural income' from agro-ecosystems, that is, all agricultural lands such as croplands, pastures, or orchards. In Mhondoro the Shona get fish from Mamina dam and this is helping in the reduction of poverty as they sell some fish to get money for other purposes. For instance, Simba Chinguwa , a student at Musinambi Secondary School in

Mhondoro said, ndinobhadhara chikoro nemari yandinowana pandinotengesa hove(i pay my school fees using the money i get from selling fish).

#### 4.4 LAND

Environmental conservation plays a vital role for well-being. Ash and Jenkins (2007) precisely analyse the importance of biodiversity in the supply of ecosystem services, which in turn contribute to human well-being. Firstly, if the land is conserved well, it is essential to food provision and food security through the facilitated access to a diverse range of locally produced agricultural and wild foodstuffs (including those that supply micronutrients and flavorings), thus maintaining a balanced and satisfying diet and enhancing adaption and resistance (resilience) of crops as an insurance against future risks and changing conditions, Ricketts (2004). Secondly, Ricketts asserts that, biodiversity also supports food production through soil formation and land productivity, pest and disease control in agricultural systems, and pollination. Ricketts found that the presence of forests-based wild pollinators increased coffee yields in Costa Rica by 20% and improved its quality for farms located less than one kilometer from the forest. Elsewhere O'Farrell et al (2007) suggested that biodiversity increases land productivity in semi-arid rangelands.

#### 4.5 WATER BODIES

There are taboos set by the African Shona to preserve water bodies. Chapter three have clearly demonstrated that water is treated with caution by the Shona. These taboos are helping to preserve water in Mhondoro. Water is used for many different things that is for domestic use, washing, bathing, irrigation, and so on. The people i interviewed explained that water is of more

importance to them and they preserve it. The Shona, just like the people of other religions value water. The fact that a person is forbidden to use a black pot to fetch water shows that Africans preserve the environment. This taboo prevents people from polluting water bodies such as rivers, dams and pools. As Ashwanden (1989) sees it, "pools, springs and swamps sustain the life of the rivers and they give the vital water. Therefore, such places are regarded as an origin of the fertility of nature.

Also, they safeguard human life and are thus to be especially respected as sacred places". This taboo of a black pot simply helps to promote high hygienic standards in the light of water sources. I can say this taboo is helping to reduce poverty in the sense that people in Mhondoro are always drinking and using clean water for their activities, thereby helping to curb diseases such as cholera which causes people to spend a lot of money for medication. In Mhondoro there are no cases of people dying as a result of cholera. This therefore clearly shows that the contribution of ATR to the environment is reducing poverty.

However, to some extent it is shrouded in obscurity whether water bodies are conserved for real by the Shona or it is just disguise. This is because whole herds of cattle are dying in the Mhondoro-Ngezi area. Dr Tony Monda (2018), wrote that, the cattle are said to display accumulated phlegm foaming at the nostrils and saliva frothing at the mouth, followed by death within eight to 10 days. This calamity has confounded villagers and livestock farmers alike. The areas of concern, where this sudden strange contagion is said to be haunting the cattle include Kadane, Murambwa, Chizinga, Gora, Mamina, Mubaira, St Micheal's, Mandedza, Chitani and Zimindo. To support this, I conducted some interviews in Chitani village on issues concerning the death of animals and the villagers confirmed that they are forced to slaughter their cattle by

this disease. *Onias Chokubata said, chirwere chakabata mombe dzedu chinotirwadza nekuti tirikutengesa mombe hombe chaidzo nemari iri pasi, bhuru rinogona kutengeswa ne60 bond chaiyo* (the disease affecting our cattle is hurting us because we are selling our large cattle at cheap price, a Brahman can be sold at 60 bond). Tony argued that the three main possible sources of these diseases are contaminated water, common at this time of the year, unclean cattle pens, toxic paddocks and, possibly, seeding lantana camara, a hardy, noxious plant which causes poisoning in cattle and which should be eliminated by all possible means when found near paddocks, kraals and homestead. The causes of the diseases are not clear but i can deduce that contaminated water is also contributing as some people wash in rivers although this is to a lesser extent. Mhondoro farmers are now left with few or no cattle for farming and this is increasing poverty. Considering the death of animals in Mhondoro it is possible to infer that the Shona attitudes to the environment are both ecologically responsible and harmful.

#### 4.6 CONCLUSION

Therefore, in conclusion ATR's attitudes to the environment helps in the reduction of poverty in Mhondoro Ngezi. Rural income and livelihood strategies are mainly based on biodiversity that is why the Shona in Mhondoro protect the environment. The poor people completely depend on the environment for their survival. This chapter has demonstrated that, farming activities are essential to food provision and food security. The Shona get medicines and tea leaves from the trees and from harvested plants. Fruits from trees are helping the Shona to a large extent. All in all ATR's practices are helping in the reduction of poverty in Mhondoro, although herds of cattle are dying in Mhondoro.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5.1 CONCLUSION

This dissertation has demonstrated the contribution of African Traditional Religion to the environmental crisis as key to poverty reduction.

Having analyzed the environmental crisis in Mhondoro, I can deduce that deforestation, air pollution, water pollution, land pollution are the main causes of this crisis. People are cutting down trees for different purposes, for example, for timber, firewood and medicines and this is contributing to the environmental crisis. Deforestation is an issue of great concern in Zimbabwe. In Mhondoro, people are struggling to the extent that they are selling firewood to get money for household goods. Therefore this is the main cause of deforestation. The fact that citizens are suffering from the current economic situation is leading to more environmental degradation. Poor people are forced to depend on natural resources only because they cannot afford to buy goods from the shops as things are very expensive. Small scale-mining activities are also contributing to the environmental crisis. Moreover, because of ZIMPLATS mine there is more air pollution caused by gold mining, platinum and cement production. Water pollution is also contributing to the environmental crisis. Mining activities distort the color of water and also industrial activities, that is, when the water is mixed with acid neutral and alkaline. Mining activities can also cause land degradation. Several land spaces can be damaged during extraction and mining activities. Therefore to a greater extent the environmental crisis in Mhondoro was caused by human activities.

As noted by Tatira (2000) in Chapter 3, taboos have been used to maintain the values and respect

for human life especially the endangered, small and powerless creatures such as pythons and pangolins. Taboos have punishments to those who do not follow them, therefore almost everyone follow these taboos. It has been shown in Chapter 3 that there are certain taboos set to protect water bodies, land, animals, mountain, forests and trees. There are taboos that are effectively protecting water bodies, for instance, that one which says, one cannot fetch water using a black pot. This taboo is only trying to keep the water bodies safe since water is very important. More so, there is the issue of totemic animals. The Africans believe that if totemic animals are killed, something might befall the family. Totemic animals are only killed by the Shona for special rituals and sometimes when they want skins for ceremonial dress for chiefs. The land is used with caution by the Shona as they use it for farming which benefit them a lot. Lastly, trees are preserved because they produce fruits and the leaves are sometimes used for herbs and medicines. Trees can only be cut down with the ritual permission from sacred practitioners/religious leaders such as chiefs and n'anga. Thus one can infer that the Shona are environmentally friendly.

After the research and findings in chapter 2 and 3 I can deduce that ATR's attitudes to nature helps in the reduction of poverty. It has been clearly demonstrated by this Chapter that the Shona care for the environment because of their taboos and issue of totemic animals. The rural poor of Mhondoro depend on natural resources for their survival. Environmentalists, policy makers and development practitioners often have different views on whether and how to connect poverty reduction and environmental conservation, but however, many different scholars mentioned in Chapter 4 realized that the issue of environmental conservation and poverty reduction are of great importance. The preservation of trees, water bodies, land and animals helps in the reduction

of poverty. Trees are used for herbs and medicines, villagers are getting fruits from these trees, for instance, muhacha fruits helped people during the drought season of 2008. If the land is preserved well, the land becomes suitable for agriculture which benefits many people in the community. The preservation of animals and water bodies is a benefit to the community. However, the fact that animals are dying in Mhondoro becomes shrouded in obscurity, whether water bodies are really preserved or not.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAYFORWARD

It is highly proposed that there is a solid need to upgrade the living conditions of all the people while conserving a good environment in which natural resources are not exploited and excessive pollution is not produced. For this to be done, there is need for the government to meet the needs of the country's poor people, because unless their needs are met there can be no comprehensive sustainability. This country does not consists of enough resources to support everybody at the level of use as enjoyed in continents such as Europe. However, the right policy exist to decrease these levels of use without concurrently decreasing the quality of life. Sustainable development must improve the quality of human lives. Major efforts must be taken to avoid the excessive use of resources. The lives of the people must be maintained by the preservation of natural resources. This can be as a result of changing one's practices and attitudes at the level of local community. Once attitudes have transferred at the individual and community levels, then the government plans can be constructed that safeguard the environmental preservation. If every individual behave as a person, in good relation with creation, thus not only uplifting creation but can also see creation as a totality, not just a collection of unrelated things which are good, bad or indifferent. Human beings have a great responsibility for God's creation. IUCN reports that African religion can help to provide direction and motivation by forming new values that would motivate individual responsibility towards nurturing the environment.



## 5.4 CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted to explain the contribution of ATR to the environment as key to poverty reduction, in the context of Mhondoro-Ngezi and Mhondoro Mubaira. The focus of this paper was to assess the significance of ATR's beliefs and practices, that is, taboos and totems in the conservation of natural resources in Mhondoro. Totems and taboos have helped to conserve natural resources. ATR's belief systems have helped and contributed effectively and immensely to the reduction of poverty. For instance, the prohibition of killing of animals and eating of crocodiles, frogs, pythons that are totems by both those of Ngezi and Mubaira. Cutting down of trees in these two areas is not allowed because of the belief that the gods reside in the trees. Thus one can conclude that ATR's belief systems, taboos and totems are helping in natural resource conservation, thereby reducing poverty in the area.

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## ***INTERVIEWS***

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**Chokubata Onias, Chitani Village, Mhondoro-Ngezi, 25 February 2019.**

**Hinda Getrude, Murambwa Village, Mhondoro-Ngezi, 16February 2019.**

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**Shoko Patronella, Harare Central Business District, 4January 2019.**

**Zengeya Mirriam, Munaku Village, Mhondoro-Ngezi, 19December 2018.**