

**Book Review, *The Environmental Questions in Global Economics: The African Story***

**Book Review**

<b>Book Author:</b> Adela Barungi
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The book “The Environmental Questions in Global Economics: The African Story” was written by Adela Barungi. The book focuses on global economics and trade policies while revealing the extent to which it has affected the African continent. The author analyzed the current crises of the environment in Africa in the historical processes of Western exploitation and underdevelopment of the continent. The author argued that Africa had assumed an environment greatly shaped by Western values. To concretize what is discussed in the book, Uganda is taken as an example of a third-world country that is environmentally affected by global economic and trade policies.

The author keenly begins by tracing the roots of the environmental crisis in Africa to Western rationality and how it has shaped the whole concept of modernization. The author pinpointed that the impact of global warming is already being felt in the Rwenzori Mountains. Citing the Washington-based World Watch Institute, it is reported that the Speke Glacier on the Rwenzori Mountains is receding due to global warming caused by the greenhouse effect. There is a fear that if the trend continues, various mountain plant and animal species may face extinction. Other major climatic effects associated with the country's global warming phenomenon include droughts, floods, and outbreaks of diseases.

The author believes that global warming is largely contributed by the increase in the amounts of ozone-destroying chemicals in the country. A large percentage of these chemicals is said to come

from the use of imported second-hand chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) emitting vehicles, refrigerators, and other equipment of more or less similar features. The consumption of dumped ozone-depleting substances is mostly noted among the urban middle class. Similarly, the author argued that with the implementation of international commercialization policies, export trade is virtually unregulated. Moreover, the author noted that the country's aquatic and terrain species are at stake. The decline of fish stocks and the depletion of some fish species in the country's water bodies are particularly of concern. Barbus, one of Lake Victoria's popular species, has virtually disappeared while others like Nile Perch and Tilapia are on threat of extinction. The author contends that the rise in international demand has resulted in the establishment of fish processing factories on the shores of Lake Victoria. The author is of the view that this is mainly being done to facilitate easy exploitation.

The author also believes that unregulated trade activities have contributed to the loss of animal species. These include; the rhinoceros species that have become extinct due to international demand for horns, the elephants, which have dramatically reduced in number due to demand for ivory, and the parrots reported being in high demand in Dubai. Similarly, over 50 trees are being cut a week for making drums and artifacts that are in high demand in Europe. The activity is even more disastrous because such a tree species would take up to 100 years to regenerate. When all conditions are favorable, it will take up to 28 years to mature.

Under urban and industrial pollution, the issue of population, industrial growth, and associated effects are discussed. Uganda's urban population is reported to rise at a very high rate of 6.33 percent per year. Official statistics indicate that Uganda's population growth rate is currently at 3.32 percent (The World Bank, 2020). This implies that the urban population growth rate is nearly double the overall countrywide annual growth rate. That means the garbage generated by this population is also rising. Open dumping of waste is particularly a threat to the urban environment. The disposal of plastics, for instance, is not only toxic to the environment but has also significantly contributed to the flooding of the city drainage system, particularly in the slum and market areas.

The author is skeptical of the rate at which Uganda's industrial sector is growing. The growth, geared by economic liberalization programs, is much faster than the capacity to control its

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environmental side effects. The book also pinpoints that importing raw materials and other manufactured products has increased the rate of pollution. Most painful, some imports are directly toxic industrial products, such as dry cells, paints, and lubricants, which have often been banned in the exporting countries because they are environmentally harmful. Their packaging containers often do not indicate any procedures for disposal. These are carelessly disposed of on the open ground, picked, and used in households without being decontaminated. Similarly, several million liters of oil are imported, and a large percentage is disposed of as waste without proper refining.

In addition to oil disposal, the author has noted a growing problem of industrial pollution on water bodies. For clarity, Lake Victoria (Uganda's largest lake) is taken as an example. The pollution of Lake Victoria is mainly attributed to the rapid urbanization and industrial transformation that the lake region has experienced over the years. The author listed several pollutants from the lake, including germinating barley, caustic soda, alcohol, and other organic and untreated toxic waste from brewing industries. Others were wastewater and bleaching agents used as dyeing and printing materials originating from textile industries. Such materials were considered to contain pollutants that cause cancer and other health hazards.

Moreover, the author contends that Western rationality has reinforced the perception of how nature should be used and even tamed, thus influencing Africans' attitude to the environment. The author's views match that of Brockington (2002), who contends that Western vision of the environment is based on the premise that local (African) communities have destroyed or are destroying the environment. The book indicates that modern sciences and other related factors reinforce Western hostility to nature. This impacted the traditional understanding of humanity and nature as inseparable; hence any attempt to explain the world meant viewing humanity apart from it. Furthermore, the scientific era is discussed as the factor that reinforced the mechanization of the earth by viewing the universe as a machine and human beings as indispensable components to operate it.

Regarding the concept of modernization, the author has shown how Africa is integrated into a Western-oriented system of development. The author shows how Africa's natural or organic economy is being transformed into a Western modern or inorganic economy. The author has revealed the various ways by which Africa is forced to adopt the values that define the

progressing countries of the West, emphasizing that "implicitly, development through modernization implies westernization." Regarding the environment, modernization means abandoning the traditionally environmentally friendly methods of conservation of economics and wholesale adoption of major values that have defined the developed countries even when they have been highly extractive in terms of the environment. Sungusia (2018) indicated that it is unhelpful to think of Western science as universal. This is because knowledge is usually partial and linked to the contexts in which it is created (Nightingale, 2003). Local or indigenous knowledge is always good for some reasons, including building strong local institutions for environmental management (Klooster, 2002; Sungusia, 2018).

Similarly, Kelbessa (2015) emphasized that, unlike mainstream Western ethics, African environmental ethics recognize the interconnectedness and interdependence of all beings and the more than human world. Thus, a plural approach to knowledge by which indigenous and Western ways of knowing are given equal emphasis and recognition. The factors of backwardness, lack of confidence in the indigenous institutions, and the wave of colonization, therefore, expose Africa to the impacts of the imposed modern economy on nature's economy.

Moreover, the author has attempted and successfully managed to draw a clear link between trends in resource extraction from Africa and consumption in rich countries. The latter engaged in resource-intensive consumption at the expense of large resource-intensive production as finished-industrial products to the third-world countries, including Africa. This trend implies traditional exports and intensive cash crop production on the exporters' side, in the unexploited places of Africa where came an intensive use of hazardous chemicals and the conversion of natural habitats for agriculture.

Meanwhile, the same people are propagating the self-contradictory move in global cleanup measures. For instance, there is a vivid contradiction in the concept of emissions trading. Under this trade, a country whose emission falls below its treaty limit can sell credit for its remaining emissions allotment to other countries. Though not binding for the third world nation's emissions, the treaty does not set limits to the type of investment (which should aim at reducing greenhouse emissions) by developed countries into developing countries. In any case, it allows

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the developed countries to invest in third-world countries rather than in improved technologies that would allow them to invest at home.

The author established that a condition of perpetual economic dependence and socio-cultural breakdown is responsible for fueling Africa's environmental crisis. This is a result of the inhibitive and retrogressive character of the West, which suffocated, distorted, and relocated African economies. This was quickly made possible by introducing the global monetary economy aided by resource-extractive technologies. The African continent is said to suffer from the new system in different ways, whereby the harmony between human communities in Africa and nature is distorted, and industrialized countries continue to dominate the extraction and plunder of Africa's environment.

Regarding overconsumption in the rich countries, the author shows how consumerism in the rich industrial countries became a factor that has fueled the demand for resources in Africa. George (1992) established that while third-world countries' debt is not the sole cause of global environmental degradation, the pressure resulting from indebtedness is a major contributing factor. The author contends that the crisis is further fueled by Structural Adjustment Programs that were intended to facilitate easy debt servicing through increased foreign exchange rates. This means that their insistence on export production through trade and market liberalization implies that African countries increase the rate of natural resource destruction to pay the debt while, at the same time, debt servicing has worsened the problem of poverty. This has, in turn, led to further degradation caused by increasing population pressure on the environment.

### **Conclusions**

Throughout the book, the author has given some warnings that can be considered part of the conclusion. Nevertheless, the author based her conclusion mainly on the last chapter. The author recommends the conservation that lies in endogenization: reawaking African rationality, including the traditional ecological knowledge, and evolving an endogenous approach to development. The reviewers believe that it should not be considered that Western science is bad/terrible or that local knowledge is superior. This implies that the blend and reinforcements between the two are required. Focusing on the influence of Western rationality on Africa's environment, the author recommends reawakening traditional ecological knowledge. The author emphasized how the environment was deeply embedded in traditional knowledge throughout the

history and culture of Africa. In this knowledge, the environment is not a separate component to be considered only when a new project is proposed. Instead, the natural environment provides a means for living without destroying it. This is because conservation has been practiced for centuries and since immemorial. Since African agricultural systems have been sustained through such intimate knowledge of the environment and its behavior, the author is optimistic that the indigenous systems of sciences and technology, if appropriately applied where the Western has failed or at times, where necessary, blended with the modern, conservation is still possible.

Moreover, the author insists that traditional ecological knowledge can be more effective since it still forms a significant part of life and hence a need to promote it through African research centers. African's unique conservation methods, such as using indigenous anti-erosion ridges, traditional manures, crop rotation, mixed cropping, small dams on valley floors, planting of trees associated with different soil types, etc., have to be revived and promoted. Several other studies insist on the same, given the crucial indigenous environmental conservation knowledge inherent in most African communities (Lssozi, 2012; Kanene, 2016). It is widely acknowledged that including indigenous people and local communities in environmental governance and drawing from their knowledge improves conservation, restoration, and the sustainable use of nature, which benefits society at large (UN, 2021).

The author proposes a philosophy of living better on less regarding the culture of consumerism and its environmental impacts in terms of excessive demand for resources and throw-away goods. Under this philosophy, society has to undergo a fundamental change from a materialist lifestyle to a less resource-expensive lifestyle. Since it is clear that the present lifestyle can only be kept going at the expense of the environment and the hogging of other economies, conservation means a clear need for change. The author thus emphasizes the need for the traditional African consumption lifestyle to replace modern lifestyles since the latter promotes only well-being and material cravings.

On the personal level, the author emphasized the need for a change in attitudes and nature, i.e., the greening of attitudes. Such a view considers that high consumption is not an indication of wealth; similarly, living simply does not indicate poverty. Hence, sufficiency has to be the guiding principle of consumption. Based on this understanding, the book reviewers believe that

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Africans in rural and urban areas should consider investing in technologies and lifestyles that are simple and environmentally friendly. This may include, for example, opting for bicycle riding than second-hand vehicles that are good emitters of greenhouse gases. They may also consider investing in farming practices geared at growing and consuming more organic produce than inorganic fertilizers and chemicals-rich produce, investing in clean cooking energies technologies, creative kitchens, and other practices to conserve the environment. The author's approval of the philosophy of living better on less comes from the fact that living such a lifestyle makes life less expensive and reduces the pressure and strain on the environment so that both humanity and nature co-exist in harmony. The greening of attitudes approach should base on the moral standing that all members of the earth's community must be treated with equal respect because they have an equal intrinsic value.

Aware of the rate of pollution in Uganda, the author is warning about the pending problem of water pollution, acidity, and eventually scarcity. The fishing industry is already beginning to feel this problem, whose production is fast declining. The author wonders whether the country has to wait for economic growth before it can clean it up.

### **Book Strength**

Although the book focused on Africa or Uganda, the same situation can be realized in many developing countries within and outside Africa. The environmental problems associated with the rapid increase in the population of Kampala city are more or less the same as those facing Johannesburg, Addis Ababa, Dar es Salaam, and other African cities. Moreover, the author has successfully assessed the operations of the Western countries, which are largely behind the crisis. On the other hand, showing what has been done on the side of Africans is well discussed. Furthermore, the problem in question may have worsened from when this article was written. This can be attributed to growth in the rate of investment in the industrial sector, mining, and oil and gas exploration, among several other economic activities with less capacity to control its environmental side effects.

Regarding the book evidence, the author's work is highly supported by the shreds of evidence in the footnotes, books, and articles from international organizations, including ILO, UNIDO, WHO, etc. The shreds of evidence also come from the mass media. Therefore, the book "The Environmental Question in Global Economics: The African Story" is relevant to Africa. This is

because the causes of environmental degradation, examples, and conclusions reached by the author can be applicable to other parts of Africa and elsewhere.

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