

# COMMUNITY RESILIENCE LESSONS FROM AND FOR AFRICA: THE SACRED TIES OF AFRICA AND BEYOND

BY EMMANUEL HOVE MHIKE

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*Emmanuel Hove Mhike*

Africans everywhere have lost confidence and pride in everything theirs because they have been uprooted. They have borrowed a culture which values money more than their Values and everything. Industries, especially extractive industries are putting more value on minerals, exhuming graves which spiritually have kept for generations African communities and nature connected, strong, united and conflict free. Bringing back African uniqueness, pride and culture is a mammoth task but it is now or never.

With modern day industrialization of food system, demonization of African cultural life and the monster Climate Change, they have never been the right time to tackle issues of development from the African perspective. Thanks so much to this Institute, **The African Learning Institute (ALI)** which brought us together to share and explore community resilience lessons. The ALI partners, COADY International Institute, COMPAS Africa Network and the funders, Christensen Fund have a common goal: PROMOTING AND BUILDING ON LOCAL AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS FOR COMMUNITY RESILIENCE.

East Africa, Kenya in particular might be generally be viewed as Pastoralists dominated but these communities have opened my eyes to exciting common traits and strategies African communities exploit in creating and recreating platforms for Community Resilience. The understanding of Local and Indigenous is the same with the other regions of Africa. Like the indigenous farmers of Southern Africa, the fisherman of West Africa, the indigeniety of pastoralists is closely related to livelihoods. With globalisation, some local (not ancestral/blood related) people have infiltrated the indigenous communities and some are now the oldest members of the society. These locals have become so respected because of the knowledge and ideas they hold. They have in some communities established formal and non-formal institutions. However, some of the ideas have been blamed by the real ancestral and blood indigenous people as knowledge that is diluting and diverting their original customs and values.

The panel discussions showed how important is the coming together of the African people who share the same history and challenges. The sharing of experiences and knowledge by people from across Africa and beyond reveals the same missing gaps in social, political, cultural and economic

engagements. People of high political standing in Kenya who were also invited, presented how governance issues have impacted negatively on the development of marginalized communities and people across Africa.

**CLIMATE CHANGE.** Africa, the whole of Africa present at the workshop admitted to their communities hard hit by the monster Climate change. According to a Kenyan baseline study 85% of Kenya is semi-arid and arid. Just like farming in other parts of Africa, Pastoralism has survived due to resilience. Water and pastoral scarcity is now a very common problem in Africa. The high drought induced losses of livestock across Africa calls for innovative ideas and strategies, the same way crop farming based regions are encouraged to embrace indigenous innovations. Across Africa there is need for creativeness and diversity in the various sources of livelihoods. Climate change is calling for change in the general way of life and adapt to systems of sustainable farming, resource management and environmental stewardship. Pastoralists of Kenya indicated that they are now settling down, establishing small gardens, receiving and buying crop seeds. Climate change has forced them to adopt other alternatives to their daily life. The same applies to farmers in other regions of Africa, there are shifting from Agriculture to Agri-ecology, farming in a way that respects the land, nature and the future generations. This is the way it has been in Africa before colonisation. Everything had been done in chain, the interconnectedness of the people, land and nature. Without Industrialisation and 'Civilization' nothing like climate change was known to exist. African Pastoralists and farmers had the joy of living so well with a great connection between them, their spiritual life and ecology. Colonization came and cut the sacred ties of Africa.

**WOMEN.** African women everywhere face the same challenges, even beyond Africa, Indigenous Canadians presented their pathetic stories of women's forced relocation, land and water resource grab, same issues with women in northern, eastern, western and southern Africa. Women of Kenya are the keepers of seeds; they distribute the seeds and seed people. Women from the surrounding communities were invited to share the seeds of various varieties of indigenous crop seeds. They have banked for many years. Sadly, women being the nurturers of the societies in Africa and beyond, their contribution rarely get noticed or rewarded. Everywhere still women don't own land and other key properties. One of the panellist, said women in pastoralist societies don't own cattle although they take care of them, milking and dipping. Like in Southern Africa women still not feel included in design and implementation of projects, machines and technology. Also women needs to move from small projects to big projects for example, Masaaai women must move from cutting beads to tying machines. The feminist theory of Gender is the one being propagated in both Africa and Canada. African communities still don't understand women needs and the actual essence of gender as it has remained largely Eurocentric. The concept was Introduced by European feminist who thought women are a homogeneous group, they are same everywhere. This is why all over Africa gender is still treated as anti-culture, a colonial thing and thought to have no place in community driven development. It was agreed by people from regions of Africa that if gender takes into consideration local knowledge, treated from African perspective, women will be seen as pivotal human beings in shaping community values and visions. Within this context, the African women's tireless energy that connects and generates life will be embraced and utilized.

**ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT.** African communities are experimenting with this new development approval in trying to introduce development totally driven from the African perspective. Africans have been brought together by the desire to develop their communities from their past, from within, from inside not outside inspired development. Before the scramble and partition of Africa, developments was merely Ancestral, it was directed by ancestral wisdom and available resources in locality. However many communities have received so much strings attached foreign support in resources and knowledge. This combined with technology have become a real threat to indigenous and local knowledge system that have sustained communities for generations, communities across Africa are

encouraged by the African networks for endogenous development like compass to bring or accept knowledge that will not displace indigenous knowledge but that will interface and complement original systems. The African worldviews are same all over. Naturally, human are the stewards of everything on earth, socially the Africans for generations have cultivated the spirit of Ubuntu "I am because you are". Spiritually, Africans never separated their day to day matters with their spirituality. Everywhere in Africa; the colonial systems have condemned and separated these inseparable pillars of African life.

The colonial governments in Africa came and introduced Eurocentric frameworks for African Research and development. The frameworks have based developments on western standards as if the world in a homogenous community. The African worldview has been overshadowed. The frameworks also have perpetuated Eurocentric values discarding and demonising local and indigenous knowledge systems. A very good example was provided by Dr Sekagya of Uganda, someone who had experience both as a traditional and western medical doctor .Just because he fought for the use African herbs and relevance for spiritual visions ,He was taken to mental hospital. This shows how deeply are the colonial roots many years after so called African independence. The colonial system is still in place now being propagated by educated blacks. The Doctor was misunderstood not by the people but by the white supremacy software installed in African 'independent' governments. This is what is happening everywhere in Africa, the stewards of local and indigenous knowledge systems have a mammoth task of decolonizing the African minds. If African communities marginalized as they are, realize that they have to revitalize and institutionalize traditional health care systems it will be easier to locally drive and measure community well-being .For decades, Africa have been overdosed by participatory approaches to development, this have imposed externally driven agendas which take a blind eye on real African communities issues and problems. Local and indigenous people across Africa have been participating in the programme of the intervener instead of the intervener participates in the community program. Participants here in Meru, Kenya were so excited to embrace the Endogenous Development approach as it put emphasis on their communities, cultures, livelihoods, priorities, values and norms as starting points.

Similar forces undermine community driven development across Africa. Religion is one of the forces, many Africans think religion is another word for Christianity or Moslamic. The African Traditionalists are now considered witches. Indigenous institutions and resources have been demonized. Everyday Prophets and preachers castigate as evil the cultural festivals, Ancestral caves/rocks, traditional food and traditional herbs. The other negative force have been the colonial education system, copy and pasted by the African Governments. The Education system have betrayed Africans, turned them into pompous bastards that disregards everything theirs and glorified everything foreign. This miseducation has caused even the youths to look down upon local and indigenous knowledge systems, community values and customs. Development has been propagated as technological advancements, tall buildings, industrial growth, mechanization and modernized infrastructure. This direction Africa have been conned to take is totally unsustainable as this kinds of development tend to destroy their production bases. There is need for a Great Turning. Besides living in abject poverty and ever deteriorating land, health and environmental systems, it is surprising that the majority of Africans are holding no actions. Only few Africans are propagating for the Great Turning through i) Holding actions, trying to stop and slow destruction ii) Creating alternatives, trying to do things differently than the popular western global cooperate model. iii) Changing consciousness, decolonizing the African minds, helping Africans to think differently bringing back the original world view. Africans have always been tied together by the Earth community system not these foreign borrowed concepts of Growth Economics.

**COMMUNITY RESILIENCE.** Community resilience has been defined as the ability of the community to bounce back after experiencing certain shocks/risks/disasters. Community Resilience is a process

which demands a clear sense of community, understanding of risks/challenges/threats, and process of response, monitoring and evaluation of resources. In classroom and out of classroom so many community resilience cases, impact stories were shared and discussed. The cases and stories though from different communities and tribes had a lot in common to tell about community resilience. They all called for same approaches, responses and mitigation. Shared and analysed were Impactful cases and stories from pastoralists in Garba Tula, Kenya, Restoration of a forest in India, Water resource grab and the response by indigenous women in Canada, South Africa's UBUNTU stories and many more. Common lessons learnt about Community Resilience include:

- Upholding indigenous knowledge systems and customs build community resilience and Indigenous knowledge systems stand the test of time.
- Community Resilience is cultivated by the collective unit and capabilities of a community
- Strong traditional governance systems led to strong community resilience
- Weakened and insecure land ownership/tenure also weaken community resilience as it led to poor land management systems.
- Culture can be a very positive thing in cultivating resilience
- Local and indigenous people across the world have problems with governance issues
- The colonial system of empowering councils and disempower chiefs weakens community resilience. Sadly, the system is still in place in 'Independent Africa'.
- Community resilience reminds everyone Earth is the mother, hence everyone have a role to play
- Community resilience is made strong by involvement of women and fully utilizing their qualities and characteristics. Women in Africa and beyond don't quit. They avails critical tools in cultivating community resilience, tools such as: Preserving, Creating, Recreating, Sharing, Extending, Loving and Nurturing.
- Appropriate external knowledge enhances community resilience

After all the phenomenal lessons, experiences and inspirations, one of the facilitators asked a simple but difficult question: 'what is the way forward now'. Surely, with all the lessons, information sharing and understanding this was not supposed to be a difficult question but community development stewards everywhere will tell you it's not easy to implement even great ideas in African communities. It's not easy to share your vision. It's not easy to mobilize people. It's not easy to deal with local authority and challenge exploiting companies in African communities. In many cases the government become the miner or have some shares in the mine, so its difficulty to police the police. One possible answer was given, the Bio-Cultural Protocols.

**THE BIO-CULTURAL PROTOCOL.** The Bio-Cultural Protocol was defined as a set of rules or by laws for the community by the community legally empowering the community to engage themselves as well as interested outsiders. It states how the community's resources and environment must be treated, protected and utilized. Cases of some communities which have successfully implemented the community protocols were presented and I was surprised to see that Chimombe, a community from my country have successfully completed its Bio-cultural protocol writing. The BCP showed me, how a united and legally enlightened community can defend its indigenous rights, resources and environment. In many cases, community people are not consulted by exploiting companies, its either community or political leadership is bribed. The Bio-cultural protocols are the essential tools in dealing with exploiting/extractive industries. Community development stewards in many parts of the continent are already doing the Bio-cultural protocol way but they simply don't have a name to the process. Some still lacks the legal empowerment concepts, procedures and strategies. The procedures, stages and strategies differ from one community to the other. It is important that

communities especially mineral rich but marginalized like our Mazvihwa, south East of Zvishavane, Zimbabwe embrace the concept and sit down to write down their own Bio-cultural Protocols.

In a nutshell, This African Learning Institute in East Africa will historically stand tall as having seeded in the African and Canadian participants the spirit of self-pride, self-motivation for the self-actualization of individual purpose in the well-being of the community. As my friend from Tanzania, **Uswege Mwakapango** would always say on our short walk to the fruit market every evening “Identity crisis is what is destroying African confidence and development”. Africa and even beyond Africa, Indigenous people share sacred ties in their spiritual connection with their respective communities, land and ecology. This means African problems can only be solved by seeking and implementing African solutions.

*The Prince of Mazvihwa, Emmanuel Hove Mhike is the Arts, Culture and Education Officer at Muonde Trust, Zimbabwe. He is also a Zimbabwean International published writer and a member of the Chisiya Writers' Club. His work revolves around revitalizing cultural life, promoting artistic expression and ensuring rights, health and food security for marginalized communities and people. He can be contacted on: princeemmanuel1987@yahoo.com*