THE ROLE OF OKUGBEAKPEJE AND IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHIES IN BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION FOR ECO-WELLNESS IN AFRICA

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Abstract
The question of environmental wellbeing has become increasingly urgent in contemporary Africa, where the degradation of ecosystems continues to threaten both human health and the wider biotic community. The erosion of biodiversity not only undermines ecological balance but also compromises public health, given humanity's dependence on nature for food, medicine, and overall wellbeing. This situation calls for a rethinking of the ethical and philosophical foundations of human interaction with the natural environment. This paper argues that African indigenous philosophical resources provide critical insights for addressing the challenges of biodiversity loss and its implications for eco-wellness. It engages the Urhobo concept of Okugbeakpeje, which affirms the unity, solidarity, and interrelatedness of all forms of life, alongside the Igbo philosophy of Igwebuike, which emphasises strength in communal interdependence. These philosophies articulate a worldview in which existence is fundamentally relational, thereby offering a moral basis for ecological responsibility. Employing cultural hermeneutics and critical analysis, the paper examines how these concepts can be re-appropriated within contemporary environmental discourse to foster collective commitment to biodiversity conservation. It contends that the current ecological crisis reflects, in part, a breakdown of relational consciousness embedded in indigenous thought. The paper concludes that a recovery and constructive appropriation of Okugbeakpeje and Igwebuike can contribute significantly to biodiversity conservation and the promotion of eco-wellness, thereby advancing a more holistic understanding of public health in Africa.

Keywords: Biodiversity, Eco-wellness, Public Health, Africa, *Okugbeakpeje*, I*gwebuike*, Indigenous Philosophy.

Introduction
The state of biodiversity in Africa and other parts of the world is dire. A diverse number of species such as monkeys, elephants, squirrels, fish, etc are threatened, and some have

been lost as a result of illegal wildlife poaching and trade, illegal logging, mining, rapid urbanisation, deforestation, etc. Africa is a land that is rich with enormous biodiversity. Isa (2024) writes that the rich biodiversity of Africa includes wide varieties of living organisms, genetic differences and ecosystems such as rainforest, savannah and over 50,000 species of animals and plants. All life on Earth depends on the rich resources that come from biodiversity. When biodiversity is depleted or brought into extinction, human life and the life of other entities in the ecosystem are also endangered. Delio, Warner & Wood (2008) write that:

> Life is amazing. All life is entirely dependent upon our planet for everything it needs …. Water falls from the sky and runs through creeks and rivers. Plants and animals grow and are all part of the circle of life. Air circulates around the globe, refreshing and renewing all life's creatures. The sun, trees, plants, oil, coal and gas provide energy. The beauty of creation grabs our attention, inspiring us and providing for our needs (p. 21).

This is the variety of life. This is biodiversity. Life is beautiful. But life is also being endangered by human activities. There is a need for concerted efforts to mitigate the harm that humans are doing to the health and well-being of humans and the entire Earth. This is the concern of this paper. The paper argues that it is not just individual efforts that are required to mitigate biodiversity loss and other environmental problems. Rather, humans should band together and come together to confront the problem. The paper uses the lens of the indigenous philosophies of *Okugbeakpeje* from the Urhobo people of the Western Niger Delta of Nigeria and *Igwebuike* from the Igbo people of the Eastern Niger Delta to argue for human solidarity, joint efforts, collective actions and galvanising the strength of the community or group to facilitate biodiversity conservation.

Consequent on the above, the paper shall, through a critical analytic and hermeneutic method, present conceptual clarifications, look at the state of biodiversity loss in Africa and its implications for eco-wellness, and discuss the role of the indigenous philosophies of *Okugbeakpeje* and *Igwebuike* for biodiversity conservation. When that has been done, the paper will be brought to a conclusion. It should be noted that not every solution to biodiversity loss can be examined in a paper like this; the focus shall be on the two indigenous philosophies mentioned above and how they can help in mobilising for action for conservation of biodiversity.

Conceptual Clarifications

Concepts that pervade this paper that require explication for the better understanding of this research are: *Okugbeakpeje*, *Igwebuike*, biodiversity conservation and eco-wellness. Ikeke (2025) writes that among the Urhobo people, from whom the word *Okugbe* comes, *Okugbe* means the collective, together, and gathering; and it also stands for unity, collective care, solidarity, and common concern. *Okugb*e is comparable and

akin to African concepts like Ujamaa, Ubuntu, and Igwebuike. The term *Okugbeakpeje* can be broken into three words: *Okugbe* (togetherness or togetherness), *akpo* (life or world) and *eje* (all). *Okugbeakpeje* means the togetherness of all life. It means all life in relationship to one another. It is solidarity and complementarity of all life. All things are radically interconnected. *Okugbeakpeje* denotes ecological solidarity, and from an African vantage point, Afroecosolidarity; these are concepts that Ikeke (2022) has extensively discussed in other papers. Ikeke writes that: "Ecosolidarity is solidarity with and for the earth. It is both an attitude and action paradigm. Afroecosolidarity or its like terms- Afroecosolidarity or Afroecosolidarity, or African ecological solidarity stands for the reality that ecosolidarity is an African value and indigenous way of life. Standing in solidarity with the earth is not foreign to Africa" (p. 323).

The other word that requires definition is *Igwebuike*. Kanu (2015) writes that the term Igwebuike literally means there is strength or might in number, and from that literal meaning comes the notion that when human beings stay together, are in solidarity or live complementarily, they are unconquerable. Human beings are created for shared existence. Wisdom Library (2025) states that:

> Igwebuike is a name of Igbo origin, a prominent ethnic group in southeastern Nigeria. The name translates to 'unity is strength' or 'community is power.' 'Igwe' means community, people, or multitude, while 'bu ike' means 'is strength' or 'is power.' The name reflects the Igbo emphasis on communalism, cooperation, and the belief that collective effort leads to success and resilience. This name is often given as a testament to the importance of togetherness and mutual support within the family and community.

Another cardinal concept in this paper is biodiversity conservation. Sponsel (2005) writes that: "The scientific concept of biodiversity has revolutionized biology, conservation, and related arenas in Western society since the 1980s. Biodiversity refers to the variety, variability, and the processes of life at all levels from the genetic to the biosphere" (p. 179). Biodiversity is the different kinds of life on Earth, including the class they belong to and all the ecosystemic processes of life in which they inhabit and interact. You cannot speak of biodiversity without thinking of ecology, the interaction of all life forms in their environments. Biodiversity is protecting these species of plants, birds, animals, flowers, microorganisms, etc from harm and extinction. Humans will make use of environmental resources, but it should be done sustainably. Wilson (1992, as cited in Phil-Eze, 2009) states that biodiversity refers to the "variety of living organisms at all levels-from genetic variants belonging to the same species, through arrays of species, families and genera, and through population, community, habitat and even ecosystems levels" (pp. 33-34).

In this research, the term eco-wellness or ecowellness or EcoWellness shall be used interchangeably. Reese (2015) states that: "EcoWellness is a sense of appreciation,

respect for, and awe of nature, resulting in feelings of connectedness with the natural environment and holistic wellness. …Nature is conceptualized in Eco-Wellness as a positive, direct or indirect, and purposeful engagement with a nonhuman entity. Such definitions might include positive interactions with a domesticated animal, watching a sunset on a beach, and indirectly experiencing nature via a mindfulness meditation where the participant visualizes his or her favourite natural landscape" (p. 317). Ecological well-being is a generic term that is used in several disciplines, such as ecology, sociology, politics, psychology, and economics, to describe the wellness of the ecological system and more generally the planet Earth. Because an ecological system includes its inhabitants, human quality of life is directly tied to the health of the environment and vice versa. Therefore, ecological well-being does not only refer to the well-being of the natural environment or the planet but encompasses the relationship between humans and the environment. The actions of humans (individuals or societies) on their natural environment may impact the well-being of ecological systems, which in turn impact the.

Biodiversity Loss and Implications for Eco-wellness

Isa (2024) writes that over 4m hectares have been decimated by deforestation, logging and infrastructure development; the destruction of forests has led to countless extinctions of species; illegal wildlife trade threatens rhinos, pangolins and elephants, and there is massive destruction of fauna and flora on the African continent. Clements et al. (2025), in their study, indicate that almost a quarter of the biodiversity of Sub-Saharan Africa from pre-industrial times has been lost, more than 75% of the population of mammals has decreased, and 80% of the wildlife of animals and plants left are outside protected areas, subjecting them to endangerment. One human activity that has a great impact on biodiversity is agriculture. Clements et al. (2025) state that: "Intensive, high-yield agriculture reduces habitat diversity and increases chemical inputs, with significant impacts on a wide range of species. In contrast, traditional smallholder systems tend to maintain more ecological complexity and support higher levels of biodiversity." This highlights the importance of transforming modern agriculture to be more earth-friendly and protective of biodiversity. Isa (2024) states that the following solutions can help in mitigating biodiversity loss: government creation of nature reserves and national parks, massive financial support by international organisations to help Africa, reducing cultural reliance on endangered species, etc.

One of the fundamental reasons for biodiversity conservation is to promote eco-wellness. Biodiversity loss leads to many negative impacts on the African continent. Njoku (2025) writes that: "According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), over 6,400 animals and 3,100 plants in Africa are at risk of extinction. The decline of Africa's abundant ecological biodiversity poses a significant threat to millions of livelihoods. It exacerbates food insecurity and conflicts over land, leading to volatile agropastoral and geopolitical contentions over grazing land." (p.2). The question of healthy biodiversity cannot be separated from your health, both personal

and that of public health. HOG (2025) states that there is interconnections between environmental sustainability and personal health, for if the planet is not healthy, your health is impacted. It is important to create a healthy planet and protect the planet's biodiversity, which fosters healthy ecosystems, if human beings are to live healthy lives. The definition of ecowellness certainly implies that beautiful and serene nature which is made up of various diversities of life forms, enhances human health. When biodiversity is destroyed, which leads to a lot of health problems for humans and a reduction of ecosystemic services, human health is impacted. Polluted environments, environments filled with garbage and refuse, degraded landscapes, and polluted atmospheres all make life uncomfortable for humans and also lead to the death of organisms. Blankespoor, Dasgupta & Wheeler (2025) argue that: "Biodiversity is essential for ecological stability, human well-being, and economic progress, providing critical ecosystem services such as clean water, food, and climate regulation. However, it faces unprecedented threats, with extinction rates accelerating to 1,000 times the natural baseline due to habitat destruction, overexploitation, pollution, invasive species, illegal trade, and climate change" (p. 2).

It is important here to state and relate the negative impact of biodiversity loss to eco-wellness. Biodiversity should be conserved for it provides places and landscapes that humans can visit for ecotourism and enhance their mental health and satisfaction. When biodiversity is lost, it has serious consequences for humans. Phil-Eze (2009) shows that there are environmental consequences such as coastal erosion, soil erosion, desertification, loss of soil fertility, hydrological upset, disease outbreak, change in climate, and even environmental refugeeism. Biodiversity provides a lot of services for the environment and humans. When there is deforestation and trees are felled, it exposes the soil to erosion, microorganisms are destroyed, pharmaceutical resources are lost, and the climatic conditions are also affected. When nature is rich with biodiversity, with forest cover, a beautiful scenic landscape, there are places that people can go for eco-tourism for retreats and reflection. It is important to pay attention to biodiversity loss.

Role of *Okugbeakpeje* and *Igwebuike* Philosophies in Biodiversity Conservation

Many solutions have been proposed for biodiversity conservation and curbing biodiversity loss. These solutions are good, but they are not enough. All hands must be on deck to solve the problem. This paper proposes that humans should stand in solidarity and in a common united front to solve the problem. The problem of biodiversity loss and other environmental problems cannot be solved by individuals alone; there is a need for people in every society to come together, work together, synergise, and collaborate to confront these problems. There should be a dialogue among people from all backgrounds to harmonise ideologies and philosophies from various cultural traditions to combat the problem. Kanu (2019) states that:

> This understanding, in terms of complementarity, provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations. As an ideology,

> Igwebuike holds that 'to be' is to live in solidarity and complementarity, and to live outside the parameters of solidarity and complementarity is to suffer alienation. 'To be' is 'to be with the other', in a community of beings (p. 97).

Human beings are to live in complementarity and search for solutions together. None should see environmental problems as the concern of others alone or become disinterested. There should be no place for rugged individualism or selfishness in environmental management. This is precisely what the two philosophies of *Okugbeakpeje* and *Igwebuike* imply and call for. A popular saying states, "United we stand, divided we fall." Human beings need to hold a sense of common purpose. The problem of biodiversity loss is a common challenge for all humanity. No human being should exempt himself/herself from the problem. Every biodiversity loss affects all humanity. Think, for instance, that a problem of biodiversity loss in a village that leads to environmental refugeeism can make people move from their environment, putting pressure on other locations. Almost all environmental problems are transboundary environmental problems. As this paper is being written, there is news on Smith (2026) that wildfire smoke is entering the United States from Canada. Not only is this wildfire destroying biodiversity in Canada and affecting human lives, but it is also affecting biodiversity and human lives in the United States. Thus, environmental problems in one country can affect another.

The indigenous Igbo philosophy of *Igwebuike* rightly asserts that there is strength in numbers. The Urhobo people say, "only one finger cannot remove a lice from the head." There is tremendous strength when people band together. You see the strength of common purpose even in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the book of Nehemiah, even though the people of Israel faced opposition, with the leadership of Nehemiah and the people joining together with him, they were able to build the wall. Look at many of the former colonised nations; they united to fight for their independence, and with common effort they were able to gain independence. Nkama, Okoro & Egbule (2022) write that:

> Grassroot mobilization by traditional rulers as custodians of culture scored 91.6 percent, probably because the respondents believe so much in the capacity of these leaders to command the respect and loyalty of their subjects, which is natural in the Igbo setting. However, this has to be properly channeled, especially as it concerns the subject of our discussion, to the effect that they mobilize their subjects to directly harness and repackage some of their cultural practices in a manner that it is relevant to the common man (sec. 5.2).

Both *Okugbeakpeje* and *Igwebuike* call for collective mobilisation of people. They are indigenous philosophies that promote the common good. Traditional African communities are grounded in the philosophy of seeing and living life together. Community labour and work were emphasised in rural places, and this is still prevalent in some places. That spirit of coming and working together to tackle common problems

is what this paper is calling for. Environmental problems like biodiversity loss should not be confronted anyhow or following individual idiosyncrasies. At the grassroots level, where there is much biodiversity in villages and rural places, there is a need for traditional authorities supported by government efforts through public policies and financial support to galvanise traditional authorities to bring people together to enlighten them about the value of biodiversity. There is a need to guide and educate against bush burning, felling of trees, careless throwing of waste, wanton destruction of birds and animals, and many other things that cause biodiversity loss. There is strength when the community comes together rather than individuals working on their own. There is a vital need for collaborative efforts at all levels. This is what *Okugbeakpeje* and *Igwebuike's* philosophies are calling for. There is a vital need for synergy and for efforts to be harnessed, instead of individuals just working alone. Blankespoor, B., Dasgupta, S., & Wheeler, D. (2025) argue that: "Effective conservation requires urgent, coordinated global action, as ecosystems and species habitats often transcend national borders. Collaboration among governments, industries, and communities is essential to restore habitats, protect endangered species, strengthen policies, and enforce conservation measures" (p. 2). Biodiversity conservation efforts will achieve less if people work at cross-purposes. There is also the need for sharing of local knowledge among communities. A popular proverb says: "Two heads are better than one." In the Biblical parlance, "Iron sharpens iron." In a world that has become globalised and affected by cultural diffusion, there is a need to share knowledge across borders and boundaries. That is the spirit of *Okugbeakpej*e and *Igwebuike*.

Community, communalism, and coming together are powerful forces in the African universe. They should not be neglected. The African philosophy of Ubuntu says, "I am because we are." And so there is a need for the individual not to isolate himself/herself from others, but to collaborate and share in solidarity with them. This is *Okugbeakpeje.* It is living and working together to solve common problems. There is strength when people come together to discuss, dialogue, converse, think, and see how to solve common environmental problems like that of biodiversity loss. This should never be discounted. The United Nations (1992) in articles 7, 9, and 10 propounds that solving environmental problems requires the cooperation of States and that environmental problems are better handled through the participation and efforts of all citizens. *Okugbeakpej*e and *Igwebuike* are indigenous African philosophies that emphasise cooperative existence and living, harmonious efforts to solve human problems.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the role that the two African indigenous philosophies of *Okugbeakpeje* and *Igwebuike* can play in mobilising for biodiversity conservation. The paper showed that indeed there is biodiversity loss in Africa and in the world. The paper showed that the *Okugbeakpeje* (togetherness of all life, unity, or solidarity) together with *Igwebuike* (strength in number or unity) can help in galvanising collective efforts to combat environmental problems. Environmental problems cannot be resolved by

individuals on their own, there is need for coming together, dialogue, conversation and synergy among humans to tackle the crisis. Biodiversity loss often occur on large scale and some can have cross-border effects. It is important that the entire community or group is mobilised to find a solution and promote conservation efforts. The benefits of biodiversity especially the ecosystem services that come from them were highlighted in the paper. Healthy biodiversity is necessary for human life and wellbeing, and ecowellness. When biodiversity is poisoned or damaged it affects the state of the health of people. It was shown in the paper that if communal efforts were taken they will help to promote an Africa that is experiencing ecowellness and secured. Let the two indigenous philosophies then be an inspiration to harness the strength of the community or the entire people for the wellbeing of the health and people.

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