

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOOD GOVERNANCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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I would like to make my contribution from the perspective of an African developing country. The concepts of governance and environmental management are universal in all societies, African countries not excluded.

GOVERNANCE involves a set of norms and values which are expressed in two (2) or more ways: informal and formal. INFORMAL polices, laws, and rules are founded on custom and practice. FORMAL polices, laws, and rules are expressed in written forms and established institutions.

In Africa there are two systems of governance in operation – traditional and modern. Traditional governance is composed of unwritten, informal, and systematic taboos (prohibitions and restrictions), rituals, and rules that regulate the interaction between individuals and the natural environment. This type of governance has its own characteristics:

- It is evolutionary, i.e., has emerged from within a societal system and grown in a cumulative way. Knowledge has passed down from generations through experimentation, learning, and application.
- It is responsive and resilient to the ecology on which they are based.
- It is localized and participatory – decisions are taken at different levels involving informal organizations (e.g., households).

The modern governance system vests planning and decision-making in centralized government agencies and denies participation of local and informal groups. The system is composed of written and formal policies, environmental plans, legal

instruments and informal laws, rules of practices, and institutions.

The pre-colonial era was characterized by pure traditional governance systems. Colonialism introduced the modern or formal governance system.

The traditional governance system has indigenous roots and is time honoured and adaptive. Local people understood it well.

Conflicts have arisen when local traditional practices are no longer viewed as legitimate or consistent with national policies or when entities external to a country ignore needs and imperatives of local people.

For example, in Ghana, forest reserves were created and restrictions placed on entry by local people by introducing forest guards. Management of the resource did not permit participation by local people to serve their needs in terms of food and medicine.

However, there were traditional forest reserves – sacred groves – with rules of entry and restrictions on collection for medicines, hunting, etc. Most of them came under threat from so-called modern ways of doing things (urbanization, construction, etc.). Today, though small in size, they stand as rich islands of biodiversity in a sea of degraded lands. Currently the concept of community-based natural resource management approaches similar to traditional governance systems are being promoted.

There is one case of a monkey sanctuary – where the people regard monkeys as sacred and villagers and animals live together. A cohabitation strategy of instituting by-laws in line with the beliefs of

the people has bridged the gap between customary and formal laws and regulations to save the monkeys, and is now a tourist attraction and providing livelihood to the community.

There are many of these traditional governance and compliance systems all over Africa (e.g., rules on noise making, fishing, and farming along water bodies).

There is a need to incorporate traditional knowledge systems and principles of conservation in the overall national environmental governance structure – where

basic questions about ownership distribution and control and utilization of environmental resources are integrated into the design of appropriate structures.

In Ghana, there is a saying in one of the local languages: SANKOFA – a call to traditional values. We need to go back to our roots and examine the good enduring concepts in our societies that have served our people well. In Africa, good governance and environmental compliance and enforcement would be assured by incorporating traditional governance values.