Representing, Conserving and celebrating nature: An analysis of Chifunyise's Takura and The Talking Branch: A Collection of Traditional Stories on the Environment

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Abstract
In Zimbabwe, children’s literature is an evolving, yet very crucial discipline that deals with topical issues such as language, identity, culture, environmentalism and sustainable development. Located within the discourse on Zimbabwean literature, this study argues that Zimbabwean children’s literature has not received adequate scholarly reflections, yet it deals with critical issues, just like adult literature. The study appreciates positive developments in Zimbabwean children’s literature by paying particular attention to Stephen Chifunyise’s Takura and the Talking Branch: A Collection of Traditional Stories on the Environment (1995). Informed by Glotfelty and Fromm’s theory of eco-criticism (1996), the study argues that children’s literature promotes environmental consciousness. The research critiques Chifunyise’s depiction of the themes of environmentalism and sustainable development in Takura and the Talking Branch: A Collection of Traditional Stories on the Environment.

Key terms: Eco-criticism, Ecological Balance, Environmentalism, Environmental Conservation, Land Degradation, Sustainable Development

Introduction
Environmental conservation has emerged to preoccupy the human race today more than ever. Themes on environmental degradation dominate Africa and the rest of the world. Similarly, these themes are beginning to dominate children’s literature as well. There have been considerable publications on the need for ecological rehabilitation. “This has been the case particularly since the Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro in 1992” (Mugambi and Vahakangas 2001:2). Conferences, consultations and workshops continue to be organized throughout the world, showing that the subject remains contemporary. Even the millennium development goals pay attention to environmental conservation. Millennium goal 7 focuses on ‘ensuring environmental sustainability’. However, simpler and modest techniques have been in use since time immemorial. It is fortunate that the recent Earth Summit (Rio+20), climate change 2012 has adopted indigenous alternatives to environmental conservation.

This paper gives an overall background to story-telling with the hope of shedding light on the importance of stories, especially in the traditional milieu. The problem that currently bedevils contemporary society with regards to environmental conservation is also highlighted. This research aims at demonstrating how contemporary society has a lot to learn from traditional approaches to the environment. Lessons from the traditional society are drawn from Chifunyise’s Takura and Thel Talking Branch: A Collection of Traditional Stories About the Environment (1995). The stories are drawn from traditional stories that were told by the hearth and hence offer a mirror into how the wisdom of the ages assisted in conserving the environment as well as achieving ecological balance. Recommendations on how children’s stories can be made use of are given.

Background to the Study
The Tradition of Story-telling and the State of the Environment in Zimbabwe

This paper has been driven by two misconstrued perceptions that literature suffers from: that it fails to transcend the folly of mere story-telling which is often deemed fictitious and detached from the real world with no other purpose than entertainment. Yet African oral folklore has always served a purpose: societies’ mores and values have always been inculcated using this mode of communication. Even to this day oral traditions are still a force to be reckoned with. According to Sugiyama and Sugiyama, oral folk-stories served a purpose, for example: [In small-scale societies, social sanctions—gossip,... open criticism, derision— are used to check antisocial impulses. Story-telling offers a proactive means of accomplishing the same end by showing group members how they will be treated if they behave badly and, conversely, how they will be treated if they behave well (Sugiyama and Sugiyama 2009: 23).]
However, due to the proliferation of media technologies and electronic gadgets that entertain youngsters, this genre is slowly dying.

Written literature for children has stepped in to replace oral folk-stories. However, this has suffered worse stigma from adults who regard it as childish. Former oral folk-tales that have been transcribed into the written mode represent and capture the historical aspects of story-telling that encapsulate the everyday experiences and activities of any given society. Nonetheless, a flagging reading culture of both children and adults has seen stories failing to transcend the entertainment role. Western perceptions about Africa and anything done by Africans have also worsened the situation. To confirm this, Hussey and Thompson (2000: 18) observed that “the subjugated natives of the colonies were often viewed as monstrous races manifesting all the worst aspects of wild people, and hence needing control and conversion.” Yet the stories traditionally had a role to play and even today they can still play that same role. This paper, therefore, seeks to demonstrate how literature can be of use to society, with specific reference to traditional children’s stories within the context of environmental conservation. The thrust of the question is how in traditional societies stories formed the backdrop against which societies’ children learnt to be responsible adults.

The concern with the environment has proved to be more of a national issue than just a literary subject for discussion. Scholars such as Gitau have pointed out that “Environmentalism is a must-do for all people from all walks of life” (2001:305). Observations have been made that the environment is the basis for all living and non-living things and that “the entire future of human life depends on the safeguarding and evolving of environmental systems” (Hussey and Thompson 2000:10). Therefore, the exigency to safeguard and protect it is inevitable. Given the massive utilisation and haphazard obliteration of the environment through massive deforestation, veld fires and siltation for instance, there is need to devise possible ways of preserving the environment. Environmental stewardship is an obligation, if a nation is to ensure sustainable socio-economic development.

Environmental degradation poses a threat to development. There is a general outcry the world over about environmental degradation. Consequently, there are concerns and attempts to literally ‘heal the world.’ Abrams et al have observed that: “forests and grasslands are threatened by agro-fuel production, wildlife is losing habitat and being consumed by hungry people, surface waters are being degraded by expanding populations, and governments are lured by the continuing prospects of industrial extraction of minerals and oil.” In Zimbabwe, the rush for gold and diamonds has left some regions of the country torn up, with no sign of rehabilitation of the land that would have been degraded (2009:799-800).”

Governments’ attempts at resolving these problems have done very little to alleviate the problem. Zimbabwe is a signatory of the various environmental conventions, including the Kyoto Protocol. Yet the question is, is it enough? Have these conventions alleviated the problems at hand? One may argue that the conventions have done nothing but prescribe solutions that are not compatible with the African way of life. While the developed world battles largely with gaseous emissions into the atmosphere and calls for technological developments to combat this, the developing world is still grappling with land degradation. This has created problems where attempts at prescriptive measures have been out of touch with the reality on the ground. To add to this, these attempts at resolving environmental problems have largely been top-down control of resource use.

This, therefore, calls for fresh strategies that can be gleaned from home-grown experiences. Children form part and parcel of any given society. Against the backdrop of ecological imbalance, mainly brought about by human action, this paper seeks to critique the role of children’s literature in preserving the environment. Gitau (2011) decry the massive environmental degradation in Africa, and calls upon concerted efforts to fight for environmental conservation.

Environmental conservation should also not be taken out of context from the development discourse. The Millenium Development Goals strive for sustainable development, yet to talk of development without taking into account the issue of the environment only means that such development is void and not sustainable. Development from the developed world’s point of view should be technologically based, while in developing countries, most of which are poor, the environment is the starting point. The problem emanates from the Western prescriptions and notions that look at technology and production, ignoring indigenous knowledge systems that seek to protect the environment. Authors such as Chifunyise (1995) utilise children’s literature to retrieve appropriate indigenous knowledge systems that help in preserving the environment. The general approach to development by the West has been very technological, with little concern for the environment. Sacredness and pollution, for example, are of little consequences. In this scheme, the underlying ethical environmental issues do not receive due consideration. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the role of literature in promoting environmental preservation, where the ecological system is delicately balanced.

Traditionally, oral stories taught children how to live harmoniously and work with, and not against nature. Thus the tradition of conserving the environment was passed from one generation to the other. Children learnt through the experiences of their predecessors. As such, for Sugiyama and Sugiyama (2009:15), “One sees oral tradition as a window onto past conditions, events, or practices of a local nature...as a window to past conditions of a pan-human nature.” Oral folklore thus became the “vehicle through which a society’s simplicity, beliefs and entire cultural practices are unveiled” (Ashu, 2010:46). This paper, however, does not deal with oral folklore in its entirety, but focuses on the folk-tale as captured by Stephen Chifunyise’s Takura and the Talking Branch: A Collection of Traditional Stories on the Environment. The paper demonstrates that traditional wisdom is still a force to be reckoned with.
Scholars such as (Ashu 2010) have pointed out the importance of folk-art in retrieving the lost Eden of Africa. Folk-art allows people to live in a positive symbiotic relationship with nature.

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem is two-pronged, that is, the lack of seriousness that children’s stories are treated with, as well as the massive degradation that now characterises today’s world. Instead of inculcating a culture of conserving the environment from the grassroots, this has been done at a higher level, yet the grassroots are equally important. There are very few strategies of promoting an awareness in children about conserving the environment. Hence the need to consider environmental situations and think of possible solutions to contemporary environmental crises.

**Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

The key theory that informs this study is Eco-criticism. Loosely defined, Eco-criticism is the study of literature and its relationship to the environment. Glotfelty’s working definition of eco-criticism is that “ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical/natural environment” (1996:xvii). Buell (1998:639) defines ecocriticism as “study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in the spirit of commitment to environmental praxis”. This study is also supported by Vladimir Propp’s (1968) model of story-telling as some of the stories incorporate some traits of his model. The paper is also informed by the participatory development model where individuals in developing communities take an active role in the development programmes at hand. In this case children take an active part in conserving the environment.

With literary analysis as its principal research method, the study examines Chifunyise’s treatment of the theme of environmentalism in his selected stories. The research is qualitative in nature. A textual analysis of Takura and the Talking Branch was employed to demonstrate the utilitarian nature of children’s literature in the discourse on development and environmental conservation. Through a semiotic analysis, the study drew analogies and distinctive features of the stories that make them appealing to a young audience.

**Representing Nature: Takura and the Talking Branch: A Synopsis of the Stories**

**The Chief’s Spoilt Daughter**

Chifunyise depicts the different ways in which human beings can cause land degradation, and how some of them get punished in a bid to impart lessons on the need for ecological conservation and balance. The stories have titles that lead the reader to become more inquisitive. The following are brief descriptions of each of the stories:

The first one, the story of Chief Tutura, is entitled, ‘Sacred Bees.’ Soma is Chief Tutura’s fifteen-year old son. Chief Tutura likes honey very much. Once every year he holds honey-tasting festivals where young men harvest honey without harming the bees, a scenario where human beings and nature are partners. Soma, the chief’s son, inexperienced as he is in harvesting honey, joins the Tokwe experienced honey-harvesters. Soma is stung to death. Chief Tutura becomes very sad and orders the killing of the bees in his land. He would give a chicken to anyone who brought ten dead bees and a goat for twenty dead bees.

The second story focuses on the people of Zangara and the guardian spirits. Its title is *Kachipapa The Guardian Spirit.* The chief was guided by five guardian spirits- Mhepo ‘responsible for the air and the winds that brought rains to Zangara,’ Ivhu responsible for the soil, Njuzu responsible for all the rivers, wells and ponds, Sora responsible for all the vegetation of the land and Dombo who was responsible for all the stones in the area. A festival was conducted every year that was meant to solve problems of the land. Through greed and power hunger, there is an insurrection by elders of Zangara against the spirits and their chief resulting in all of them being killed. Previous laws are broken and in three years the once flourishing land is destroyed leading to chaos and hunger as villagers took to stealing to make amends. This was met with harsh punishment of banishment. The protagonist of the story, Tendai, is wrongly accused and banished from the land. However, his banishment proves to be a blessing in disguise as he is reconciled with spirits of the land and chief Kachipapa.

**The Chief’s Spoilt Daughter**

The village of Tapiwa, the village is saved.

**Sacred Bird.** The once flourishing land of Gutsa is invaded by a neighbouring chieftain and all elders and the chief are killed. The invading people, the Moto people, ravage the countryside in search of precious stones. This resulted in the burning of all forest areas. This led to the destruction of all wildlife, including the sacred birds whose role at the tree planting festival was to show that the spirits of the land were happy. People had no shade from the powerful rays of the sun and “no rains came. The flowing rivers dried up. The wind blew soil from the barren land” (26). Harmony is restored when the enslaved people of Gutsa secretly start planting trees again.

**Kachipapa The Guardian Spirit.**

The fourth story is about Lungani village, the story of ‘How Tombizodwa Became an Anthill.” The chief’s spoilt daughter defies the rules of the forests “ where those who picked wild fruits were expected to follow the traditions of the land” (29). Her crime was “breaking branches and forcing many unripe fruit to fall to the ground” (30). Chiding from other children falls on deaf ears. Because the spirits of the land are angry, a bolt of lightning strikes Tombizodwa and she turns into an anthill.

**Kachipapa The Guardian Spirit.**

The land of Mundamukuru faces ‘The Vengeance of the Locusts’ in the fifth story. The people of the land were hunters and the chief of the land, upon the realization that the forests were being depleted, consulted the land’s spirit medium who prescribed totems as a way of protecting the animals of the land. Families were asked to adopt an animal or a plant and “people would then not be allowed to kill animals and to destroy plants...
which have their totem” (35). However, one family of the locust totem is killed in a poisoning incident, resulting in many people killing locusts. The locusts, in revenge, destroyed the vegetation and all the crops until the culprits who had poisoned the family of the locust totem were brought to book.

‘Takura and the Talking Branch’, is the sixth story. It is about a young man who, in spite of warnings (by a talking branch) not to relieve himself in the sacred forest went on to do so. As a result, Takura fails to clean himself up as each time he tried to use something, for example leaves or stones, these turned into smelly snakes. Worse still, his human waste followed him chanting his crime until he arrived at his girlfriend’s village. Takura is humiliated, but because he had learnt his lesson, he becomes actively involved in protecting the environment and he became known as “the guardian of the forest” (44). He becomes chief and his reputation was known throughout the land. Even tourists were attracted to his village “to see the plants and animals which cannot be found in any other part of the world” (45).

The seventh story is about ‘The Clear Water of Chuchu’, a sacred pool that had healing powers. No one was allowed to drink from the pool and the only people who were allowed near the pool were the chief’s advisors and heads of families. Tembo, the chief healer, was the guardian of the pool and because of his healing powers, “No one in the land of Chuchu died of disease. Those who died often died from old age and accidents such as snake bites, or being eaten by wild animals” (47). Unfortunately, strangers who come to Chuchu and some greedy elders connived and raided the sacred pool for precious stones. As a result the pool boils and dries up, killing those involved. A great famine befalls the land and the people of Chuchu are disease ridden. It takes an old woman who could neither see, speak nor hear to restore the pool and the village to their previous status.

The last story in the anthology is entitled ‘Chilambe and Kabale,’ two brothers who inherited their father’s chiefdom upon his death. The brothers divided the chiefdom into two and they became separate chiefs. Kabale worked with his team of elders in any decision-making process while Chilambe “had no time to sit with his people” (55). Due to greed and unplanned use of the land, Chilambe’s chiefdom soon used up most of the natural resources. While the “people of the north [Chilambe’s people] had dug huge holes on the ground” (56) and many other land degrading practices that led to hunger and poverty, the people of the south had plenty of food and “animals had milk all year round” (57).

Conserving and Celebrating Nature: A Critical Appraisal of the Stories

Chifunyise in his anthology Takura and the Talking Branch employs different strategies to demonstrate the importance of the environment to young and growing minds. His is a dual mode of address as the same stories that are meant for children also have lessons for adults. While the stories are told with childlike simplicity to match the target audience, the messages that they convey are crucial. Chifunyise handles themes that include siltation, climate change, deforestation, wanton killing of animals, illegal mining and panning. While the aforesaid terms may not be explicable in similar terms in the stories, simple layman’s language is used and this simplicity makes his material accessible and suitable for children. In the text, it is apparent that Chifunyise was making reference to some of the activities as demonstrated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>SCIENTIFIC EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>streams</td>
<td>Depleted ozone layer, etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big holes and the big banks of rivers filled up</td>
<td>Siltation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they had told the people not to cultivate along banks of rivers</td>
<td>Stream-bank cultivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the big hole in the sky had been caused by the big land fire</td>
<td>Depleted ozone layer, etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The text Takura and the Talking Branch constitutes the traditional alternatives that were put in place in order to combat environmental degradation. It bridges that gap between the oral mode that was meant for children in a traditional rural setting with those in a more urban and probably classroom setting. The book provides a timeous intervention for children in dealing with environmental issues in a contemporary society. Children relate to the land degradation that has resulted from human actions such as the killing of animals, illegal panning/mining for minerals and precious stones and stream-bank cultivation, something that they may have seen being reported on television.

The stories identify challenges and offer prescriptions regarding environmental matters in a subtle and easy to follow way. The collection of stories does well by following a well laid out structure that can be linked to Propp’s story-telling model (1968), that is, presenting a tranquil society, then identifying the source of the problem which is often associated with the villain in the story, as well as vanquishing the weak point in society. As such, in Takura and the Talking Branch, we are presented with such communities as Tokwe, Zangara, Zimunda among others. Generally, in traditional Africa, life entailed with environmental issues in a contemporary society. Children relate to the land degradation that has resulted from human actions such as the killing of animals, illegal panning/mining for minerals and precious stones and stream-bank cultivation, something that they may have seen being reported on television.

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The land of Gutsa was a land of plenty. Fast flowing rivers with all types of fish, frogs and crocodiles ran throughout the year. Chief Gutsa whose nickname was “makers of forests spent most of his leisure time planting trees (21). “

The secret to this abundance lay in the communities’ well established laws and values which had to be adhered to at all times. Almost all the stories present communities that are characterized by bumper harvests, lush forests, peace and tranquility punctuated by massive celebrations such as the honey tasting festival. However, amidst all the peace and tranquility, a problem is presented usually in the form of an abomination which disrupts that usual flow of things. Examples include not
just ordinary people but traditional leaders themselves, such as Chief Tutura whose unbridled grief leads to the eradication of bees from his land as punishment for killing his son. The author tells the reader that:

During the weeks that followed, many people in Tokwe invaded the forest to kill bees for chicken and goats. Some people used fire to kill many bees inside their hive while others used nets. Many people put poison on flowers to kill the bees. Unfortunately the poisons also killed wasps, moths, butterflies, ants, mantis, and small birds. (7).

What follows is a drought that points out that even the small and almost insignificant creatures as bees have a role in the ecosystem. Chifunyise reminds society that human beings are completely dependent on the earth for their existence. While this story is told in simple language, the message that is conveyed is important. Chifunyise handles the theme of unjustifiable killing of insects, birds and animals. Perpetrators of such deeds immediately become villains whose actions lead to consequences. Chief Tutura dies a painful death at the hands of the sacred birds. Normalcy returns to Tokwe:

On the day the chief and his advisors were buried the whole village was invaded by very friendly bees, wasps, moths, grasshoppers, small birds, beetles, termites and butterflies. Rain, beautiful soaking rain fell, bringing back life to the dry patched land” (9).

A number of mechanisms are put in place to ensure that evil deeds are met with justice, “anybody who would be found killing a bee would be punished” (10).

Similarly, the story “The Vengeance of the Locusts” demonstrates how such seemingly insignificant creatures can turn the tables of ecological balance, making people suffer for it. Not only is the ecosystem disrupted but the spirits of the land are angered as well. Thus, the pattern of cause and effect also predominates in the stories. It is easier for children to grasp messages that way than incorporate complex storylines.

The harmony of the people is disrupted not by abominations or breaking of rules alone but by other factors such as wars as well. The Chiefship of Gutsa is annihilated after invasion by the people of Moto.

A semiotic analysis of the stories reveals some analogies and binary oppositions at play. The good is paralleled with the bad, the presence of the forest, and the absence of the forest. The good is the spirit medium Sora who was responsible for good harvests. The bad is the spirit medium Ivhu who was responsible for evil harvests. The good is the people of south (Kabale’s people) thriving and “there are big harvests,” the people of the north are dogged by “hunger, drought and poverty” (59).

Another important issue to note is that in almost all the stories, chiefs and spirit mediums play a pivotal role in their respective communities and act as guardians of the natural environment. The people of Zangara enjoy good harvests. They freely share with people from neighbouring countries. The secret behind abundance in Zangara reportedly comes from the people’s respect for their spirit mediums. The story of “Kachipapa the Guardian of the Forest” is yet another example of spirit medium and chiefs working as a team to keep an environment that is ecologically sound. The following extract demonstrates this:

[Chief Kachipapa] called all her people and introduced the five spirit mediums of the land. The most senior spirit was called Mhepo who was responsible for the air and the winds which brought rains to Zangara. The second was spirit medium Ivhu who was responsible for the soil. Spirit medium Njuzu was responsible for all the rivers, wells and ponds while spirit medium Sora was responsible for grass, trees and all the other plants in the land. Spirit medium Dombo was responsible for all the stones (11).

This can also be observed in other stories such as “The Vengeance of the locusts” where Chief Tendai ordered the adoption of totems to safeguard animals as well as the flora and fauna of the chiefdom from the predatory tendencies of humankind. Contemporary society may borrow a leaf from these traditional structures in implementing environmental conservation techniques.

Chifunyise also employs captivating titles that keep his young audience focused on the message he is conveying. The title story “Takura and the Talking Branch” combines the magic and fantasy and other characteristics of children’s stories whose features appeal to young readers and remain etched in their memories for a long time. The story “Takura and the Talking branch” is captivating and inculcates good habits of cleanliness and observing general rules about hygiene. Because he breaks the rule by relieving himself in the sacred forests, Takura has a horrifying experience – leaves turn into snakes and chant at him. It is even worse when his human waste follows him to his destination, to the chagrin and meleee of his intended hosts. Takura is both humiliated and frightened. The moral of the story Chifunyise’s opted to use this story for a reason; as the title of the anthology as it is full of magic, wonder and suspense.

These titles are stimulating as they challenge the trend of ignoring traditional education on the maintenance of a holistic environment. The titles directly evoke a sense of responsibility, or at least prevent one from causing environmental disharmony. In his informative study, Gitau (2011:316) reminds society that “…land, soil, animals, vegetation, rivers and lakes upon which society depended on for its sustenance were sacrosanct. They
had to be treated with reverence”. In the same manner, the stories teach society ecological rules and the consequences of failure to observe them. Such stories as “How Ntombizodwa Became an Anthill” and “Sacred Bees” have the same magical effects.

Pictures have also been used to help young children to visualize what is transpiring in the stories. However, the challenge comes when children fail to connect with the different cultures of traditional Zimbabwe. For example, children who take the initiative to read the text on their own might feel the gap that exists between the lifestyle that is portrayed in the stories and their own experiences. Short stories are specific and effective since they normally dwell on one incident. The stories are brief and to the point. They also are structured in such a way that they are accessible to children. The sentences are short and simple, making understanding easy. Although the stories generally have a traditional flair about them, contemporary society is incorporated particularly where the stories refer to eco-tourism, such as the title story. However, the author tends to force matters as there is a sudden shift from a traditional to a modern setting where eco-tourism flourishes.

It is unfortunate that the storybook is not colourful. It would have appealed more to the visual senses of young readers. However, children have their own way of making meaning out of written work even when it is assumed that the reading may be challenging to them. This is confirmed by Moyles who says:

For the past several decades in many parts of the world, play and active learning have been acknowledged as crucial to the cognitive and other developmental processes of children. That the child learns through making his or her own physical and mental connections with the world, through sensory explorations, personal effort, social experiences and the active seeking of meanings from experiences, has been established in the theories of psychologists and educationalists such as Froebel, Montessori, Isaacs, Steiner, Vygotsky and, later, Piaget and Bruner (1997:9).

Therefore, one way or the other, children are bound to enjoy the stories even when the pictures are dull and not very appealing to the eye. In spite of this, one can conclude that it is without doubt that Chifunyise’s text is effective in identifying and offering prescriptions to challenges that are haunting society today.

**Conclusion: Towards Environmental Conservation - Lessons from Takura and the Talking Branch**

It can thus be concluded that concern with the environment is the starting point towards environmental recovery. According Munyaradzi Murove (2009:315) there is need for the establishment of ethics that govern day-to-day activities with regards to the conservation of the environment- the need for ‘the interdependence of individuals within the larger society and to the environment on which they all belong.’ Such ethics can be inculcated in youngsters from the grassroots.

Children’s literature promotes environmental consciousness, appreciation, knowledge and stewardship within the children. The text *Takura and the Talking Branch*’s heroes facilitate and engender positive and admirable qualities of patriotism and general environmental consciousness. According to Stinson: Just as myths and legends embody cultural understandings, and treasured family stories give evidence of what a family values, stories that exemplify our beliefs. When we look at our stories, we come to recognize what we know and value (2002:164).

When children grow up aware of taboos in their society they internalize them and apply them practically in life. While taboos in *Takura and the Talking Branch* have limited reach, especially in contemporary urban society, statutes should be put in place that would eliminate and mitigate retrogressive behaviour amongst violators of such laws. When these are taught to children from as early as possible, they are internalized and children grow up with the knowledge of how to nurture the environment and the consequences of intentional land degradation and mal-use. It can also be concluded that uninformed uses and abuses of the landscape are retrogressive to development.

Traditional folklore indeed has lessons to teach contemporary society. Gitau suggests the exploitation of these traditional African beliefs that are environmentally – friendly in protecting nature and its surrounds. Eco-centrism principles should be embraced in order to eliminate wanton environmental destruction that is common in Africa. There is need to inculcate ecological wisdom, especially in children. It is quite encouraging to observe that the Earth Summit (Rio+20) in 2012 acknowledged the involvement of indigenous people in the achievement of sustainable development.

**Recommendations**

Having explored the usefulness of children’s literature to the environment, this paper recommends that:

* Young children be nurtured into environmental activism, drawing their consciences to the green movements around the world.
* Children’s literature be made mandatory in all primary schools and be incorporated in the Environmental Education curriculum.
* Stricter measures be adopted for the perpetrators of environmental degradation.
* Statutes regarding the environment be taught from as early as possible.
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