

Integrating language and sacred knowledge in conservation of indigenous trees in Siaya County

This is a descriptive survey of sacred places and trees considered the sources of powerful forces, energy and wisdom within the lake region of Kenya. Sacred landscapes are maintained through the practice of religious rituals, ceremonies, and sanctions within a specific cultural group. The sacred ecology refers to the interactions between humans and nature in a particular landscape in this life and next. Sacred places may hold significance for one household, a community or multiple communities. Indigenous knowledge systems, rooted in a particular geography, are mostly culturally transmitted via collective memory that is encoded in stories, myths, legends, songs, dances, rituals and practices. It may also be sacred or specialized knowledge known only to a few, such as religious leaders and herbal practitioners. Among the Luo community of Kenya all living creatures as well as non-living material objects contain some form of 'power' making them sacred to the user communities. The power might be dormant until they are provoked. In this presentation the paper aims at to show how developments in recent history have devalued and in some cases eliminated indigenous fauna and flora together with knowledge and practices through destruction of the sacred places, objects and unique plants and vegetation. Conflicts have emerged between the need to conserve language, enhance local livelihoods and protection of the environment. Increasing public awareness of deforestation and its links to soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, floods, and other forms of environmental degradation have not been made central to community's economic activities. While stressing on economic well-being and tourism, the society has ironically destroyed cultural identity and has adulterated sacred places with abandon.

