

Revitalising Indigenous Names in Balancing Environmental Science: A Case of Ignored Names of Places in Rusitu Valley

Matsapa Wiseman

Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, Bindura University of Science Education, 741 Chimurenga Road Off Trojan Road, Bindura

Corresponding author: matsapawiseman@gmail.com

Abstract

Indigenous names of places that the Ndaу community of Rusitu Valley has ignored have contributed to life-threatening calamities such as water-related conflicts, environmental degradation, and cyclones to current and future generations. This study examined how narrow options for survival and challenges in the Rusitu Valley have continued to expose the vulnerable Ndaу community to a direct conflict with nature. The study employed the re-imagination of nature theory as a lens in revitalizing indigenous names of places that have been ignored by the Ndaу community. This theory was aligned with a new environmental worldview that recognizes a greater integration with the world's traditional base, namely the Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). Thus, the study found that indigenous names given to nature by locals are enough evidence of human-nature coexistence and guarantee environmental protection. However, the study revealed that environmental oversight given by the current generation and development architectures have continued to dynamically change their nature, context, and continuum. Thus, the study aimed to analyze the reasons behind ignoring indigenous names of places, the challenges encountered after this negligence, and to ascertain the significance of such names in addressing the problems that emerged. The research used in-depth interviews, observations, and content analysis to establish the realities around the ignored names such as Chirambadota (a place where no fire will ever burn), Ndadzingwa (to be chased away from your indigenous land) and Pene (an upper place regarded as a natural asset by forefathers). The study also revealed that socio-economic

activities by the locals and development proponents that neglect the coexistence of indigenous names of places and Environmental Science may proffer serious implications. In light of this scenario, the study concluded with a call for revitalizing historical indigenous names of places, especially the negative ones, to balance the socio-economic activities of the locals and Environmental Science.

Keywords: Chirambadota, Environmental Science, Ndadingwa, Pene, Indigenous names of places, Rusitu Valley.

Introduction and Background

The world over, disregard or neglect of the significance of IKS can cause serious and devastating effects for human beings and the natural environment. IKS, as a broad branch of knowledge encompassing culture, natural resources, and indigenous names of places, is important in enhancing social, religio-cultural, and environmental sustainability (Mapara, 2022; Rusinga and Maposa, 2022). Contextually, the term neglect or ignore can describe a situation whereby the locals overexploit the essentials in areas with specific indigenous names, prohibiting the overexploitation of natural resources. Names and naming practices in the United States, the Caribbean, and the African continent, are not merely elements of cultural retention but also forms of resistance, security, sustainability, and construction of identity and memory for persons of their descent (Pfukwa, 2007; Fitzpatrick, 2012; Raper, 2017). Particularly in Africa, the place names that the Bushmen gave to the features in their environment were primarily descriptive, referring to the geomorphology, hydrographic features, vegetation, and animals of the vicinity (Raper, 2017).

Naming is an integral part of any society and culture; it is beyond identity tags; it influences moral contacts, social interactions, and aspirations of individuals or groups within a community (Akintoye, 2021). Igboin (2014) argues that African names are not philosophical or rhetoric but are the heritage that is believed to convey deep intrinsic significance for the named or bearer and the community at large. For the Yoruba people in Nigeria, a name is an essential entity used to preserve cultural heritage and perpetuate indigenous philosophies, knowledge systems, and balanced environmental science (Uluocha, 2015; Akintoye, 2021). Contextually, Environmental

Science focuses on interactions between the solid earth, its air, water, and living organisms. In essence, indigenous names given to natural environmental features by our forefathers have primordially played a significant role in balancing Environmental Science.

Africans do not just give names to identify the named or bearer, names also serve as an essential part of indigenous ways of communicating societal values and beliefs and balancing Environmental Science (Pfukwa, 2003; Mamvura, 2014; Mapara, 2022). Furthermore, naming is also an essential device utilized among various indigenous cultures to express valuable and historical information to an individual in his/her micro capacity, family or group (meso-capacity), and community (macro-capacity). Therefore, names are not just signs but are regarded as symbols that evaluate the nature, importance, characteristics, functions, or orientation of a given society (Echekwube, 2005). In other words, names encapsulate the totality of humanity, nature, the environment, and 'communal existence' (Igboin, 2014; Sipeyiye, 2020). Therefore, this study examines the connection between indigenous names of places, human beings, and the natural environment.

Although various archives, written sources, and oral traditions are important sources of indigenous knowledge, indigenous names of places are central in providing the historical truth, memorizing events, and protecting societal values and beliefs in Zimbabwe (Mamvura, 2014; Mensah et al., 2020). This is particularly so because indigenous names given to the natural environment by locals are enough evidence of human-nature coexistence and guarantee human security at all levels (Pfukwa, 2007; Mamvura, 2014; Olatunji et al., 2015). Therefore, the study accepts that for any society's sustenance of the environment, indigenous names of places given by its forefathers must be acknowledged.

Place naming is also central to language revitalization as it helps to strengthen, grow, and preserve indigenous peoples' connections with the natural environment and cultural identity (Uluocha, 2015). Thus, indigenous names gave the indigenous population a sense of belonging, protection, and sustainability (Baobeid, 2018). On the other hand, ignorance and misuse of an indigenous-preferred knowledge base can adversely affect vulnerable indigenous communities (Ndiweni and Gwate, 2014). Furthermore, for many centuries, indigenous communities have been well known

for their virtues of preserving culture, the environment, and the worldview to the extent of portraying them through their traditional names (Udechukwu and Nnyigide, 2016). In line with this background, indigenous communities can utilize the indigenous names of places as a social asset that can help them to survive without a direct conflict with nature. Conflict with nature is a conservation conflict that emerges when people destroy species that other people want to conserve or when the protection of land areas threatens the well-being of the locals (Peltola, 2022; Masakure and Ndumeya, 2021).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no qualitative case study has been undertaken to revitalize the ignored indigenous place names among the marginalized Ndaou group. However, indigenous names of places that the Ndaou community of Rusitu Valley has ignored cause life-threatening problems such as water-related conflicts, degradation, cyclones, floods, and landslides to current and future generations. With narrow options for survival, these problems have continued to expose the vulnerable Ndaou community to a direct conflict with nature and Environmental Science. As a recent example, Cyclone Idai of March 2019 devastated the Ndaou community of Rusitu Valley to the extent that many lives were lost, important infrastructure and the natural environment were damaged, and the local livelihoods of the survivors were affected drastically (Sipeyiye, 2020; Chanza et al., 2020, Musarandega and Masocha, 2023). This implies that the recurrence of these unspeakable circumstances in the valley may also affect future generations. Against this backdrop, the Ndaou should have largely taken advantage of their traditional base by positively responding to the old age wisdom transmitted to them by their forefathers (Chigidi, 2015; 2021). However, the Ndaou people persistently failed to benefit from the wisdom, such as indigenous names of places when they should have. Thus, the study aims to analyze life-threatening challenges encountered by the Ndaou community after neglecting indigenous names of places in the Rusitu Valley.

The main research questions of the study are:

- Why are indigenous names of places ignored in Rusitu Valley?
- What are the consequences of ignoring indigenous names of places in Rusitu Valley?
- How are indigenous names of places relevant in addressing societal problems?

This study is structured as follows: Section 2 is the literature review; Section 3 covers the materials and methods; Section 4 is the results; Section 5 is the discussion of the results; Section 6 is the conclusion of the study.

Literature review

Focusing on the historical relevance of indigenous names in the studies of IKS continues to cause recurrent problems emanating from Environmental Science. The related literature of this study was obtained from journals, textbooks, and theses.

The role of colonial and post-colonial practices on Indigenous Names

The world over, colonization and post-colonial practices have brought the neglect of indigenous named places in many indigenous societies (Wilson, 1993; Ngoyi, 2021). Renaming and displacement in Canada have been a critical part of settler colonization in which the erasure of indigenous peoples' names, languages, cultures, and social structures was prevalent (Gray and Ruck, 2019). The African names that represent their religio-cultural significance were taken for granted by the settlers. Rusinga and Maposa (2020) concur that colonial assumptions were just a way of alienating Africans from their valuable land resources rather than an attempt to offer more viable environmental management strategies. For instance, when Chirinda Forest was in the hands of settlers, they imposed policies that discriminated against indigenous people acquiring forest resources (Ndumeya, 2020). Resultantly, where policymakers are insensitive to the economic, religious-cultural, and environmental practices of the locals they govern, the latter resist the policies by clandestinely overexploiting their resources (Thondhlana and Cundill, 2017; Ndumeya, 2020; Masakure and Ndumeya, 2021). This aforementioned view connotes the neglect of indigenous names as they are still relevant in conserving the environment of the locals.

Tensions between elected local government bodies, namely Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) and traditional leaders, have resulted in the disinclination of the locals to participate in rural development programs (Ncube, 2011). As traditional leaders have existed since time immemorial, they are highly respected, listened to, and sometimes almost worshipped. Culturally, these traditional leaders are the only agencies who can convince the ancestral spirits to accept or

adopt any new concept or ideology in any local community (Dodo, 2013). Without this historical relevance of traditional leadership systems in sustainable rural development, the traditional base of the local communities may be seriously eroded and ignored. Dodo (2013) and Ncube (2011) argue that the quandary with the traditional leadership institution is that the field has been over-politicized to the extent of accepting everything from VIDCOs and also being given directions by District Administrators. Presumably, this over-politicization of the traditional leadership institution also plays a critical role in the neglect of indigenous names by the local communities.

Researchers must consider 'land corruption' as new concepts emerge around the realities of land redistribution, utilization, management, and conflict (Mutondoro et al., 2016). This new concept can be defined as the use of political and economic powers to subvert laid down rules and regulations for individual selfish gains (ibid). Land corruption is against our long-lived philosophy of Ubuntu, which promotes humanness and distributive justice in all facets of life (Nyawo, 2023). Moyo (2011) contends that the land reform in Zimbabwe was not free of corruption as evidence points to most elites who are politically inclined to the ruling party having been blessed with multiple farms or plots (Chigidi, 2015). This position is supported by Mkodzongi and Lawrence (2019), who reiterates that those owning multiple farms or plots tend to be politically connected and use their influence to resist measures to bring equity to the agricultural sector. Through the lack of distributive justice and compromise in the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) (Hungwe, 2021; Nyawo, 2023), an estimated 200 000 permanent farm workers and many foreign farm workers lost work opportunities. Due to agricultural disturbances caused by the FTLRP, workers were left out in land redistributive justice (Kabonga, 2020, Hungwe, 2021). Consequently, these aforesaid disadvantaged groups opened new lands in indigenous named places.

Challenges faced by indigenous people

The colonial and post-colonial eras have also brought intense setbacks in Environmental Science. They destroyed indigenous people's self-confidence and denied them the right to manage their socio-economic and environmental affairs (Frederick, 2006; Igboin, 2014). Furthermore, there is a connection between naming and power, naming and progress, and between naming and bringing it to reality (Wilson, 1993; Chigidi & Mutasa, 2013). Thus, when Indigenous Africans permit others to name and define their places, they jeopardize the Indigenous African interpretation of

Environmental Science (Ngoyi, 2021). For instance, in Nigeria, the distortion of place names or toponyms seriously threatens the indigenous mapmaking (cartographic) heritage, environmental protection, and cultural identity of the locals (Uluocha, 2015). Therefore, indigenous names of places in African societies have been taken for negligence since the colonial era.

Romanticizing IKS can be risky as indigenous communities generate context-specific knowledge that benefits the whole community (Muyambo, 2018). For instance, in south-eastern Zimbabwe, there is a sacred mountain called Sviba or Gomo raMabika. The name was derived from one of the traditional leaders of the Murinye clan, who was buried in it (Mawere et al., 2012). As the African worldview recognizes the life after death or the living dead (Mbiti, 1969), they view places like Sviba as sacred places that must be respected and preserved. Mawere et al. (2012) establish that Gomo raMabika remains sacred to date; hence, the numerous breakdowns of Econet contractors' machinery during the construction of the booster service road were statements of displeasure by ancestors. This justifies the significance of the African traditional base in local development initiatives.

Environmental fragility from anthropogenic degradation (Hein & De Ridder, 2006) exacerbates many local problems, including food insecurity, reduced resilience, conflicts, and stagnant development (OECD, 2022). Anthropogenic degradation is the human-induced combination of exposure to climate, environmental, and health risks and insufficient coping capacity of community systems to manage and mitigate those challenges. Matandirotya (2022) and OECD (2022) argue that socio-environmental challenges are inseparable from political, economic, religious, security, institutional, and social conditions in which they become a reality. This also means that they revolve around how indigenous communities are organized and how knowledge is interpreted, communicated, and utilized (Matandirotya, 2022). The above literature shows that indigenous communities must look back at their past as their essential way forward.

The growing world population changes land use patterns, resulting in environmental fragility (OECD, 2022; Muhammad et al., 2023). As a result, environmental scientists posit that life balance on this solid earth is in danger due to human socio-economic activities (Manyani et al., 2019; Sipeyiye, 2020). This means that the consequences of human neglect of the elements of nature

manifest clearly in weather-related calamities, including cyclones, floods, droughts, and landslides (Chanza et al., 2020). For example, in March 2019, many lives were lost in Chimanimani, infrastructure was destroyed, and the livelihoods of the survivors were negatively affected due to Cyclone Idai (Sipeyiye, 2020; Chanza et al., 2020; Musarandega and Masocha, 2023). Ironically, most of these weather-related calamities result from the uneven balance of life between the four components of Environmental Science, namely the solid earth, its air, water, and living organisms (Allaby, 2002).

The study by Chiwandamira and Mbengo (1999) shows that environmental concerns are inextricably linked to social and economic activities within any community. OECD (2022) concurs that most environmental problems emerge within interactions between human beings and natural resources, incorporating the role of markets and economics, politics, security, and social relations. An observation made by Rusinga and Maposa (2020) shows that the Ndaus were and still are conscious of the devastating tendencies of the unsustainable utilization of natural resources that are rooted in the religious-cultural background of the locals. As this has been the challenge faced in Rusitu Valley since 2000, there is a need to take heed of environmental science by revitalizing the Ndau worldview on place names.

Worldview of African Names as the Bedrock of Environmental Science

The African worldview ascertains the core understanding of the socio-human, natural, and spiritual factors of given societal values and beliefs. Sipeyiye (2020) reiterates that the Ndau worldview, like many other African worldviews, is a three-tier structure that comprises the human world (social relationships and human beings), the natural world (the physical world that comprises all forms of material such as natural resources) and the spiritual world (the atmosphere). The Ndaus, just like other African societies, have their own way of studying and interpreting Environmental Science. The Ndau worldview establishes what is possible, probable, actual, desirable, acceptable, and essential in each of the spheres of the social, material, physical, and supernatural (Dube and Sipeyiye, 2021). In the case of indigenous names of places, the Ndaus do not give them just as an act of identifying the named places but also as an essential part of indigenous ways of communicating socio-environmental values and beliefs (Mapara, 2022). In this regard, Ndau communities established the naming system vitally as part of their traditional base.

As Ndaou communities do not just establish the naming system to identify the named (Mapara, 2022), some names have been given to preserve and respect nature and ancestors (Mbiti, 1969), while others act as a security warning. Prohibitions and restrictions through naming systems on certain indigenous places, like river confluences, forests, mountains, and wetlands, are not a new worldview among the Ndaou but reflect an everlasting indigenous culture. While the aforementioned elements of nature sustain human life, the socio-economic activities of indigenous communities concerning the heed and negligence of environmental science offer serious entailments. The destructive tendencies of human negligence manifest in disturbances such as cyclones, droughts, and floods (Sipeyiye, 2020; Rusinga and Maposa, 2020). Contrary to the Ndaou worldview, principles of Christianity prohibited the locals from acknowledging the strength of the Ndaou traditional base in sustainably managing their resources. This is due to the Christian belief that blackmailed solutions to local problems through IKS are diabolic (Ndiweni and Gwate, 2014).

With all suggestions advanced by various development architects on the development roadmap (Mawere et al., 2012) of the Ndaou society, indigenous naming systems established by the locals guarantee human and environmental security. In the Ndaou tradition, names of places are also memories of historical events (living heritage), just as they represent the current Ndaou society, family, and individual reality. Chigidi and Mutasa (2013) concur that even during the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, men had a monopoly over the naming system used to point to things, objects, and people. Being cognizant of the Ndaou worldview (Dube and Sipeyiye, 2021) on environmental science, indigenous names of places replay and revisualize the circumstances once experienced by a particular indigenous society.

Materials and methods

Theoretical framework

The study employed the re-imagination of nature theory to revitalize indigenous names of places that the Ndaou community has ignored. The theory is the opposite of the disenchantment theory, which emphasizes the complete undoing of the traditional base of indigenous communities (Reader, 2021; McPherso, 2020). Sipeyiye (2021) supports the view that the disenchantment of the nature theory has been driven by the modern Western worldview that reduces nature to material

without life or spirit. Consequently, disasters have always emanated from human interaction with nature, technology, and other living entities. Traditional ways of perceiving nature as alive and sacred are replenished with modern scientific recognitions, viewing nature as readily available resources to be exploited by human beings. The re-imagination theory holds that positive or negative attitudes for or against nature result from a way of conceptualizing the world that stimulates either constructive or destructive actions towards it (Sipeyiye, 2020). The re-enchantment theory also aligns with a new environmental worldview that recognizes a greater integration with the world's traditional base, namely the IKS. The theory supports the need to revisit our IKS as the only essential way to address the problems associated with cultural colonization among indigenous communities. One weakness of this theory is that the sacredness of nature is viewed as an essentiality to the extent of forgetting the communal existence of indigenous communities. However, it must be noted that as nature vitalizes the need for life, human beings also need agricultural land, food, shelter, health services, and energy (Pinello, 2022).

Study area

The Ndau people are a minority ethnic group found in Manicaland province in the eastern part of Zimbabwe (Sipeyiye, 2020; Rusinga & Maposa, 2020). These Ndau people are concentrated in the Chimanimani and Chipinge districts (Konyana, 2016; Mangiza & Chakawa, 2021; Hlongwana, 2021). Chimanimani District is home to five Ndau chiefdoms, namely Muusha, Ngorima, Ndima, Chikukwa, and Mutambara. This study focuses on Muusha and Ngorima Chiefdoms, where floods and landslides due to cyclones recurrently cause devastating disturbances to some of the historically indigenous named places in Rusitu Valley. For example, the Copa Growth Point was the area most seriously devastated by floods in the valley (Chanza et al., 2020).

People in Chimanimani, particularly Rusitu Valley, speak Ndau, a dialect of the dominant Shona language in Zimbabwe (Chanza et al., 2020). Their history and origins are related to the Zimbabwe plateau, the fragmentations of the Monomotapa Empire and Mbire Kingdoms, and the expansionary cycles of the Rozvi Empire (Patricio, 2012). Geographically, Rusitu Valley has evidenced the vastness of land resources since the pre-colonial period (KBAP, 2022). Most of the Ndau people occupied the vast area of land along the Mozambique-Zimbabwe border, from Rusitu Valley to Mahenye in Chipinge (Mangiza and Chakawa, 2021). This supports the view that the

introduction of settlements in this Valley was in conjunction with the availability of land resources (Chanza et al., 2020). Similarly, Mazarire (2009) argues that the sustainable livelihoods of the people who live in valleys are determined by their choice of settlements and indicate continuity in their spatial behaviour.

Methodological prima

The study's qualitative approach is informed by the constructivist philosophy that seeks to access the meaning embedded in deep historical indigenous names of places in the context of socio-environmental challenges encountered by the Ndaou people. A case study design allowed for a close range with the Ndaou people of Rusitu Valley in the Chimanimani district. Creswell (2007) defines a case study as a qualitative research approach in which the researcher explores a bounded system (a case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. For this research, data was collected through observations and in-depth interviews with purposively selected informants and accessing secondary sources such as published books and articles by other scholars on Ndaou traditional base. The age groups of participants in this study ranged between twenty-two (22) and eighty (80) years. Entry into the research field was done at the beginning of October 2021 and ended at the end of December 2022.

The research purposefully selected three indigenous Ndaou place names: Chirambadota, Ndadzingwa, and Pene. These names are significant as they represent the Ndaou cultural heritage, conflict resolution, and environmental preservation strategies. To that end, the researcher employed the observation method to deeply interrogate traditional court cases related to the ignored names of places, disturbances in the Rusitu Valley, people in prohibited places, and socio-economic activities that expose the Ndaou to direct conflict with nature. Additionally, in-depth interviews with the Ndaou people were employed to gather their opinions, experiences, and the challenges encountered due to the ignored indigenous names of places in the Rusitu Valley.

Data was collected from a purposefully selected sample of twenty-five (25) participants, comprising ten (10) elderly members of the Ndaou community, five (5) youths who resided in prohibited indigenous named places, four (4) landless former farm workers, and six (6) traditional leaders. The purposive sampling technique was appropriate as it allowed the selection of

participants with information for this study. Furthermore, as the researcher is Ndaou and is familiar with the respondents' culture and socio-economic activities of the researched community, purposive sampling was the most appropriate. The data collected was coded, analyzed thematically, and discussed in light of relevant literature. Thematic analysis is an important process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The researcher also upheld the necessary ethical guidelines for undertaking the study. In line with these guidelines, observations and in-depth interviews were done in a non-intrusive way in which anonymity was upheld, and the pictures that compromised the integrity of the observed people and the community at large were not displayed by the researcher. Therefore, participants were informed of the purpose of the research and were guaranteed their privacy and confidentiality.

Results

Several themes emerged from analyzing accounts and observations of various participants' lived experiences on the ignored indigenous names of places in Rusitu Valley. These were used to structure the study's findings. These themes include the traditional meaning of some ignored indigenous names of places and the reasons behind their neglect, challenges encountered after the neglect, and the relevance of these names in addressing the problems that emerged.

Some of the ignored names of places in Rusitu

From narrations of traditional leaders and local elderly participants, the definition and the origins of the traditional name, Chirambadota or Masanga, were deduced. The participants revealed that their forefathers named the area where Kopa Growth Point was established Chirambadota or Masanga. Chirambadota literally means a place where no fire will ever burn. Masanga or Masonga also literally means a place or a confluence where three major rivers, namely Nyahode, Rusitu, and Chipita, meet. The corroboration of traditional leaders clearly explains the origins of the names Chirambadota and Masanga.

The name Chirambadota prohibits people from residing in the area around the confluence of these major rivers. Historically, these places were not conducive for human settlements but for planting crops like chidza (groundnuts). Even when the Rural District Council (RDC) wanted to establish a growth point, one of the local traditional leaders argued that it was not a safe place to build

structures. Therefore, their ancestors prohibited the building of structures and the burning of fire in Chirambadota. Against this background, the RDC established the growth point around Chirambadota after independence.

Through observations and interviews, one of the residential areas established just before the confluence (Masonga) was Madhomeni, named after the Agricultural Extension Officers, who were the first people to settle in this place. Consequently, Chirambadota and Masanga were replaced by new modern names such as Kopa, Gata, and Madhomeni.

The explanations given by traditional authorities living in the Ndadzingwa area revealed the definition of the indigenous name Ndadzingwa and how it emerged. Before the coming of white settlers, Headman Dzawanda Dzingire, under Chief Muusha, lived in the Dzikope area called Keven, which was named after a coffee plantation farmer. When Keven arrived, he ordered the Headman to leave Dzikope so that he could establish his coffee plantation. However, Dzawanda, with his people, tried to resist this order. Still, they were forcefully removed from this place and moved downwards to reside in the lower valley near the perennial Rusitu River. After being frustrated by this decisive event, Dzawanda named the new place Ndadzingwa, which literally means the Headman and his people were forcefully removed from their conducive settlement areas. Traditional leaders concur that the name Ndadzingwa represents the issue of being chased away from our arable ancestral lands to disease-infested lower valleys along the perennial Rusitu River. Therefore, this area was not conducive to human settlements but cattle rearing. Another name supporting cattle production in Rusitu is Mbusho, which means a viable area for grazing land (pastures).

Narrations by local older adults and traditional leaders who lived in the valley below Pene Mountain concur with the definition of the indigenous name Pene and its origin. As a cultural heritage site found in the Ngorima area, Pene means an upper place regarded as a natural asset by their forefathers. Traditional leaders concur that the place was not conducive for human settlement, but it preserved natural resources such as grazing land (pastures), water sources, natural herbs, energy, wildlife, and food. One of the local elderly participants narrated that Pene ndiro chinyuka chikuru chezvimukowa zvakaita saana imbi, chikwenjere, gwaha, chimbandikwa, mutsangazi and

mwatsara, uyehe ndimwo mwetaiushira mwombe dzedu. This literally means numerous streams emerged from Pene Mountain.

Local older adults and traditional leaders concurred that the mountain is about eight kilometers wide and five hundred meters high. One of the traditional leaders revealed that Pene iNdauyairemeredzwa, iri padenga inotichengetera mafuro, mvura, huni, mishonga yechindau nezvakawanda. This literally means that Pene is an upper land that was preserved and protected as a cultural heritage site, pastoral lands, water main sources, energy, food and medicinal sources, and shelter for wildlife. However, local elders concurred that Pene Mountain was not suitable for human settlements, but the young generation resided there and introduced plantations along various streams. They corruptly collaborate with the young generation leaders (traditional) who do not take heed of their primordial traditional base.

Reasons behind the neglect of names of places in Rusitu

From interviews and observation, the researcher found mixed responses on the reasons behind the neglect of indigenous names of places in the Rusitu Valley. Some of the reasons given by traditional authorities and the local elderly participants differed from those of former farm workers and youths. Traditional leaders and local elderly participants concurred that total acceptance of Christian values diluted the Ndaus' cultural heritage. For example, these participants argued that traditional authorities rebuked the stance of establishing a Growth Point at Chirambadota by development proponents. However, the government of Zimbabwe proceeded to establish a settlement at this river confluence. Both the government and the new settlers overlooked our forefathers' naming system.

By adopting Christian values, the Ndaus ignored the relevance of traditional names of places. One of the local elderly participants narrated: “vadoko varikuti madhara muchakasara, zvirozvakachinja kare, apana chichaera mazuwa ano tavakushanda nemwanakona wamwari.” This means nothing is sacred in Christianity; they are working with the guidance of the Son of God. These Christian values adopted by the Ndaus have their traditional base. Colonialism and its segregation policies also led to overpopulation in the Ndaus reserves. As a result, the Ndaus were left with no option except to be in severe conflict with nature. For example, although Dzawanda

knew that he would conflict with nature when he established the settlement near Rusitu River, he had no option except to accept a defeat by the powerful settlers. Again, people without the cultural background of the Rusitu Valley community took the meanings of indigenous names of places such as Chirambadota, Masanga, and Pene for granted. They only longed for new land to settle with their families without considering a given area's cultural heritage.

On the other hand, from observation and interviews with former farm workers and youth participants, the research found other reasons for neglecting cultural heritage sites. They corroborated that some of the reasons behind the neglect of indigenous names of places include corruption and distributive injustices, market conflicts, unemployment, and lack of other livelihood opportunities in the valley. Most landless former farm workers were ignored in land redistribution; consequently, they invaded sacred places and wetlands as an option for survival. They achieved this in different ways, for example, through corrupt deals with traditional authorities and taking advantage of the 2000-2009 political environment. Additionally, many youths have no land and, at the same time, no employment or other livelihood opportunities exist.

The only survival option at the disposal of these youths is to be in direct conflict with nature through overexploiting natural resources, which are also essential for future generations. Those with small pieces of land suffered from challenges posed by market conflicts. For example, smallholder banana producers were always in conflict for the market with informal traders who wanted to continuously underpay for their produce. These smallholder farmers were threatened by informal traders when they tried to go to the marketplace with their produce. As a result, small-scale producers continuously opened new lands to produce surplus to cater for their family needs. However, most of the newly opened farming land lies in areas formerly prohibited for settlement by their forefathers.

Three local elderly participants also blamed the age and background of the installed traditional leaders. Some traditional leaders in charge of the whole community do not have enough cultural background, while others are too young to acknowledge the cultural heritage of the Ndau community. One of the local elderly participants narrated that *amweni anamutape arikugadzwa muno vanonga vasina chaanoziya pamusana pedunhu rawo, ngekuti nguwa yake zhinjitu wanga*

arikuchirungu. Amweniwo anamutape acho ngaanogadzwawo ane makore ari pashi pemakumi mairi, apana chinonga chati chazikanwa pamusana pemagaririro netsika dzeaNdau. This literally means that some younger traditional leaders do not have enough background of the society they represent because they have spent much of their time working in urban areas. They came when it was their turn to be installed. Other traditional leaders were installed when they were still young (less than twenty years), and at this age, they would know nothing about Ndau cultural norms and beliefs.

Challenges related to the neglect of indigenous names of places

Four sub-thematic headings emerged from observations made by the researcher and the participants' in-depth interview responses on the challenges related to the neglect of indigenous names of places. These sub-thematic headings include cyclones, floods and landslides, water-related conflicts, degradation of the Rusitu Valley, and direct conflict with nature.

Cyclones, floods, and landslides in the Rusitu Valley

Traditional leaders and local elderly participants agreed that the neglect of indigenous named places had exposed the vulnerable indigenous Ndau people to natural disasters and hazards such as cyclones, floods, and landslides. These calamities minimize the livelihood opportunities of the Ndau community. For example, due to floods caused by Cyclone Idai, some of the indigenous named places, such as Chirambadota (do not reside on the confluence of the major rivers), were totally destroyed to the extent of leaving boulders deposits in the formerly established settlement. The cyclone exploited the vulnerability and environmental exposure to which the Ndau people of Rusitu Valley have been subjected. One of the young participants mentioned that although not as severe as the devastations caused by floods in the Madhomeni area, landslides in Pene Mountain also resulted in environmental fragility. Traditional leaders and local elderly participants corroborated that Cyclone Idai swept away people who resided on the indigenous place named Chirambadota on 15 March 2019. Even before Cyclone Idai, people were warned by the effects of Cyclone Eline of 2000 that swept away Nyahode Bridge at Kopa Growth Point. A traditional leader in Dzingire Village revealed that indigenous names of places given to the natural environment by our forefathers are enough to point at future human-environmental problems.

Water-related conflicts in Rusitu Valley

The researcher observed that residents of Rusitu Valley fueled irrigation water scarcity by neglecting their traditional base. Indigenous names of places such as Pene Mountain are essential for preserving perennial stream water for agricultural and household purposes. However, youth participants concurred that some major conflicts that emerged resulted from water scarcity. This is evidenced by the several streams emanating from Pene, which are drying up and piling pressure on the few remaining perennial streams in the valley. Increased deforestation, squatter settlements, and environmental fragility in sacred places contribute to hydrological uncertainties and intensify water-related conflicts. To make matters worse, the preponderance of mining is polluting some of the major perennial rivers, such as Nyabamba, Nyahode, and Rusitu. Consequently, this has resulted in muddy water that is unsuitable for irrigation and other household uses, leading to serious pressure applied on the few remaining clean sources of water in Rusitu Valley.

Degradation in the Rusitu Valley

From the narrations given by traditional authorities and local elderly participants, future Ndaun generations in Rusitu Valley are more vulnerable to the consequences of environmental degradation than is commonly assumed. As deforestation and the environmental delicacy of the valley in the 2000s have been disguised by the surging trend of annual rainfall, future challenges associated with the degradation of the valley may be serious. One of the youths indicated that the future Ndaun population in this valley might be more susceptible to the consequences of environmental degradation, such as droughts, than the present. Every member of this valley must consider the lives of future generations by enhancing balanced human-environmental interactions.

Local elderly participants concurred that places like Pene were previously reserved as the main clean water sources for the Ngorima area. However, deforestation and environmental fragility are now rampant to the extent that Pene Mountain has lost its relevance in sustaining the whole community. One of the local elderly participants narrated that “ngekwenda kwenguwa ndau yaNgorima ino ichaomera zvekuguma taakutama neyekumwa chaiyo ngekuti makare kare taiziya kuti Pene nezvinyuka zvirimwo zvaakupera kuvhiringwa nevanhu vogaramwo ndizvo zvaiitata kuti tione mvura yakakwana.” This literally means that water resources will be scarcer in the future

because historically, we knew and believed that Pene, which was turned into agricultural lands, is their main water source.

Direct conflict with nature

The study found that cultural heritage sites were protected and respected through indigenous names of places. However, these sites have since been converted into agricultural land. The scenario has resulted in direct conflict with the environment and the existing natural systems, such as wildlife, rivers, natural forests, and mountains. The youth participants who resided in previously prohibited areas indicated that there were limited means of survival, resulting in an uneasy coexistence with the natural system. For instance, the youth narrated that “as youths with limited options for survival, we find ourselves ignoring the indigenous naming system of the Ndaou community.” The study found that areas such as Pene, formerly forbidden to reside through the indigenous naming system, were turned into residential settlements.

The relevance of indigenous names of places

From the researcher’s observations and narrations from in-depth interviews of various participants’ lived experiences, four sub-themes that ascertain the relevance of indigenous names of places in addressing the problems emerged. These sub-themes include the protection of socio-cultural heritage, human security and environmental protection, land resources conservation, and the Ndaou traditional conflict resolutions for sustainable peace.

Protection of socio-cultural heritage

From the quotations of traditional authorities and local elderly participants, the relevance of ignored names of places was largely observable among the Ndaou. The study found that indigenous names of places preserved memories of political, social, cultural, and historical events just as they represent the current community, family, or personal reality. Names have been given to sacred places such as Chirambadota and Pene to preserve their socio-historical and cultural heritage. Participants in this study concurred that indigenous names of places have helped to protect culture since time immemorial and provided a string of relationships between people and nature. Therefore, these historical names of places have played a critical role in balancing environmental science in Rusicu Valley.

Human security and environmental protection

The study found that indigenous named places played an important role in human security and environmental protection. The researcher observed that human security encompasses the ability of individuals, families or groups, and communities to be resilient during disturbances such as floods, landslides, droughts, diseases, and conflicts. Names given to the river confluences of Nyahode, Chipita, and Rusitu Rivers by the indigenous Ndaui inhabitants were Chirambadota and Masanga or Masonga. Interestingly, these traditional names given to this part of the valley by the Ndaui suggest that the place was unsuitable for human habitation. These indigenous named places were prohibited from settling by local headmen, such as the late Dzawanda, due to the experience of floods and diseases and the dangers they posed to human security. Historically, the Ndaui sometimes used this place for crop production rather than human settlement. Human settlements were prohibited through the names given to this area, particularly because of the historical calamities narrated by the study participants. Traditional leaders and local older adults of the area argued that indigenous names given to the natural ecosystems by their forefathers were enough assurance for environmental protection and human security.

Land resources conservation

The participants corroborated that indigenous names of places such as Pene have played an essential role in land resource conservation since time immemorial. Historically, these places were sources of meat and traditional fruits, medicines, and water for the locals. Free access to these land resources may consequently result in their overexploitation. However, our traditional leaders have had an essential role in using indigenous names of places to control and plan the sustainable management of land resources. Pene is an essential source of water for irrigation, cleaning, cooking, and drinking water for all locals living in the Ngorima area. Conservation is critical for sustainable progress because many perennial streams that feed the Nyahode and Rusitu Rivers have emerged from Pene Mountain. Therefore, traditional leaders prohibited human settlement and agricultural production in this area in order to conserve land resources.

The Ndaui traditional conflict resolutions

Through observation and in-depth interviews, the study found that as mechanisms for traditional conflict resolution, some indigenous names played a critical role in enhancing sustainable peace. For example, the name Ndadzingwa, which literally means the acceptance of defeat before it was too late, helped the Ndau people conserve their natural environment and avoid wars. One of the local elderly participants said, “muchindau chedu isusu aNdau, kune twoyi akuna chiriro,” meaning that those who quickly accept defeat during times of conflict have many lasting advantages. Traditional authorities concurred that historically, the name Ndadzingwa reminds them of how their forefathers traditionally resolved conflicts, where they came from, and how they have been deprived of their arable land. Therefore, to avoid intractable conflicts with serious destructive consequences on the environment and human beings, the Ndadzingwa approach was a necessary Ndau traditional dispute resolution mechanism. The Ndau people disclosed an essential connection between traditional conflict resolution and their naming system. Even the term Chirambadota, which prohibited settlements in Madhomeni, was an indigenous way of avoiding a direct conflict with nature.

Discussion

Against the backdrop of ignoring the significance of indigenous names in addressing recurrent problems, this research gives several insights into the reasons behind the neglect and challenges faced in Rusitu Valley. Most of the calamities that emerged, such as floods, landslides, water-related conflicts, and direct conflict with nature, are due to the discord between the locals and their environment. For instance, locals and the government ignored the affected communities' traditional knowledge base. Hence, Chanza et al. (2020) argue that establishing Kopa Growth Point is believed to have occurred against the local tradition. Although some locals, such as traditional authorities and elders, were theoretically aware of the significance of the Ndau naming system in addressing calamities, development proponents have neglected the relevance of indigenous names. As a solution, Mawere et al. (2012) noted that it is essential to draft a comprehensive sustainable development roadmap that will enhance development that is cordial to the community's environmental, cultural, economic, and political setting.

Cyclones, floods, and landslides could have been significantly minimized had the locals and the government paid attention to the local indigenous naming systems. This study found that whatever

views are advanced by different schools of thought on the development agenda of Rusitu Valley and Africa, indigenous names given to nature by the locals are enough evidence of the witnessed calamities and guarantee for environmental protection, conservation of water sources, and human security. In line with the above, the study has shown that as more exploitation of land resources continues in indigenous-named areas, these indigenous names of places will return to haunt the inhabitants some other day, even if new development is ushered in the Valley. In a similar observation, Mapara (2022) noted that indigenous names carry within them reminders of some of the wrongdoings that are viewed as the most senseless and completely unacceptable to the environment within which each being is located and exists. This observation resonates with the arguments by Uluocha (2015), who accepts the significance of local place names as primordial evidence of environmental planning, science, and technology.

It was clear that as a direct conflict with nature, evidenced by the current environmental degradations that are taking place in most of the indigenous named places, the Ndaou people are living on borrowed time. Ironically, people have never won a battle against nature, which can be equated to the battle between a bicycle (human being) and a train (nature). This contextually means that current and future generations become the human-nature conflict victims. With the observed unbalanced environmental science, this study shows that the RDC, the Environmental Management Agency, Traditional Leadership Institutions (TLI), and the locals must join hands in preserving local traditions, values, and cultural heritage sites. In essence, TLI must be used as a direct agency to convince the locals to abide by the communal rules and regulations. In line with the above, Dodo (2013) and Chanza et al. (2020) corroborate that traditional leaders are the essential agencies in preserving cultural heritage through customary laws usually revered in indigenous societies.

The study also revealed that the Ndaou people and indigenous communities have ways of interpreting and balancing environmental science. As environmental science seeks to understand, analyze, and address the community's biggest environmental problems, the Ndaou worldview ascertains positive interactions between the environment and living beings. The study recognizes that some indigenous names of places have not been given for security warnings but essentially to preserve nature. Thus, through the Ndaou naming system, the environmental components (solid

earth, air, water, and living organisms) have primordially interacted with each other and positively contributed to a balanced and healthy ecosystem. Therefore, according to the study, there is a need to revitalize indigenous names of places to successfully address the biggest environmental challenges that are currently facing Ndaou residents in Rusitu Valley. The findings corroborate the assumption of the re-enchantment of nature theory that emphasizes the re-imagination of our traditional base (Reader, 2021; McPherso, 2020). Chigidi (2015) similarly notes that there is a need to look back to go forward.

Akin to the above were the study findings that ascertained the relevance of the Ndaou traditional base in addressing environmental challenges. However, the significance of the Ndaou naming systems is ignored, yet it is essential for a balanced interaction of environmental components. The study recognizes that imbalanced human-environmental interactions pose life-threatening calamities to current and future generations. As a solution, Rusinga & Maposa (2020) noted that there is a need to take heed of the Ndaou rich tradition of norms, values, and taboo systems grounded in the cultural milieu that is most relevant in balancing the utilization and conservation of nature.

The study expects that there might be loopholes in presenting data because it employed a qualitative research methodology. Although qualitative methodology might have drawbacks for this study, such as statistical limitations in data presentation and the familiarity of the researcher with participants, the study committed to the qualitative methodological prima that calls for the trustworthiness of the results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Future research might consider adopting a mixed methods research approach.

Conclusions

The study concluded that the Ndaou people have ignored their traditional base, particularly the indigenous names of places that were primordially important in preserving indigenous people's cultural heritage and balancing Environmental Science. Environmental delicacy posed by this neglect aggravates multiple challenges for the Ndaou people, including environmental degradation of the valley, food insecurity, reduced resilience, stagnant development, and direct conflict with nature. These challenges could have been significantly minimized had the local Ndaou people revisited their traditional knowledge systems. As Traditional Leadership Institutions were the most

respected agencies by the locals, they must be used in prosecuting those who wantonly cut down trees and settle in cultural heritage sites. Rather than recurrently responding to life-threatening challenges caused by neglecting the significance of indigenous named places, policymakers, government agencies, and development actors must recognize the relevance of the Ndau traditional base in promoting environmental regeneration, a balanced interaction of its components, and better collective management of land resources. Supposing the fragility and degradation of the Ndau cultural heritage sites continues, indigenous names of places will return to haunt the local inhabitants even if new development is ushered in Rusitu Valley. Hence, there is a need to revitalize historical indigenous names of places to help the community prevent a recurrence of the unspeakable circumstances that the indigenous Ndau people had experienced. This ethical demand for indigenous names of places is responsible for creating a new socio-cultural, political, and economic order in which everyone in the Rusitu Valley can survive without infringing the laws of Environmental Science. The study did not dwell much on the scientific reasons behind the climate-induced Cyclone Idai, such as El Nino and La Nina weather patterns in Rusitu Valley. In this regard, further empirical research needs to be conducted on the scientific reasons behind the Cyclone Idai. Therefore, the study finally noted that the destruction caused by climate-induced disasters was not limited to Rusitu Valley but extended to other areas in Chimanimani.

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