



Left: UNEP-IUCN Conference, Rio de Janeiro, October 2016. Chief Robinson together with Marina Silva, former Minister of the Environment in Brazil.

# The voice of traditional leaders

by HM (Mfaw) Robinson Tambe-ayuk TANYI  
Secretary General of the Pan African Council of Traditional and Native Authorities (PACTNA)

It took conference participants like a surprise in Yaoundé, Cameroon, when two traditional leaders were called up for an award on their role in preserving the Congo Basins' biodiversity at the 15th Partnership Conference on the Congo Basin Forest in October 2015, executed by the US Ambassador Cynthia Akuetteh.

Since then, the inclusion of communities through their traditional Leaders has taken another dimension in implementing planetary safeguards, by stakeholders of the civil society, and a recognition that involving indigenous communities at high policymaking levels with clear roles will contribute significantly to checking illegalities and waste in the forest patrimony of the Congo Basin. This action, symbolic as it was meant on this day, was a major recognition and admission, though late, into the scientific mainstream of measures in the struggle to save Planet Earth, of contributions that traditional leaders and their communities of the Congo Basin can make within a global context in conservation efforts.

All life depends on the integrity of the biosphere and the interdependence of ecological systems. The nature, attitude and practices of those living within and around the geographical periphery of these systems matter and dictate whether the latter will perish or survive as endowed by creation. Generations must ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment and forest in particular is maintained or restored for the benefit of all, in the present and in the future. In this regard natural resources are therefore to be managed, so that they are used with the highest level of efficiency and avoidance of waste. This in part is the responsibility of traditional leaders in their role as custodians for the conservation and sustainable use of Nature. It should be mentioned that the customs and traditions of our people expressed in their usages have long been couched in conservation setups that honoured certain species and parts of the forest, trees, animals, streams and rivers that are held as sacred to man and to nature's very existence and well-being, because of the role they play in our spiritual and/or human existence through food, medicines, water and shelter. Nature which includes all of forest's endowment is life to humanity and because it lives, like the Congo Basin forest, humanity has the responsibility of keeping all of it intact. As in 2010, at a meeting in Cancun, the Conference of the Parties to the 1992 Convention recognized the need for "deep cuts in global greenhouse gas emissions... so as to

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hold the increase in global average temperatures below 2°C above pre-industrial levels", it was the world recognising the importance of such conservation. For the indigenous of the Congo Basin Forest its preservation is of utmost importance for ecological balance and the provisions of the things that make us live.

### IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING THE CONGO BASIN FOREST

Broadly speaking, as a gift of Creation, the Almighty Himself in his infinite knowledge and chemistry had composed this forest component to serve as one of two lungs of the earth along with the Amazon. It contributes in ensuring life through oxygenation and regeneration into procreation. This is why issues associated with climate change permeate national boundaries. Emissions or actions in one state will have adverse consequences on another. The effect is even in areas over which states have no jurisdictions or sovereignty... like the protection of the ozone layer. We, within the cycle of the Pan African Council of Traditional and Native Authority (PACTNA), believe that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions if allowed to continue... will cause further warming and longlasting changes... increasing the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts on our people. Restrictively speaking, the Congo Basin forest is a source of food, shelter,