

# The Myths Surrounding the TRɔMO (The Bongo Antelope-- Tragelaphus Eurycerus) and Fauna Conservation Among the Akan of Ghana: A Critical Analysis

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## Abstract

Despite recent interest in indigenous religio-cultural studies on environmental conservation, only few studies have delved into how these indigenous beliefs and practices particularly those based on myths and rituals can assist in the conservation of some endangered fauna species. Through an ethnographic research project conducted in regions inhabited by the Akan ethnic group in Ghana, we examined the environmental and resource conservational values embedded in some of these religio-cultural beliefs and practices. In doing so, we focused especially on one particular animal, *trɔmo* (the bongo antelope), an endangered species about which there are many myths related to its huntability. Although we conclude that the bongo antelope is huntable by the Akan, the data shows that its hunting is not frequent as compared to other animals due to the fear embedded in the myths surrounding it. This fear helps in the conservation of bongo antelope species in the study areas.

**Keywords:** Worldview, Myths on animals, Rituals, Conservation, Akan, *Trɔmo* (bongo antelope) *Sasaduro* (anti-*sasa* Medicine).

## 1. Introduction

Some studies have been done in Ghana about the *Trɔmo*, bongo antelope (Rattray, 1923; MaCaskie, 1995; Dakwa *et al*, 2014; Emieaboe *et al*, 2014) but not in respect of environmental protection or conservation of the bongo species. Some of them even mentioned the bongo in passing, and the one that has some conservational undertone is the study by Emieaboe *et al* (2014) but their major finding on the myth and biodiversity conservation is different from this current study.

Our research shows that the biggest challenge to the use of religio-cultural beliefs and practices (indigenous knowledge) such as myths to combat some of the contemporary ecological challenges is that some scholars still treat indigenous knowledge which has ecological conservation values such as myths as superstition and unscientific and thus are of no relevance today (see Edgerton 1992; Alvard, 1993; 1994). But other studies have proven that indigenous religio-cultural beliefs and practices provide a unique contribution to the conservation of the environment (Colding and Folke, 1997; Berkes *et al*, 1995; Gadgil *et al*, 1993; Ntiama-Baidu, 2008; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2010). This paper aimed to ascertain or interrogate further the veracity or the extent to which this view is correct. In doing so, one particular animal, *trɔmo* (the bongo antelope) about which a lot of myths abound in terms of its hunting was selected for analysis.

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1 Study sites

Ghana is divided into ten administrative regions. Out of the ten regions, the Akan are found in six of the regions. The study was conducted in three out of the six regions where the Akan are found—Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti and Central Regions of Ghana. In each of these three regions, one traditional area<sup>1</sup> was chosen for the study. These traditional areas were: Berekum Traditional Area (Brong-Ahafo Region), Mamponden Traditional Area (Ashanti Region) and Eguafo-Abrem Traditional Area (Central Region).

Our analysis is based on an ethnographic study that we carried out between February 2014 and June 2017. Our key objective was to find out whether or not the myriad of myths surrounding the bongo antelope help in the conservation of the bongo antelope species. The key informants were experienced hunters, chiefs, and traditional medical practitioners among others in the studied communities. Their ages ranged between 50 and 80 years. The purposive sampling technique (Atkinson, Bouma, and Dixon, 1987) supported by the snowball techniques (Noy, 2008; Faugier and Sargeant, 1997; Biemacki and Waldorf, 1981) were employed to select our key informants. The use of the snowball technique enabled us to identify the rest of our informants that the local people themselves considered to be knowledgeable in the subject matter of the study. The principal aim was to find out whether the mysteries surrounding the *trɔmo* (the bongo antelope) prevent their hunting and thus assist in the protection and conservation of the specie.

We selected five (5) experienced hunters, two (2) chiefs, two (2) traditional medical practitioners from each

<sup>1</sup> In Ghana, a traditional area refers to an area under the jurisdiction of a Paramount Chief. A Paramount Chief also refers to a chief who has a number of divisional and sub-chiefs under his/her control.

of the three (3) traditional areas where the study was conducted. In addition, we selected and interviewed two (2) caretakers of sacred groves and three (3) farmers from each of the study areas. In all, 42 people were selected and interviewed. The breakdown and our reasons for the selection of the above categories of informants are explained in the table below.

**Category of key informants**

	Category of interviewee	Numbers selected	Reasons for their selection
1	Hunters	15	They are directly involved in the hunting profession and are well versed in the profession and thus knowledgeable in many of the myths surrounding animals, hunting ethics and other related issues in the profession.
2	Chiefs	6	They are the landowners of the local communities and are also in charge of punishing those who go against local environmental laws.
3	Traditional Priests/Traditional Medical Practitioners	6	To have an idea about how <i>sasaduro</i> (anti- <i>sasa</i> medicine) is prepared and dispensed. I.e. how one is exorcised from the attack from <i>the sasa</i> of the bongo. Because it is such category of people who have the capability to heal ailments connected with the <i>sasa</i> attack due to their professional training.
4	Caretakers of Sacred Groves	6	The caretakers of sacred groves were selected because they are in charge of the selected forested areas where restrictions are placed on their entry.
5	Farmers	9	They are the category of people who usually go to the bush where the bongos live to farm and thus have some knowledge about them.
	Total	42	

Informed consent was sought from each of our participants and was assured that their identities were going to be kept confidential. Although many of them informed us that we could identify them by name in our report, yet we decided to use letters/numbers to identify all of them. We also asked permission to tape-record all the interviews. The Akan language (*Twi*) was the main medium for the interviews. Some of the sample questions that guided the study are listed below:

What do the Akan mean by myth? What do the Akan mean by *sasa*? Do you know of the *trɔmo*, the bongo antelope? Does it possess what the Akan refer to as *sasa*? Are there specific signs to indicate that someone has been possessed by the *sasa* of a bongo? How is one possessed by a *sasa* exorcised or healed? Is the bongo huntable? What role do the myths on the bongo play in its conservation?

Follow-up questions were posed based on the responses from our participants. The interviews were transcribed, coded and the following themes emerged:

The nature of *sasa*, *Sasa* potent animals, bongo myths, characteristics of bongo-*sasa* possession, exorcising *sasa*, anti-*sasa* medicine, estimates of bongo population, and the effects of bongo myths on conservation.

These themes formed the bases of the discussions and the analysis of the data.

**3. Conceptual Framework**

The study was conducted within the framework of the Akan worldview, mythology and ritual. Studies have already shown that the worldview of a people plays a role in their conceptual scheme or conduct (see Makhubu, 1978). We therefore, believe that choosing the worldview as a framework would be helpful in the study.

The term worldview is variously constructed. Scholars such as Miller (1999) and Slikkerveer (1999) refer to it as cosmovision. Bauman et al (2011), for instance, see a worldview as a set of basic assumptions through which one views reality, usually shared among members of a community and often heavily influenced by religion (Bauman *et al*, 2011, 235). Kraft (1989), on the other hand, defines a worldview as the set of culturally structured assumptions, values and commitments/ allegiances underlying a people's perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions (1989, 20), adding that worldview is not separate from culture. It is for this reason that *Guba* (1990, 17) as quoted in Creswell (2014) refers to worldview as 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action' (Creswell, 2014).

A cursory survey of literature shows a huge chunk of literature on theories of myths dating from the ancient time through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries till today with varied conceptualization of what myths are about. While some argued that myths are mere stories, others thought that may not wholly be the case, because such consideration of myths could not account fully for the multiple and complex relations between a people and their myths (Tylor, 1871; Frazer, 1890; Stith, 1955; Kirk, 1970; Segel, 2004). In this paper, we simply see myths as one of the mediums a group of people use to explain their history, customs, and their traditional beliefs and practices and how they see nature as a whole. In other words, myths are one of the media through which a people

express their worldview.

We also discovered the importance of rituals in the life and thought of the people under study because the act in itself has religious and psychological relevance for them. The term ‘ritual’ just like myth, has also been viewed from various perspectives. Mbiti (1991, 131) defines it as “a set form of carrying out a religious action or ceremony”. He adds that a ritual is a means ‘of communicating something of religious significance, through words, symbols and actions. Therefore a ritual embodies a belief or beliefs’. For Rappaport (1999), the term “ritual” denotes ‘the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers’. He further notes that his definition is broad and says it ‘encompasses much more than religious behavior’ (1999, 24). Therefore, the focus of this paper was not to reopen the debate about myths and rituals, but rather to look at the role of myths and rituals about animals in environmental management or conservation in indigenous societies such as the Akan of Ghana.

#### 4. The Akan Worldview

The Akan constitutes the largest ethnic group in Ghana. Ghana’s (2010) Population and Housing Census put their percentage at 49.1% of the total population of Ghana. The traditional occupations of the Akan are farming for those in the inland areas and fishing for those along the coast, and trading, particularly for women (Rattray, 1923; Omenyo, 2001, 26). The Akan are mainly found in the middle and the southern parts of Ghana and are found in six out of the ten administrative regions in Ghana. The Akan group is composed of different linguistic sub-groups. The tongue of each group constitutes a dialect of the Akan language, but most of these dialects are mutually intelligible. One important feature of the Akan is that they generally share a common worldview.

The worldview of the people under study directly or indirectly influences their conduct, be it socio-economic, religious, nature preservation/conservation or healthcare delivery and serves as an important basis for their ethical decision making. They also believe in a myriad of spirit beings which are hierarchically arranged with *Onyame*, the Supreme Being always occupying the top of the hierarchy (Rattray, 1923; Smith 1950).

Other natural objects such as some animals and trees are believed to have some powers which can be harmful to humans depending on how these entities are treated. Such powers are often referred to as *sasa* in Akan (Rattray, 1923; 1959; Warren, 1986; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2010). For the traditional or indigenous Akan, nothing happens without a cause. This notion is based on their worldview that there is cause and effect to every human circumstance. This explains why we have briefly touched on the Akan worldview.

In the Akan worldview, the universe is conceptualized in a dual form—the tangible (physical) and the intangible (spiritual) worlds—but the spiritual world is believed to take precedence over the physical. It is against this backdrop that occurrences in the spiritual realm can manifest themselves in the physical realm (A traditional priest, personal comm.). What this means is that in the Akan conceptual scheme, the worlds of the spirits and that of humans are intrinsically inseparable.

Another important aspect of the people under study’s worldview is the belief that rituals are crucial means of redressing a disharmony between the world of spirits and that of humans. This worldview is clear when one views it against Rappaport’s (1999) view that there is a link among rituals, religion and humans in his *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*.

### 5. Results

#### 5.1 Myths and Rituals

On what constitutes a myth, we received various responses. For instance, a traditional priest responded that ‘when we say myth we mean a vehicle through which our forbears have preserved and conveyed to us their understanding of phenomena.’ Another one also had this to say ‘myths are sacred stories told to explain the nature of things’. One of our hunter interviewees responded ‘a myth simply contains our worldview’. It is from these explanations on myths that informed us to define myth as a medium a group of people use to explain their history, customs and their traditional beliefs and practices and how they see nature as a whole.

#### 5.2 Sasa

We wanted to know what exactly the Akan refer to as *sasa*: The following were some of the responses we got from our interviewees:

‘It is the *tumi* (power) suffused in some creatures such as animals and plants.’ (pers. comm. with a traditional priest). ‘*Sasa* is a kind of spirit, which is evil, and it is a spirit that works hand in hand with witchcraft.’ (pers. Comm. with hunter #4).

Our informants were unanimous that some categories of trees and animals are believed to possess more powerful *sasa* (spiritual powers) than others. This differentiation in *sasa* suggests that the *tumi* (power(s)) suffused in these animals and plants are not of equal standing. All the informants pointed out that *sasa* is of two types—*sasa a eye hare* (lit. *sasa* which is not heavy) and *sasa a eye duru* (lit. *sasa* which is heavy). McCaskie (1995) also has this categorization of *sasa* among the Akan. But in the animal kingdom, all our informants

described the *sasa* of the bongo ((*Tragelaphus eurycerus*) as the most dangerous of all the animals that possess *sasa*. On which other category of animal that possess *sasa*, the following were mentioned:

1. *Oyuo* (*cephalophus niger*),
2. *Kuntun* or *Pataku* (*Canis adustus*),
3. *Okoo* (*Syncerus caffer*)
4. *Okweku* (Monkey)
5. *Asuroboa* (a type within the monkey family)
6. *Akaatia* (the baboon)

### 5.3 The Nature of the Bongo Antelope and some Myths and Rituals around it

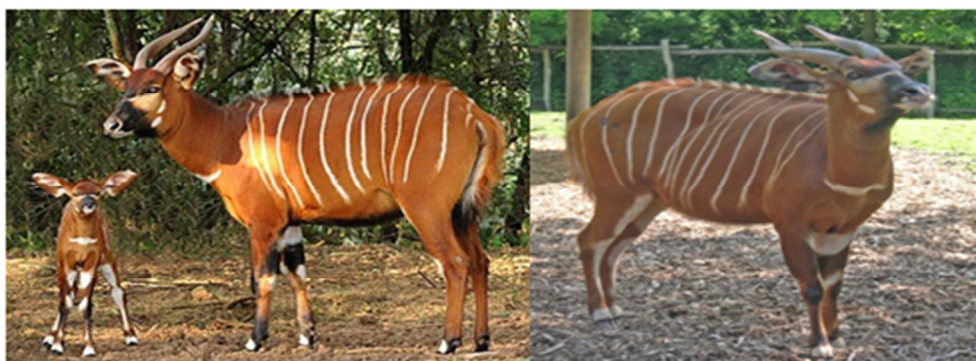
Various myths and rituals were narrated to us by some of our interlocutors. This points to the fact that our interlocutors know something about the bongo. The highlights of some of the myths and rituals that are connected with the animal are summarized in bullet points below:

- ‘It is an animal, which looks like the cow. There is no part of its body, which does not work.’ (one farmer recounted).
- ‘It is not as huge as the elephant and its hairs are like that of the deer. Hunters can get to know of the presence of the animal because its horns rattle to make some sounds when approaching.’ (pers. comm. with hunter #6).
- ‘The antelope is considered as one of the strongest animals in the forest and its spirit is believed to be extremely dangerous.’ (pers. comm. with a farmer).
- ‘The bongo antelope is a wonderful animal because it is well known for its combination of swiftness. Its strength is actually incomparable. It literally tends to trace the whereabouts of its predator to devour him upon attempting to kill it and missing.’ (pers. comm. with hunter # 1).
- ‘The Bongo Antelope is a type of animal that is so distinct from other animals. Although the *Mfantse* people say there is no other animal after the Elephant (king of all animals that live on land) yet, the elephant does not have a heavy *sasa* like the Bongo antelope.’ (pers. comm. with hunter # 7).
- ‘The Bongo Antelope is a type of animal whose horn starts growing a year after birth on the upper part of the head other than through the ears as that of the sheep or goat. There is an additional horn each year as it grows’. (a farmer).
- ‘When killed, its carcass is disposed off in a special manner through the performance of certain rituals.’ (pers. comm. with hunter #3).
- ‘When the carcass is brought home, the one carrying its head must lead, and keep on shouting *wonhyia ooo* (literally, no one dares meet us on our way home) while the other parts of the carcass follow. The tail is the last to be brought home.’ (pers. comm. with hunter #3).

### 5.4 Characteristics/Habitat

According to our hunter interviewees, the bongo is the largest and the most beautiful of all the forest antelopes. ‘The design of its colour [the stripes on its sides] helps it to camouflage its enemies’ (hunter #5). In terms of size, the hunters agreed that the male is not distinguishable from the female in the case of adult bongo, except that the carcass of the female is a little bit fatty than that of the male. One hunters said that ‘the bongo has a sharp hearing ability and this is due to the large ears that it possesses’.

Our interviewees were unanimous that the bongo antelope is usually found close to sources of water in thick forested areas as well as forest edges especially where it can get fresh growth since its main food is herbs. It can also be found in bamboo thickets according to some of our informants. Another habitat of the bongo according to the majority of our interviewees is the forest-savanna areas. Most of the hunters said the bongo usually moves in groups ranging from four to ten. The above description of the habitat of the bongo is similar to what Dakwa *et al* (2014) had in their case study on the distribution of bongos in Kakum Conservation Area (KCA) near Cape Coast in the Central region of Ghana.



Images of the bongo antelope:

Source <http://www.google.com/search?q=where+does+the+bongo+antelope+live>.

### 5.5 Sasaduro (anti-sasa medicine)

Diverse descriptions of how *sasaduro* (anti-*sasa* medicine) is prepared and the rituals involved in its application on someone under *sasa* attack were given. Some of the descriptions came from the hunters themselves and some from the traditional African priests cum traditional medical practitioners:

- The medicines are usually a combination of particular herbs, or leaves from a particular tree called *kwatema*. All are ground in a pot and placed in a *dunsin* (the stump of a tree). The person under attack would have to go early in the morning when the cock crows, at 12am, and 6am each day for seven days to bath the concoction. There should be no break in the use of the concoction. If the person should fail to use the concoction after the first day or subsequent days, for one reason or the other, the person would have to start the process (ritual) all over again (pers. comm. with hunter # 5).
- One who decides to hunt for the bongo should have 'something' to protect oneself or else, one will be tormented in dreams and even during the daytime. For instance, to drive away the *sasa* of the animal, one would have to go through a ritual bath three times a day for seven days whether the leaves used in preparing the concoction are rotten or not (pers. comm. with hunter #15).
- Some of the medicine can be in a form of *dido* (potions); which you bath, drink or apply on the body. Some can also be burnt in a pot and ground and applied on some parts of the body, where small incisions are made with the *mmoto* (stuff made of bark of trees, leaves, roots that are roasted and ground into a black powder) put into the incisions made on certain parts of the body (pers. comm. with a priest cum traditional medical practitioner).

Personal experiences of two hunters are shared in the ensuing paragraphs to give further explanation on the nature of *sasa* attack and the kind of rituals one has to perform in order to exorcise oneself from the attack. The following is a personal experience of a hunter (pers. comm. with hunter # 10) we interviewed:

I killed an unfamiliar animal during one of my hunting expeditions. Soon after killing it, I realized that some unusual uneasiness had come over me. I immediately became weak and found it very difficult to trace my way back home. I could not sleep that night due to a series of nightmares I had to go through during the night. I managed to narrate my ordeal to a colleague hunter the following morning. This friend volunteered to go with me to the bush where the animal was killed. From a distance to where the animal laid, my friend told me that the animal was a bongo. He told me that what I had been going through were signs of bongo *sasa* attack. So he advised that I needed to immediately find a powerful spiritual man to undergo the appropriate rituals to exorcise the *sasa* or else I was in for more troubles. I became free when he sent me to a traditional African priest in a nearby village, where I went through a ritual bath for seven consecutive days. After this experience, I met bongos twice in my hunting expedition but never attempted to kill any of them (pers. comm. with hunter # 10).

One day, one of my sons I had been training to become a professional hunter went on a hunting expedition not far from our village. A little over two hours, I heard some interminable shootings. I suspected they were coming from my son's gun and I suspected there was something wrong and therefore decided to follow up from the direction of the shooting. After fifteen minutes walk, I met my son in the bush, looking tired and with an unusual demeanour. I asked him why the many shootings and his response was that he had shot and killed seven bongos. But when I demanded to see their horns (it is usually the case that any hunter that kills a bongo must come

home with its horn as a proof), he could only show the horn of one bongo. Right away, I realized that my son was under a bongo *sasa* attack. This is very dangerous because the *sasa* of a bongo could even make one to mistake a human being for an animal and kill him or her if one does not undergo the necessary rituals (pers. comm. with hunter # 12).

The claim that it was possible to mistake a human being for an animal and wrongly kill the human being when one was possessed by a bongo was confirmed by two traditional medical practitioners and three other hunters we later interviewed. An unanimous response from all our interviewees was that ‘anyone who kills the bongo antelope will be haunted by it until one gets *sasaduro* or a medicine man to help him get healed’. Therefore, to prevent the ordeal one would have to go through by killing the bongo, it is better not to bother to kill it at all. This belief has been expressed in a commonplace proverb thus: “*Se wobeku tromo na w’adware sasaduru dee gyae no ma onfa nemmrantesem nante kwae ase.*” (to wit, since when you kill the bongo its spirit will haunt you until you exorcise it; you better leave it to roam about in the forest).

Based on the above fearful stories or myths and rituals associated with the bongo, we still wanted to know from our key informants whether it meant that the bongo is not huntable at all in the study areas. The common response was that in spite of the fear created around the bongo, it was still considered huntable, except that only few hunters have the capabilities to kill the bongo. Such hunters, we were told, are very fortified spiritually. The majority of the hunters interviewed, however, stated that due to the laborious and time consuming nature of going through the ritual bath associated with exorcising oneself from the *sasa* attack of the bongo, they would hardly kill it if they came across a bongo during their hunting expeditions. This response has some conservational values, which will be revisited in the discussion section of this paper.

The above finding however, runs contrary to that of Emieaboe *et al*’s 2014 study among the hunters of the Akposo traditional area in the Jasikan District of the Volta Region of Ghana where they found out that majority of the hunters interviewed said were prepared to go through the rituals and even pay the associated fines due to the proceeds they get from the sale of the carcass as well as the fame and respect—as being a celebrated hunter in the community—associated with being able to kill a bongo antelope. The striking difference here is that unlike the hunters in the Akposo traditional area, among the Akan, no fines are attached to the killing of a bongo antelope but as stated above, the consequences associated with the killing of the bongo antelope is the key factor or issue.

During the field work, we also tried to find out if our key informants, particularly the hunters, know of other means of conserving the bongo and animals in general apart from religio-cultural beliefs and practices. The responses showed that they had limited knowledge about Wildlife regulations in Ghana. But generally, according to many of them, the little they know about Wildlife regulations in Ghana has low level of compliance. One of them said ‘I would go for hunting when I have reason to believe that I would not be caught by the officials of the Wildlife Division of the Forestry Commission.’

## 6 Discussion

The interviewees demonstrated clearly that the bongo antelope is a familiar animal in the study areas. This was evident in the descriptions of the animal and its habitat, which are supported by empirical research (Elkan, 2003; Dakwa, *et al*, 2014; IUCN, 2016). Some myths and the rituals connected with its hunting and most especially, the commonplace proverb about the bongo antelope, which though rendered in various forms, depicted the same notion, also points to familiarity of the animal among our key informants. Also, from the anti-*sasa* medicine preparation and dispensation narratives gathered, one obvious thing is clear. It is, the case that there are different kinds and application of *sasaduro* to heal an affected hunter. This further implies that some of the medicine can fail to provide relief. This suspicion of a failure of some of the anti-*sasa* medicine to bring relief, explains the hunters’ preference to stay away from the bongo antelope altogether.

It became clear to us from the data that some of the stories appear to be over exaggerated. Many of these stories were based on anecdotes sustained by our non-hunter interviewees. For instance, one of our interlocutors said ‘the bongo has many horns and develops additional horns each year.’ This claim was however, discounted by all the hunters and some farmers we interviewed. Also, and more importantly, the pictures of bongos, which we accessed on the internet, disprove this claim.

It was pointed out by almost of our interviewees including the non-hunters that in spite of the existence of *sasaduro*, the following beliefs have influenced the majority of the people including the hunters we interviewed on their attitude towards the bongo antelope:

- The process involved in exorcising bongo *sasa* is very complex and laborious
- The killing of the bongo can cause one to claim to be responsible for crime(s) one does not know anything about
- It can lead to madness
- It can make one suffer from a variety of misfortunes

- It can affect one's immediate family members (e.g. giving birth to abnormal child/children)
- The killing can cause strange diseases and attacks, which can lead to one's death
- There is the possibility of the failure of exorcism rituals etc.

At least, we met three experienced hunters who compared the dangers associated with the hunting of the bongo antelope with another dangerous bird--*Santrofi anoma* (Nightjar), which the hunters will mostly avoid. The comparison runs thus:

The animal [the bongo] is just like the *Santrofi anoma* (Nightjar bird). Our forefathers believed that when one kills it (*Santrofi anoma*), one invites misfortunes on oneself, but when one leaves it, one has missed a delicacy (pers. Comm. with hunter #1).

The above belief was corroborated by hunters #5 and #11.

It is clear that the bongo antelope is not an ordinary animal to be hunted for. The common proverb which almost all our interlocutors made reference to during the interviews offers the clearest evidence.

On the weight of the evidence, we were specifically interested to find out if indeed, this proverb and other myths about the bongo help in its protection and conservation in the study areas. The facts on the ground showed that despite the presence of this proverb in the studied areas, the bongo is still huntable. This finding seems to demystify the pervading belief that the bongo is not huntable. However, as has already been noted, its hunting is not as frequent as compared to the other animals that are believed to possess less lethal or no *sasa* at all such as the rat, grass cutter, squirrel, duiker and the like. One major reason that our interviewees, particularly the hunters gave was that to a large extent, the fear that they have about the bongo as a dangerous animal, protects their species from frequent hunting. In other words, a careful analysis of the data indicates that the mysteries or the beliefs about the bongo have the potential to conserve it since it is only a few hunters that can go through the laborious rituals associated with the preparation and use of the *sasaduro* (anti-*sasa* medicine).

In addition, all the 15 hunters interviewed held the view that they would rather prefer to avoid the bongo mainly because of the fear they have for the bongo and the possibility of the failure of the anti-*sasa* medicine. What this implies is that religio-cultural belief system, particularly, myths to some extent, play a role in fauna conservation among the indigenous Akan of Ghana.

It is important to state that we gathered from our key informants that the bongo population in the studied areas has dwindled considerably and the common response from them was that the reduced number of bongos in their areas may not be attributable mainly to hunting activities. Interviewers proposed other key factors such as the destruction of their habitat due to the anthropogenic demand for large settlement, farming activities and deforestation resulting from legal and illegal lumbering account for the dwindling population of the bongo. The common claim of the hunters was that all the bongos have moved to the high forested areas and particularly to some sacred groves and government forest reserves such as the *Bia*, *Tein II*, *Mankran*, *Afram* headwaters, and the *Kakum* Conservation Area (KCA) located in the *Kakum* National park in the Central Region of Ghana as the study of Dakwa et al (2014) discovered. In addition, we can deduce from the data that among the people of the study areas, the belief in spiritually induced or cause of illness is present. This notion is what Foster (1976, pp. 772-782) describes as 'personalistic' aetiology—diseases and other afflictions are mainly believed to be caused by 'active purposeful intervention of an agent, human (witch, sorcerer), non-human (ghost, ancestor, evil spirit, or supernatural (deity or powerful being)'. Besides, such belief does not necessarily mean that the people do not believe in ill-health due to physical cause such as filth or eating contaminated foods. This implies that their therapeutic method is dependent on the aetiology of the disease. If it is believed to be spiritually induced, spiritual means are applied—that is, it is at this point that the performance of rituals becomes imperative and the physical means is chosen when the evidence is clear. But where the traditional medical practitioner is not too clear of the cause of an ailment, the holistic method is applied to ensure holistic healing. That is, both the spiritual and physical therapeutic methods are applied in their healthcare delivery. The explanation for this as has been pointed out is that in the Akan conceptual scheme, the worlds of the spirits and that of humans are intrinsically inseparable (see Dickson and Elingworth 1969). This confirms the view that the people's worldview influences their behaviour. This also shows the appropriateness of the theoretical framework of the paper.

## 7 Measures to Protect and Conserve the Bongo

We have pointed out from the data that the people, particularly the hunters themselves were not very much abreast with the Ghana Hunting Regulations. Emieaboe *et al's* (2014) study also confirmed this deficiency. This lack of knowledge makes such regulations less effective. And as we have demonstrated in this paper, some hunters will still kill the bongo antelope in spite of the fearful myths and rituals surrounding its hunting. One possible way in this paper's view, lies in the intensification of education on the existing wildlife hunting regulations by involving members of the District and Municipal Assemblies, Members of Parliament, District and Municipal Chief Executives led by the officials of the Department of Wildlife. The use of the many local FM and TV stations can be of great help in this exercise.

What this means is that the synergy of myths (indigenous ecological knowledge and wildlife regulations)

should be tapped to help in the conservation of the bongo and other wildlife species in a holistic way. This recommendation is feasible as Vandenberg's study has concluded that 'when individuals learn that their actions cause specific harms to the environment and public health and that they can reduce those harms by taking different actions, that knowledge will activate norms that will encourage them to change their behaviour' (as quoted in Johnson 2009, p. 121). Vandenberg further argues that 'activating personal norms through information disclosure would be much more effective than command-and-control or economic-based alternatives (modern wildlife regulations alone) would be if those alternatives were implemented on their own' as quoted in Johnson (2009, p. 121).

What is being suggested here is that even when a myth appears to lose its potency, the solution does not lie in its abandonment but rather, a suitable way is designed to re-interpret it for the contemporary societal use. In other words, contemporary communities should find ways to remythologize to make the myths relevant to the contemporary time provided they can help address some of the challenges of contemporary times. This approach is better than throwing away the myths as is the case with scholars who have been treating indigenous ecological knowledge as unscientific and of no relevance today.

Again, all the factors that have accounted for the destruction of the natural habitat of the bongo species in the study areas such as over exploitation of timber, excessive land cultivation, and other forms of natural forest degradation should cease, while massive afforestation projects are embarked upon to restore the bongo's natural habitat.

## 8 Conclusion

Our discussion has pointed out that the worldview of a people directs their understanding of their environment and how to adapt to it, and demonstrated that in spite of the numerous myths and rituals surrounding the bongo antelope, the animal is still huntable in the study areas. The data proved as well that a majority of hunters in the study areas avoid killing the bongo antelope. This implies that religio-cultural practices such as myths and rituals can function to protect and conserve the bongo species. This is in sharp contrast to the finding of Emieaboe et al (2014) in their study among the people the Akposo traditional area in the Volta Region of Ghana that as high as over 97% of hunters there claimed they were prepared to kill the bongo and pay a fine and as well go through the anti *sasa* rituals.

The study concludes that neither the indigenous ways of conserving wildlife nor the modern means (Ghana's Wildlife Regulations) are enough to ensure sustainable wildlife conservation. It is this that makes the use of both the indigenous and the modern means of wildlife conservation more imperative.

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