

Sacred Natural Sites as Legal Persons: An African Perspective on Tradition, Law and Environmental Jurisprudence in Uganda

A, b, i, g, a, i, l, K, i, g, o, z, i, ,, M, u, s, a, M, u, w, a, n, g, a, ,, P, a, t, i, e, n,
c, e, A, k, e, l, l, o

| Abstract

Background: The global movement to recognise nature's legal rights

intersects with enduring African traditions of sacred natural sites (SNS). In Uganda, this presents a critical juncture for environmental jurisprudence, yet scholarly discourse within the Arts & Humanities from 2021–2026 remains underdeveloped. Purpose and objectives: This perspective piece clarifies the conceptual and practical debates surrounding the attribution of legal personhood to SNS in Uganda. It aims to analyse the intersection of African Traditional Religion and contemporary environmental law, and to propose a coherent agenda for future interdisciplinary scholarship. Methodology: The analysis employs a qualitative, desk-based methodology. It synthesises recent literature, legal instruments, and policy documents from 2021–2026 to construct a critical conceptual framing. Key insights: The analysis indicates that legal personhood for SNS could provide a powerful juridical tool for conservation, bridging statutory law and indigenous cosmologies. However, significant challenges exist, including potential conflicts with formal land tenure, the risk of co-opting tradition, and the need for legitimate custodial governance structures. Conclusion: The paper concludes that legal personhood for Ugandan SNS is a conceptually viable but complex pathway. Its success depends on context-specific frameworks that are empirically grounded and developed in genuine partnership with traditional custodians. Recommendations: Future research must prioritise empirical, community-engaged studies to inform robust legal models. Policymakers should initiate inclusive dialogues to design governance mechanisms that respect both ontological foundations and practical environmental governance. Key words: sacred natural sites, legal personhood, rights of nature, African Traditional

Religion, environmental law, Uganda, environmental jurisprudence

Contribution statement: This perspective contributes a focused, critical analysis to a nascent interdisciplinary field, synthesising recent developments to advance scholarly and policy discourse on nature's legal rights within an African context.
