

## **Islandness, Lifeboat Ethics and Sustainable Development Projects in Small Island Communities: Musings of a Native Islander <sup>1</sup>**

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*Sustainable developments in small island communities and states in developing countries largely depend on how designers and implementers of development projects in the islands integrate Islandness and Lifeboat ethics in the islands' development programming. Integration and affirmation of Islandness, the heightened metaphysical sensation of sacredness, awe and specialness of islands, moderated by lifeboat ethics (a communal ethics of care of the shared but scarce resources of our small islands), may be the missing links in sustainable development programming in small island communities and states in developing countries. There is growing concern, however, that Mainlandness, a concept that I introduce and conceptualize as the heightened existential experience of profanity, irreverence, contempt and indifference that characterise mainland ethics and development, may be finding its way in small island communities. Mainlandness, the very antithesis of islandness and lifeboat ethics, is buttressed by a spaceship ethics (an ethics of wasteful development, effluent and environmental degradation that pervade mainland developments) may soon sound the death knell of small island communities, especially in developing and emerging island economies; if islanders themselves do not check the untrammelled wasteful and unsustainable development projects in the islands. Sustainable development projects in small island communities and states should integrate and affirm the sacredness and specialness of our islands. Islanders, irrespective of where they live, have only one home. Our islands. Development projects in the island should therefore integrate islandness and the ethics of care in their design, implementation and evaluation. This commentary is expected to expand the debate and scholarship on the concept of project environment. It is also expected that the commentary will ignite interest among project management researchers on how to address the challenges inherent in the design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development projects in small islands. I hope that islandness and lifeboat ethics will promote discourse on project management scholarship and programming in small island communities and states.*

Sustainable development in small island communities largely depend on how designers and implementers of development projects in the islands integrate *Islandness* and *lifeboat ethics* in the islands' developments. Integration and affirmation of *Islandness* (a concept that has been widely discussed in island development studies, but which I define as *the heightened metaphysical sensation of sacredness, awe and specialness of islands*), moderated by *Lifeboat Ethics* (which I conceptualize as a communal ethics of care of the shared but scarce resources in small islands), may be the missing links in sustainable development programming in small island communities and states in

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developing countries. However, there is growing concern that *Mainlandness*, a concept that I introduce and conceptualize as *the heightened existential experience of profanity, irreverence, contempt and indifference that characterise mainland worldview and development*, may be finding its way in our small islands. Mainlandness, the very antithesis of islandness and lifeboat ethics, is buttressed by a spaceship ethics; an ethics of wasteful development, effluent and environmental degradation that pervade mainland developments, may soon sound the death knell of small island communities, especially in developing and emerging island economies, if islanders themselves do not check the untrammled wasteful developments in the islands. Sustainable development in small island communities and states should integrate and affirm the sacredness and specialness of our islands. Island development without islandness is unsustainable.

Island communities are some of the most vulnerable and at risk geographical spaces in the world. With an estimated 600 million inhabitants, islands are more likely to experience extensive and intrusive developments to cater for the growing needs of the island population, investors and island visitors. With the heightened destination branding of islands, islands in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will experience more pervasive developments, especially in tourism related development projects. Moreover, with the escalating allure of islands as place destinations, reinforced by the predominant *feelings of specialness, sacredness and awe that islands impose on islanders and island visitors alike*, 21<sup>st</sup> century islands will experience more troubling and pressured intrusion of mainlandness and wasteful developments. The pressure will be experienced and exerted more on islands' physical spaces and environments. Evidence from islands in developing economies suggest that '*hospitality effluent*': hard and solid wastes and pollutants from island hotels, resorts, lodges and other related hospitality facilities, continue to exert untold toll on environmental integrity in most islands.

Yes, islands are arenas of sacredness, awe and specialness. Both old and young islanders alike in my native Rusinga island in Kenya's Lake Victoria, reverentially and sentimentally refer to Rusinga Island as *Chula*, (not exactly its Spanish equivalent!); a phrase that evokes feelings of deep reverence, awe, love, intimacy and affection among my native Rusinga islanders. The feeling of reverence, specialness and awe evoked by *islands* in the psyche of native islanders and island visitors alike, is what island scholars refer to as *Islandness*. I strongly believe, as a native islander living in a small island community living on the fringe of Kenya's Lake Victoria, that Islandness is both the soul and the heart of islanders. Without the island's ability to evoke and reinforce feelings of awe, sacredness and specialness among islanders and island visitors, islands like my native Rusinga Island in Lake Victoria would have died long time ago. Yes, islands just like mainland geographical locations and spaces may become gentrified. Gentrification kills places, including islands. The preservations of island fauna and flora in most islands, would not have possible, if islanders were driven by *Mainlandness* and *Spaceship ethics*.

*Mainlandness*, for me, is the very antithesis of *Islandness*: it is the heightened metaphysical feeling and experience of profanity, irreverence, contempt and indifference that characterise mainland ethics and development. *Mainlandness* is buttressed by a spaceship ethics; an ethics of waste, effluent and environmental degradation that characterise mainland world view and developmental ethics. Just imagine the billowing black smoke that spaceships vomit in our seas and oceans daily!

Garret Hardin is fondly associated with the spaceship and lifeboat ethics analogies. However, we know that spaceships contribute substantial pollution to our seas and oceans on a daily basis. Thus, the use of spaceship as an environmental imagery is contradictory, and self-defeating, if we take into consideration the billowing fumes that spaceships churn out into our planet's seas and oceans. However, I strongly believe that developments in our islands must be guided by lifeboat ethics; *a communal ethics of care of the shared but scarce resources of our small islands*. The lifeboat ethics is the ethics firmly rooted in *Islandness*; and has traction with my fellow native Rusinga islanders. Because our historical and present conception and experience of our Rusinga Island is deeply rooted in *our Islandness*, our ancestors reminded us through folklores and communal festivals and rituals, that our very survival and existence as a small island community depend on our individual and collective integration and affirmation of our *Islandness* and lifeboat ethics. *Islandness* and Lifeboat ethics are critical sustainable development imperatives and paradigms in our Rusinga Island community.

Irrespective of the advancements in medical technology, Siamese twins' operations is always delicate. Thus each successful operation is celebrated and beamed by the world media. Successful Siamese twins' operations are celebrated worldwide, not because of the sophisticated medical technologies deployed during the operation, but *because of the ethics*, the lifeboat ethics philosophy that guide the actions and the behaviors of the medical team in the face of heightened risks involved in the operations. Failure of the operation is deeply and painfully experienced by both the medical team and the family of the twins, and the whole world! Therefore, for native islanders like myself, the concepts of lifeboat ethics and sustainable small island communities are like Siamese twins, whose mother is *Islandness*. Small islands do not have the luxury of material abundance like mainlanders.

As a result, development in small island communities is received with anticipation among the islanders, because islanders strongly believe that any development in the small island communities that are not rooted and grounded on the philosophy and psychology of *islandness*, will give birth to '*Siamese twins type of development*', a development that paradoxically and inexorably leads to environment operation and mutilation in the small islands. Fellow native Islanders, like myself, are wary of island development projects that are not designed and executed with a lifeboat ethics orientation.

The philosophy and world view of Mainlandness and spaceship ethics are at work in mainland Kenya. For example, the inexorable environmental injustice exacerbated by Mainlandness and spaceship ethics in mainland Kenya are evidenced by the ruthless destruction of the Mau Forests in the expansive Rift Valley, and the industrial waste and effluent that agro chemical industries gush out daily into Kenya's rivers and lakes and other water systems, killing not just Kenya's mainland spaces, but the very heart and soul of Kenya as a nation. Mainlandness and spaceship ethics are killing the heart and soul of the nation! Not just in mainland Kenya, but more so in other mainland nations and states. The billowing skyscraper developments in the so called 'developed' worlds and the sprawling slums that choke urban and peri urban spaces in both developing and some 'developed' countries are manifestations of destructions wrought by Mainlandness and spaceship ethics: Mainlandness and spaceship ethics do not evoke feelings of specialness, awe and reference. That's why islands have become preferred destinations for mainlanders who must escape, even for a short while, from the choking fumes of Mainlandness.

The mercantile trawling in Lake Victoria's numerous islands is being vehemently opposed by islanders whose livelihood depend on the island fishing ecosystems being destroyed by trawlers. Most fishing trawlers in the islands are mainland merchants whose philosophy and way of life is guided by Mainlandness and spaceship ethics. They are not ecologically and marine friendly, and in their mercantilist quest they destroy not only the islands' fish breeds and fish breeding nests, but also the soul and the heart of small islands. Thus, developments in the small islands that is grounded on Islandness and lifeboat ethics is imperative and critical for sustainable programming for small island communities and spaces. Inhabitants of small islands, like members of my family and fellow island residents, have only *one small boat*, and the only small boat is our small island. While our small boat can accommodate a few extra islanders and mainlanders, we cannot allow mainlandness to paddle the boat! Our Islands cannot allow and tolerate the irreverent and soulless developments that take place in mainland spaces and regions. Our boat is small and we have few lifeguards. To survive as islanders, we have to preserve our islandness through deliberate and targeted lifeboat ethics aimed at preserving and sustaining our small boat - our small islands. This is because the only home that islanders have, the only place we truly call home, irrespective of where we live or stay, is *the Island*.

## About the Author



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**Isaac Odhiambo Abuya** teaches project planning and management and also coordinates the PhD, Master and Bachelor Programmes in Project Management at the University of Nairobi, Kisumu Campus. His research interests include the integration of multidisciplinary perspectives in project management research and their application to small island and minority and vulnerable communities and populations. He has a combined 25 years of experience in teaching both in high schools and universities in Kenya and in managing development projects in the country. He was a Project Director at World Vision Kenya, National Programme Manager at AED/FHI 360, Project Coordinator at ADRA International, Programmes Coordinator at Nyanza Reproductive Health Society(NRHS), and Chief of Staff, Homa Bay County, Kenya. Isaac has consulted for leading non- governmental organizations in sub- Saharan Africa. He holds Master and PhD degrees in Project Planning and Management from the University of Nairobi, a Master of Arts degree in Counselling Psychology from Kenyatta University, Kenya and a Bachelor of Education degree (History and Religion majors) from Egerton University, Kenya. Isaac is also a non-paid Director of Better Futures for Children, an island-based organization (IBO) committed to advancing reading literacy among orphans and vulnerable children in small islands in Kenya's Lake Vitoria. Isaac is a native resident of Rusinga Island. He is working towards the development of Island Research for Island Development Initiative (IRIDI), to advocate for the translation of research conducted in Kenya's small islands to support sustainable development of the small islands.

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