This study sets out to investigate moral values and attitudes towards nature from a traditional African Community the Agicugu of Kirinyaga District. It also evaluates to what extent these values and attitudes can be used to construct an environmental ethic suitable for the contemporary needs.

The study shows that if we are to have a correct relationship between humans and their environment it must be based on a holistic view of nature. This involves the metaphysical concept of holism and the ecological awareness that the ecosystem is a living thing - a community of organisms interacting with their physical environment, neither of which can survive alone. Such a view demands respect for nature, an attitude that has the potential to propagate proper relationship between humanity and nature.

Certain values have been identified among the traditional Agicugu namely; the intrinsic good of other existents, the sanctity and worth of life, the connectedness of all beings, and order and harmony in nature. These values traditionally resulted in such attitudes as anti-vandalism, anti-greed, anti-wanton destruction, acquisition for use and not for mere possession, letting other things be and reverence for life. All these attitudes manifest respect for nature. The Agicugu's understanding of the connectedness of all things embraces the idea of holism.

The study also shows that human and nonhuman nature relationship can be explained by means of three main theories. In anthropocentrism, nature becomes a moral subject, only as a category of human interests. Pathocentrism argues that if the capacity for pain and pleasure in humans is a reason for moral considerability, then on the same principle animals must be admitted into the class of moral subjects.

Ecocentrism operates on the principle of "equal intrinsic worth" among all existents and the fundamental understanding of ecological and metaphysical holism. Ecocentrism, as a theory, has the capacity for taking care of the interests of both humans and nature impartially. It also embraces the values and attitudes evident in the study group. It is therefore adopted as the theory that best accounts for the morality of the Agicugu.

The construction of an environmental ethic suitable for the contemporary needs demands that we stop looking at nonhuman nature as the "other"; and begin to look at ourselves as part of nature, from which we benefit and towards which we are morally responsible.

The worth or value that belongs naturally to any existent as a member of the ecological system.

This involves an immediate shift from dualism according to which nature is composed of the value laden humanity and the value free nonhuman beings into the holism in which all existence forms a single system valued as such. This holism is evident in the beliefs and practices of the traditional African societies like the Agicugu and in the modern ecological awareness. This is to say that in building a relevant and viable environmental ethic, we ought to evaluate both the indigenous and alien cultures, and then pick the appropriate elements from each. The term "nature" is here used to connote both human and non human beings.