

## African Traditional Religion as an Antidote to Environmental Challenges in Nigeria

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**Abstract**

The existence of the environment is of paramount importance to all Africans. For an African the environment is a conglomeration of the physical made up of the air, water, human beings, animals, rocks, hills, mountains; the socio-cultural which comprises ethics, economic, aesthetics, and the spiritual which embodies the Supreme Being (creator), the deities, shrines, spirits among others. This goes to explain that for an African the world is not dichotomized but seen as a whole and so all exist to complement the other. In Nigeria, there are some experiences that are fighting against the environment which is the embodiment of the above-mentioned components thereby generating environmental crisis through flooding, erosion, desertification, pollution, climate change among others. All these forces destabilize the harmony that keeps the balance of the ecosystem. The aim of this paper is to bring out some environmental challenges African Traditional Religion proffers solution to so as to set a balance in the eco system. When the environment is in harmony with life will be better, to some extent, for all Nigerians. The study was carried out in Nigeria. The data was collected through interviews and analyzed by adopting the qualitative approach. The findings of this paper indicate that through the existence of sacred grooves, customary laws and environmental ethics like respect for rivers and streams as abode of the spirits and goddesses, totems, reverence for sacred lands, African Traditional Religion protects the environment from degeneration. The paper recommends that African Traditional Religious adherents and traditional rulers should sensitize the younger generation on the need to protect environment and take note of the danger of the climate change red alert.

**Keywords:** Environmental Challenges, Environment, African Traditional Religion, Desertification, Pollution, Flooding, Overpopulation, Climate Change.

**Introduction**

Knowledge of the environment is one of the good aspects of one who is conscious of oneself. It is a good attribute of humans as conscious beings in the world. Since everyone is born in a specific environment it would not be out of place to know how to harness, protect and improve on it for the welfare of man. As a Nigerian the content of the environment and its impact is of paramount importance. The environment here is described as both the material and the immaterial, the spiritual, the biotic and the abiotic, the known and the unknown. Hence, environment is defined as the sum of all the conditions, situations that are around humans or group of men. These situations comprises material situations such as air, water and climate, and landforms; the social and cultural aspects such as norms and regulations, financial resources, beauty and such situations which affect the behaviour of man or a group of men living together, Keller in Efobi (1994).

In African Traditional Religion the environment comprises the spirit world and the physical world. According to Nana (2016) it is difficult to alienate African Traditional Religion from environmental matters and all that are in its tress, oceans, river, seas, mountains, stones, which serves as channels through which Africans worship the divinity (Chukwu Okike abiam). In African Religious ideology and worldview, man is part of the environment, whatever lies outside of man is adding value to his life and since his belief in the spiritual being, the environment is designed by the supreme being (Chukwu Okike abiam) and is made up of two supportive worlds; the visible world and the invisible world, says Nana (2016). The visible world comprises the earth, filled with humans, animals, birds of the air, lands, and physical surroundings such as rivers, forests, mountains, lands, valleys, grasses, oceans and lake among others; the spiritual world consists of ontological beings; invisible beings, the supreme being (Chukwu, Chineke), the gods and goddesses, forefathers and invisible realities cited by Nana in Gbende (2010).

Since these two worlds are not dichotomized, nor there is any distinction between them, they live in harmony and so complement each other, (Nana 2010). It is deeply noted in the African belief that Supreme Being (God) designed everything and so all things in the environment is pleasantly working for the advantage and welfare of man; both for the living and the dead and so, African Religion attributes much relevance to shielding the environment from harm, Ekpeyong (2021).

In Nigeria as the case may be, every state including Federal Capital Territory, has one form of environmental challenge or the other. Giving credence to the above assertion, McNamara former president of World Bank cited by Isife (2012) said, every state of Nigeria federation has one challenge or the other in relation to environmental issues and in various degrees.

The northern part of Nigeria suffers from wind erosion very seriously, the South from ocean tide. Wind erosion is detested in such states from the North such as Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi, Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, Borno and Yobe. Farmers suffer the challenges of sands being carried away by water thereby burying the crops with sands. Road and houses as well as public buildings may be covered by sand dunes, which is a hip of sands near the ocean or dessert. In Nigeria these are some of the major causes of environmental challenges, pollution, deforestation, land degradation, poor sanitation, ozone layer depletion, desertification, climate change, urbanization, over population, bush burning, flooding among others. According to Evelyn and Tyav, (2012), the crisis of the environment in Nigeria involves pollution, poor sanitation, ozone layer depletion, desertification, flooding, erosion, bushfire, discriminate felling of trees and vegetation, and contamination of the earth especially the soil, water and air. They also noted that the indiscriminate dumping of refuse, dungs, crude, and refined oil, oil spillages cause pollution in Nigeria. They pose health and agricultural challenges which have heinous effect on Nigerian economy. Nigeria as a country has these environmental issues as can be seen and discussed below.

### **Methodology**

The study was carried out in Nigeria which is a country in West Africa. It has a population of over 230 million. It is the most populous country in Africa and the world sixth-most populous country. It has borders with Niger in the North, Chad in the Northeast, Cameroon in the east, and Benin in the West. It has 36 states and the federal capital territory where the capital is located. It is a multinational state inhabited by more than 250 ethnic groups specially 500 distinct languages with a wide variety of cultures. The three largest ethnic groups are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The study adopted a qualitative approach, which provided insights into opinions and literary evidence of African Traditional Religion as a wonderful solution to environmental challenges in Nigeria. The data was collected during oral interviews and was analyzed using conceptual contents analysis. It involves insightful materials in published and unpublished books, journals, oral interviews. Other sources include internet sources, literatures and published opinions etc.

### **Climate change**

Climate change is long-standing change in temperature and weather patterns. These changes may be natural, but since 1800s, the activities of man have been the driver of climate change, primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels (like coal, oil and gas), which produces heat-trapping gases." The major causes are generating power, manufacturing goods, cutting down forests etc. It is also seen as the significant variation of average weather conditions becoming for example, warmer, wetter, or drier-over several decades.

Sources of livelihoods, farm and agricultural practices, as well as other resources are endangered by environmental crisis and climate change. The increase in ocean tides and sea levels, exposes the environment to flooding and waterborne disease; drought, and rising temperature, hinder agricultural production and fishing, reduction of food security and so affect human health and nutrition negatively. According to Amobi and Onyishi (2015) since Nigeria is mostly contending with primary production of economic values as against industrial production of goods and services, any harsh effect on the biosphere through climate change would have negative effect on the economy of Nigeria. In the North Sahelian zone, desert encroachment is slowly but constantly depleting vegetation and grazing resources, which then forces more nomadic activities. This has increased inter-communal/ethnic clashes as well as herders' farmers' clashes. These have the ugly effect of reduction in agricultural production (crops and animals). Greenhouse gases are

carbon dioxide, methane, ozone, nitrous oxide, chlorofluorocarbons, and water vapour, perfluorocarbons, sulphurhexafluoride, nitrogen trifluoride etc.

### **Desertification**

Desertification is the procedure through which plants in arid soils and semi-arid lands, such as grasslands or shrub lands reduces or goes into extinction and eventually or vanishes and dies off. Desertification is a serious issue in the northern Nigeria regions. According to Isife (2012), desertification is also seen as the introduction of the desert on the soil that was once rich and humid. It can be induced either by natural process or by the action of man on the environment. Natural hazards such as prolonged droughts and deposits by winds are major factors in the desertification process. This work also observes that, prolonged droughts, overgrazing of an area of land, and deforestation have speed up desertification and eventually turning the area to loss of arable land and consequently displacing of some communities. Going further, Isife(2012) is observed that, It really threatens food security, thereby leading to famine, destruction of crops, live stocks and man, as well as diseases. It also increases the tendency of rural to urban migration. It has led to serious conflicts and clashes between crop farmers and herders'. This also contributes to social and political instability.

### **Flooding**

Another form of environmental challenge facing Nigeria is flooding. Flooding is a situation where a portion of land or a very wide area of land is covered with water. It destabilizes living and non -living things around that area. According to Amusa, et. al., (2018) flooding is a condition which results when land that is usually dry is covered with water as a result of river or dam overflow, damage of constructed down and heavy rain. The threat is enormous on farms, families and buildings. National Weather Service,( 2005) described flooding as the inundation of normally dry area caused by an increased water level. It occurs when water on land rises to abnormal depths and affects normal animal and plant activities, ( Nnaji and Uzoekwe2018). Continuing they said. Overflowing of rivers, streams, and lakes; heavy rainfall over short periods; inflow of water from seas as a result of hurricanes are some of the factors that cause flooding.

According to Ocheckwu and Onuoha(2022), flooding is an environmental concern in Nigeria. Flooding is very harmful to both property and natural environment. It can occur as an overflow of water from bodies such as river, lake, or ocean in which water overflows banks, overtops or breaks level set for it. Muhammed et al in Onuoha, et. al., (2022) avers that flooding harms natural habitat and people's belongings. It happens because of rainfall and can be caused by natural reasons such as excessive rain or human activities such as indiscriminate waste disposals, building and blocking of water ways. It is also aggravated by inappropriate waste management, excessive cutting down of trees and other vegetations plus other behaviours that have dangerous effects on the environment which results in his lives and properties. According to Agbonkhese, Agbonkhese, Aka, Joe-Abaya,Ocholi, and Adekunle, in Ottuh(2018), the causes of flooding among others causes are rapid population growth, poor governance, poor drainage facilities, poor practices of dumping waste,/ refuse and climate change plus inadequate preparedness, human activities in terms of developments adjudged to be a very essential factor in facilitating the speed of this hazards. This disaster has caused diseases and loss of lives in various parts of Nigeria, as well as loss and destruction of properties worth of billions of money.

As a result of the impact of the havoc caused by flooding, Ali and Hamidu, in Ottuh(2018) say that flood is one of the most recurrent and hazardous natural disasters which kills people in their good numbers and such consequences are huge on the people especially the less developed countries like Nigeria. They opined that the causes are, as a result of rapid growth in population, constant and incessant dumping of refuse in drainages, decaying infrastructures, and lack of environmental planning, which results in loss of properties, spread of diseases, displacement of people and migration of people from the disaster prone area to a more stable place. Floods occur as a result of rainfall or man's activities such as obstruction of water ways or drainage systems; it could also be as a result of melting of ice, climate changes, poor urban planning and development, poor engineering structure and so on. Floods lead to loss of lives and property, death of animals, crops, land slide and waste of money as it needs much money to control it.

### **Pollution**

Pollution is the introduction of injurious or lethal, poisonous materials into the environment. The environment could be land, air or water. These injurious materials are called pollutants. Pollutants can be natural such as volcanic ash. They can also be man-made or rather artificial. Examples of artificial pollutants are thrashing, runoff produced by factories, herbicides, insecticides, and other chemical pollutants. Pollution of the environment can be grouped into three, water, air and land. WHO, in Isife (2012) defined pollution as limited to situations in which the outer environment contains materials in concentrations which are very harmful to man and his environment. Nigeria is under heavy environmental crises as a result of water, air and land pollution, which was a result of industrial activities, poor waste management, incomplete combustion of fuel engines which in turn produces excess carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide as well as other gas emissions harmful to man and his environment. Giving credence to the above assertion, Obaimi, in Isife (2012) said in Nigeria, many rural areas that enjoyed fresh air are presently experiencing air pollution challenges as a result of industrialization, urbanization and expansion in human activities.

Going by our discussions, Ekpenyong (2021) averts these environmental challenges caused by human activities are obvious in the following areas, exhaustion of ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, acid rains, loss of biodiversity, drying of rivers and lakes, death of species, diseases and death from chemically and radioactively polluted food, water and air, diminishing of water resources, global warming, and reduction of rain forests. There is no contention that our environment today has changed from what it used to be so many years back.

### **African Traditional Religion Antidote to Environmental Challenges in Nigeria**

African Traditional Religion is a religion that is original to Africans. It was handed down by the ancestors to this present generation. It is traditional because it was not foreign. It is autochthonous, not adulterated nor influenced nor diluted by any external influence. Dine (2007), said that "tradition is described as handing down from generation to generation of opinions, beliefs, customs of what obtains in the past and still obtains in the current history of a people". For Mbuy (2021), going by the etymology of tradition from *latin* origin, *tradere* "to give" or to handover, and "trans" – across, it means that tradition refers to something that is handed over, transmitted or delivered to. In the same vein, any religion that has been handed over or transmitted from one generation to the next is a "traditional religion."

When it is said that African Traditional Religion is traditional it means that it has a long history in the continent, it has its own deposits (customs, beliefs, values and ways of doing things that are handed over) which date back to the sustaining faith of our forebears (Mbuy, 2021). It should be understood that it has been the medium through which the people have related and continue to relate among themselves with (the Supreme Being ) says Mbuy, (2021). In Africa religion is in everything and everything is in religion. That means that religion is life. It is embedded in African world view. This is expressed very vividly by Ekpenyong (2021) when he said that, African traditional religion is established in African worldview and in the people's ethics of life, customs, beliefs and values.

As the issue of environmental crisis/challenges has to do with how humans relate with nature and his environment. Africans have a serious regard for his environment through religion, customs, taboos, value systems etc. The environmental crisis which beholds the world today can be controlled. Since efforts put by the government are not giving the desired positive result, it is believed that religion is the only institution that has the ability to control what people can do because it is well placed to affect a shift or transform behaviours, cultures and norms in respect to maintaining environmental balance, thereby avoidance of the depletion of natural resources (Ekpenyong, 2021). For an African, there is no separation between what is temporal from what is holy and so everything is seen from the religious prism (Eneji, et al 2012). Man is part of the content of the environment in African religion, thought and ideologies (Ekpenyong, 2021). God (Supreme Being), '*Chukwuokike*' created the world (environment) and it is made up of two parts, the physical and the spiritual.

The contents of the earth are human beings, animals, birds, reptiles, rivers, seas, grasses, mountains, rocks, lakes, ocean, rivers ponds, plants, fishes, flies etc. Forests, land, valleys while the unseen domain are made up of God, goddesses, the divinities, deities, ancestors and spirits, Gbenda, Ekpenyong (2021). They are interrelated and the belief is that they were all made for the welfare of humans. As a result of this relationship African Traditional Religion respects them as parts of nature and so preserves them. Having observed them as parts of nature or environment and Gods creation, it means that humans should protect them as other parts of Supreme Beings creation, *Chukwu Okike* Mkenda (2010) and Snoo and Bertels in Eneji et al (2012). All these creatures were manifestations of the Supreme Being and so deserve respect and protection and by this way care for the environment. According to Ekpenyong (2021), human beings are not seen as masters of nature to exploit, overuse, abuse, without treating or handling it with respect or reverence, Africans believe that they are one with nature the environment, therefore we are responsible toward the environment (nature), and so they interact with creation and so the man as the king of creation. The following sub-headings discuss ways African Traditional Religious practices could help address environmental challenges in the country express different ways.

### **Existence of Sacred Grooves**

According to Nana (2016) everywhere in Africa, sacred grooves are found. Sacred grooves are based on the African worldview. Giving credence to the above, Gbenda in Nana (2016) avers that initially, sacred grooves hinged on spiritual and traditional trusts however, they have since such period made a very important positive impact to the protection of the environment and its contents be it animals or plants. Achunike , personal communication(2024) opines that Sacred grooves are protected by customary laws since they are seen as abode of the gods, shrines, deities and even spirits. Such sacred grooves are found in Nkpa, Nwoli, in Lejja in Nsukka Local Government Area, it is found in Elu-agba in Amegu village also in Lejja, in Nsukka L.G.A in Enugu State.

According to Eneji, et al (2012) in almost all the communities (in Africa) there is a general conception or belief that it is difficult to get any community, town that do not have a sacred grove, evil forest, sacred pond, evil stream, or forbidden forest, where some part of the environment is mapped out for the worship of the gods (Eneji et al., 2009; Tiwari, et al., in Eneji, et al (2012). Sacred groves are tracts of forests which are regenerated around places of worship. They help in the protection and conservation of many rare, threatened, and endemic species of plants and animals found in a particular area". The above view or belief is expressed in seeing trees like Iroko, Mahogany, Silk cotton, Mimosop, fig trees, baobabs, have spirits and so are respected, venerated and conserved. Cox, in Eneji, (2012) are of the opinion that in original African societies there are multiples of shrines, deities, which were associated with forests. This made Deb, et al (1997) to resolve that these trees alongside with the plants that surround them were kept, reserved as holy areas of devotion to the gods, for devotion. The designation of sacred places, trees among others, as places of worship of the gods, deities, is as a result of the fact that they help man since, tree leaves, barks, roots, grasses, and so on serve as herbal medicine to human beings, wild and domestic animals. The trees were preserved and reserved as holy areas of devotion and abodes for the interaction and consultation with the gods of the land. In so doing it helps in preservation conservation of the environment.

In some places in Africa there are places marked as evil forest; such places are habitats for murders and bad men and women in the society. Evil and bad people are sent there to die. If one is seen as a witch or a wizard and have rocked harm in the society or died of an unknown disease, or bloated stomach or death as a result of an accident such as motor accident, falling from palm tree, such corpses are thrown into the evil forest. In these forests, no cultivation of crops, cutting down of plants or collection of vegetation or the like is carried out in such an area. These forests are forbidden from any entrance neither does one farm in those areas. It is a taboo to neither cut down any tree nor hunt for wild animals there. It is kept sacred as the abode of the spirit and the goddess of the land, so no one is permitted to enter the place. Since it is a taboo to neither cut down any trees nor hunt for games there, many plants and animals are secured there. In this way African societies preserve the environment.

#### **Customary Laws and Environmental Ethics**

African societies (environments) are conserved and preserved by customary laws and rules as they are seen to be home of the gods and violating the laws tantamount to disrupting the spirit of the gods which has a damning effect on the entire community. According to customary laws collection of Milan, customary law is described as unwritten legal rule which derives from general, uniform, and constant patterns of behaviour, established in the long run and considered in the same way as a binding law. It is also seen as a set of customs, practices, and beliefs that are accepted as obligatory rules of conduct by a particular community. Here rules of conducts are established. For example, According to Nwangwoke, personal communication (2024), in Lejja in Nsukka local government, Ohodo, Ozalla in Igbo-etiti local government both in Enugu state, among others on Omabe/ omaba or Odo days, women are not allowed to come out. On certain market days, traditional marriages are not celebrated. Certain animals are not eaten areas for example, in Eke in Udi local government of Enugu State, no one kills a python. It is a taboo to kill a python. In the same vein certain forests mapped as evil forests; no one enters there, evil people are thrown into it if they are dead, not even fire woods are fetched there. This prohibition tells you how the rules are respected and strictly kept.

The sacred places also groves are places which have religious and cultural bases. These holy areas assist in protecting springs, rivers and the fertility of the soil as well as helping to shield, moisture, and environmental balance (eco-system balance and nutrient recycling. In some sacred rivers no one is allowed to fish in that area. Some rivers and streams are abodes for women goddess and so the deity is worshipped. Washing of clothes or farming is prohibited in such places such as lakes (Ekpenyong, 2021). In fact, it is a taboo to do anything funny within and around the forest or area.

African Traditional Religion approves a positive environmental ethic which is humans centered since the world view is seen in terms of its relationship with human beings. To him nature is sacred because it is Supreme Beings creation. Thus, traditional African societies use ethics to help her regulate, moderate his relationship with the natural environment. Taboos and proverbs are used to reinforce power of the goddess and its (greatness) magnitude. Taboos and proverbs are set of rules formulated by Africans to help their relationship with nature so as to avoid over usage of plants and animals, rivers, forests, streams, medicinal plants, mountains and hills, undue usage of animals for grazing, says Ekpenyong (2021). Since sacred trees are used in demarcation and covenant making, it is therefore an abomination to cut them down wherever they are seen. African concept of the Supreme Being and its agents influences their relationship with the natural environment.

#### **Rivers and Streams**

Nana in Gbenda (2010) in relation to rivers and streams says that in African traditional society, streams and water sources are treated as holy and approached with awe by those who living around the surrounding areas.. The whole of the environment are highly secluded in the belief that the river goddess or spirits live in such an area, communities whose habitat are close to the lakes, rivers or streams or springs of water venerate such places. It is very reasonable to see from the above examples and African belief system in relation, to streams, rivers, springs as constituting natural reserves as an area where the ecosystem is conserved and free from disturbances by human beings since they are sacred places.

Ohaniran (2023) in Nana (2016) observed that the clear evidences or way of protecting the environment is by shielding of the eco-system due to the respect for the gods of the bank of the streams.. This is clearly seen in and around those living where there are rivers, streams, springs and so on. Sometimes are erected at various spots around the land surrounding the river, streams and springs as well as houses of those that mediate for the gods.

According to Onah in Ekpenyong (2021), among the Ekprinyi community of Yala L.G.A in Cross River State, there is a world view that there is a river is holy river called Okpuoole, in this river, no one is permitted to fish on it. People have this notion that if one accidentally fishing in that very river, it results in immediate demise of someone male or female of that place.

In the same vein, Nnaji, personal communication (2024) says that in Umaram in Ikem; Isi-uzo L.G.A of Enugu State there is a river in existence there where no one is permitted to kill any fish. The stream, Ijogwu, no one is allowed to fish or kill Naji fish a specie of Cart fish. The consequence of attempting to fish in it, the *arusi* deity will visit you with an unlimited and unknown punishment such blocking your progress.

African Traditional Religion has a very strong belief in the interrelationship between the living and non-living things or the unseen. It also recognizes that human beings are part of the whole of a community which includes plants, animals, and natural forces. The relationship between the living things and non-living things are

extended to the spiritual realm, where human beings co-exist with deities, spirits, and our fire fathers or the living dead, who are believed to live and share with creation. Since African Traditional Religion believes that the well-being of human being tantamount to the welfare of the natural environment since they are interconnected (Alifa 2023).

Against this background we can understand that in Africa especially Nigeria, certain forests that inhabit wild animals and plants are considered sacred or totems, Gbenda, in Nnana (2016). Totem could be an animal, reptile, animalia (phylum chordate) that vegetations has a unique connection with the humans and so man has a relationship or mystical connection with, (Nana 2016). Going further to make our presentation appear reasonable; Ikyaren (the green snake) is a totem among the Tiv of Nigeria, python and green snake in some parts of Igboland, in Ibibio Etefia Ikonois, a totem represented by snail (Equong), the African people revere done, parrot and corocodile among others as totems, (Nana 2016). According to Onyeke, personal communication (2024), in Nsukka area, certain animals such as (Ram or Goats or Donkeys), and trees such as Iroko, cotton tree among others are regarded as totem.

It is against this understanding that Emile Durkeim (1858-1917), a renowned sociologist people provides object of worship such as animals, plants, water creatures and so on. In totality he named them totems. Here, he is of the belief that totems whose worship determine people's perception, thought, attitude and action have a relationship and interconnectedness with both the living and the spirit world. He says that totems belong to the domain of the sacred and not of the profane. (Gbashahwange 2024). From the reverence and regard of certain animals, plants and reptiles which makes them not to be tempered with or killed indiscriminately, environmental protection is assured.

### Sacred Lands

In Nigeria certain portions of land are regarded as sacred. Because of that, they are set aside within the settled areas or set outside particular settlement where no one goes to farm. Such places retain the original contents of both the flora and fauna. Nana (2016), supporting the above assertion says, lands are set apart within a certain area or outside a place where farmers settle or any other form of human activities are not allowed. Such places retain their original flora and fauna shrines are located there. Both the land and the forest in that area are regarded as sacred.

Certain areas are also allocated for the masquerades. Such places are called *Uhamu* in Lejja where such masquerades with special regard are prepared, decorated and ready to be seen by the initiate. Nobody fetches firewood in that area, no one is allowed to cultivate nor do any farm work there. Such masquerades such as *Okokoro*, *Ujam* (*Ujam ezugwoke*), *Ovuruzo*, *Mburu*, are prepared there. It is also in such lands in the sacred forest that the items for such masquerades are kept. Women and uninitiated do not cross the area. Before the arrival of masquerade in February on the year when it will come out, certain rituals are performed.

In some lands, certain purification rites are performed to remove any abominable acts that may have been done in the land. These are done to appease the gods and maintain the original quality of the land in its purity and nature, (Nana 2016). By forbidding and restricting people from farming, fetching of firewood, felling of trees, gaming or killing some animals or reptiles indiscriminately the environment is protected from degeneration and crisis.

### Recommendations

- (i) African Traditional Religion should try more in her efforts in the preservation of biosphere for enhanced human development, by reduction of bush burning through customary laws and sanctions

- (ii) The adherents of African Traditional Religion should sensitize her younger generation on the conservation of aquatic life and wild lives through town criers' and village meetings. The traditional rulers should be more serious these days that the climate change is at its red alert.
- (iii) African values should be upheld as it helps in the reduction of environmental degradation, for example respect for lives of both human and animals as evident in totems'.
- (iv) Sacred groves are to be respected as it assists in curbing of the detrimental effects of climate change. This has to be through laws, sanction and taboos.
- (v) The healthy relationship between the adherents of African Traditional Religion and the environment made up of the physical and the spiritual world should be promoted in order to have improved quality of sane environment. Women and children are not allowed to enter yam bans. New yam festivals with the accompanied rites and rituals help to create a better outlook on the respect for yam as the king of all crops, other crops. The festivals with the accompanied rite and rituals help to bring a balance between the goddess of the land and human beings, the spiritual and the physical world.

### Conclusion

Africans generally has a positive relationship with the environment and Nigeria is not an exception since it is one of the countries in Africa. The understanding of the environment gave rise to the attitude it has with the whole of the environment. Traveling from the Northern to the Southern, Western and Eastern part of the country Nigeria one would note that it is the same cultural belief system, practice and world view, the same attitude and perception irrespective of ethnic backgrounds. This applies to the issue of the environment. The environment surrounding Nigeria is made up of both living and non-living things. It is therefore evident in the understanding that the quality of lives of both biotic and abiotic Nigeria directly or indirectly affects the entire environment. This means that the degradation of the environment poses danger to the ecosystem within the country.

Religion which is an effective tool in enhancing the environment is therefore viewed as a healthy aspect of the environment. African Traditional Religion is therefore seen as such. This paper therefore sifts out the positive contributions of African Traditional Religion in its applicability as an instrument that helps to conserve and preserve the environment in Nigeria. Thus, the causes of environmental challenges such as flooding erosion, desertification, bush burning, pollution, overgrazing, among others are indirectly controlled through African Traditional Religion and the values it promotes.

In this paper one could see that African Traditional Religion has a very good concept of her relationship with Supreme Being and nature. It acknowledges the importance of life. African Traditional Religion does not see the environment to be used, abused or exploited. The above reason made her to devise so many means such as taboos, customary laws, delineation of some sacred places as sacred groves, shrines, sacred forests, evil forests among others as a way of preserving the environment.

In these places, within Nigeria flora and fauna are respected, feared, protected, venerated and conserved. This helps in doing anything possible to be sure that any of the causes of environmental challenge is avoided such as erosion, desertification, environmental pollution, flooding and so on. One significant thing about African Traditional Religion is that nature/environment is seen as something to be

handled with care, preserved and venerated. Nigeria therefore would ever acknowledge and celebrate the values which African Traditional Religion promotes since such values serves as antidote to environmental challenges bedeviling Nigeria.

#### Conflict interest(s)

The authors declare that they have no personal, professional or financial interest that may have inappropriately influenced the outcome of this research.

#### Ethical considerations

The authors declare that this article was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and principles for research.

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### Author Biography

**Robert Chibueze Ugwuogo** is a Roman Catholic Priest of Diocese of Nsukka and a doctoral student of Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka, with specialisation in Religion and Society. His research interest include, religion and environment, youth and cybercrime, youths and Suicide, violence against women in Africa, among others.

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### List of Informants

S/ No	Name	Date	Age	Place of working	Remarks
1.	Muokwenye Michael	28/6/24	49	UNN	Lecturer
2.	Nnaji Peter	21/6/24	53	Ikem	Clergy
3.	Nwangwoke Albert	18/6/24	75	Lejja	Farmer
4	Chineme Onyeke	1/7/24	53	Opi	Business man
5.	Achunike Hilary	26/6/24	70	Anambra State	Lecturer