


## The Impact of Religion on Environmental Sustainability: The Case of Benue State, Nigeria

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**Abstract**

The problem of environmental sustainability in Nigeria is exacerbated by the complex interplay of religious and political influences. Religious doctrines and political frameworks often clash or fail to adequately address environmental issues, leading to ineffective policies and practices. This paper therefore examined the impact of religion and politics on environmental sustainability in Benue State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions and hypotheses. The study employed a correctional survey research design. The study population comprise of 1,454,303 members of all registered religious bodies in Benue State out of which 400 respondents were randomly sampled for the study. The study employed structure questionnaire as instrument of data collection. Data collected was analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions. Hypotheses were tested using chi-square statistical tool. The findings revealed that religion has positive impact on climate change. The study further revealed that religion also has impact on environmental sustainability in Benue State. Tapping into these motivations and combining them with religious teachings about climate change and environmental sustainability could provide a powerful story line to enable the desired change. It was therefore recommended, among other things, that the religious leaders should endeavour to adopt appropriate measures in motivating their members to change their behaviours towards enhance environmental sustainability in the state.

**Keywords:** Climate Change, Religion, Environmental sustainability and Climate Change**Introduction**

In recent years, the state of the planet has become a cause for great concern. Environmental sustainability, defined as the responsible interaction with the environment to avoid depletion or degradation of natural resources and allow for long-term environmental quality, has emerged as a critical issue. Despite increasing awareness and efforts, environmental degradation continues at an alarming pace, raising significant worry among scientists, policymakers, and the general public. This worry is not unfounded, as the adverse impacts of climate change, pollution, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity pose existential threats to humanity (Akinyemi, 2015; Adeyemi & Adedeji, 2016).

Environmental sustainability is not just a scientific or economic issue; it intersects profoundly with social, cultural, religious, and political dimensions. Religion, with its deep-rooted influence on values and behavior, and politics, with its control over regulatory and policy frameworks, play important roles in shaping attitudes and actions toward the environment (Oluwole, 2017; Okonkwo, 2018).

In Benue state Nigeria, religious beliefs are deeply embedded in the daily lives of individuals and communities. The doctrines and teachings of major religions, such as Christianity and Islam, have significant influence on the environmental ethics of their adherents in the state. Religious leaders, through sermons and teachings, can either promote environmental stewardship or contribute to environmental neglect. For instance, the concept of stewardship in Christianity, which emphasises the responsibility of humans to take care of God's creation, can be a powerful motivator for environmental conservation (Adedayo, 2015). Conversely, interpretations that prioritise dominion over nature without responsibility can lead to exploitation and degradation.

The interplay between religion and politics sometimes complicates, further, the quest for environmental sustainability. In some cases, political leaders leverage religious sentiments to gain support, which can affect environmental policies. For instance, politicians may align with religious groups that have specific views on land use, resource management, or conservation efforts, thus impacting policy decisions (Akande, 2017). This symbiotic relationship can either hinder or advance environmental sustainability, depending on the prevailing religious and political ideologies.

Moreover, the cultural context of Benue state, Nigeria, is where traditional beliefs and practices are still influential, adds another layer of complexity. Indigenous practices often embody sustainable principles, such as the sacredness of certain natural sites and communal resource management. However, the clash between traditional, religious, and modern political views can lead to conflicting approaches to environmental management (Adamu, 2016).

Understanding the impact of religion on environmental sustainability requires a robust approach, drawing from theology, political science, sociology, and environmental studies.

By examining the contributions of religious teachings and actions on environmental outcomes, this study aims to identify pathways to enhance environmental sustainability efforts in Benue state, Nigeria. It is crucial to explore how religious leaders can be engaged in promoting environmental ethics to support sustainable development (Olagunju, 2018; Nwosu, 2019).

Therefore, addressing the environmental challenges in Benue state, Nigeria necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the roles played by religion in that regard. Religion has a significant potential to either support or undermine environmental sustainability in the state. This paper seeks to investigate the dynamics between religion and environmental sustainability, providing insights on how the two relates with each other, particularly, on how religion can make positive impact on environmental sustainability in Benue state, Nigeria.

### Aim of the Study

The general aim of the study is to examine the impact of religion on environmental sustainability in Benue State. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. Find out the impact of religion on climate change in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the impact of religion on environmental sustainability.

### Research Questions

The study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of religion on climate change in Benue State, Nigeria?
2. What is the impact of religion on environmental sustainability in Benue state, Nigeria?

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Religion has no significant impact on climate change in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. Religion has no significant impact on environmental sustainability in Benue State, Nigeria

### Review of Related Literature

This section of the study is dedicated to review of literature. The review will be done along the lines of environmental sustainability, impact of environmental sustainability, the impact of religion on environmental sustainability and summary of literature review.

#### Environmental Sustainability

Akinyemi (2015) defines environmental sustainability as "the practice of ensuring that natural resources are used and managed in a way that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition underscores the principle of intergenerational equity, emphasizing that our current use of resources should not impair the capacity of future generations to fulfil their needs. The focus is on responsible resource management to maintain ecological balance over the long term.

Adeyemi and Adedeji (2016) describe environmental sustainability as "the responsible management and conservation of the earth's natural resources to ensure long-term ecological balance and human well-being." Their definition highlights the importance of conservation practices that protect and sustain the natural environment, which in turn supports human health and prosperity.

The emphasis is on long-term ecological balance as a foundation for sustainable development.

Oluwole (2017) states that environmental sustainability involves "the integration of environmental health, economic vitality, and social equity to maintain the planet's ecosystems while supporting human life and development." This definition reflects the multifaceted nature of sustainability, which encompasses environmental, economic, and social dimensions. By integrating these aspects, sustainability efforts aim to create a balanced approach that supports both ecological health and human development.

Adamu (2016) defines it as "the continuous process of aligning human activities with the regenerative capacity of the natural environment to prevent resource depletion and environmental degradation." This definition focuses on the need to harmonize human activities with the natural environment's ability to regenerate. It stresses the importance of avoiding practices that deplete resources or cause environmental harm, thereby ensuring the environment's capacity to sustain life.

#### The Impact of Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability has profound implications for various aspects of human life and the natural world. When effectively implemented, it promotes ecological health, economic stability, and social well-being. For instance, sustainable agricultural practices can enhance soil fertility, increase crop yields, and ensure food security for communities. This is particularly vital in Nigeria, where agriculture is a significant part of the economy and a primary source of livelihood for many (Olagunju, 2018). By adopting sustainable practices, farmers can improve productivity and resilience, contributing to the overall stability of the agricultural sector.

Sustainable practices also contribute to economic stability by creating green jobs and promoting industries that rely on renewable resources. For example, the development of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind power, can reduce dependence on fossil fuels, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and create employment opportunities in Nigeria's growing green economy (Ibrahim, 2017). These practices not only support environmental health but also drive economic growth and development. As the global economy increasingly shifts towards sustainability, embracing these practices can position Nigeria to benefit from new economic opportunities and technological advancements.

Social well-being is another critical aspect influenced by environmental sustainability. Access to clean air, water, and a healthy environment directly impacts public health and quality of life. In urban areas of Nigeria, efforts to improve waste management, reduce pollution, and enhance green spaces contribute to healthier living conditions and overall community well-being (Eze, 2016). Moreover, sustainable development policies that prioritize social equity ensure that all members of society benefit from environmental improvements, reducing disparities and fostering inclusive growth. By addressing environmental challenges, communities can enhance their quality of life and resilience to environmental changes.

However, the challenges of achieving environmental sustainability in Nigeria are significant. Political instability, corruption, and insufficient enforcement of environmental regulations often undermine sustainability efforts. Additionally, conflicting interests among stakeholders, including government bodies, private enterprises, and local communities, can impede the implementation of effective sustainability policies (Akande, 2017). Addressing these

challenges requires a collaborative approach, engaging all sectors of society to work towards a common goal of preserving the environment for future generations. By fostering cooperation and strengthening governance frameworks, Nigeria can overcome these obstacles and advance towards a more sustainable future.

### **The Impact of Religion on Environmental Sustainability**

Religion plays a significant role in shaping attitudes and behaviors towards the environment in Nigeria. Religious teachings often provide a moral framework that influences how adherents interact with nature. For instance, Christianity and Islam, the predominant religions in Nigeria, both advocate for stewardship and care for creation. Christian doctrines, such as the concept of stewardship, emphasize the responsibility of humans to protect and preserve God's creation (Adedayo, 2015). Similarly, Islamic teachings advocate for the balanced use of resources and the protection of the environment as a duty to God (Oluwole, 2017). Religious leaders, through their sermons and teachings, can inspire their followers to adopt environmentally friendly practices. However, the influence of religion can also be negative if misinterpreted or if religious leaders fail to emphasise the importance of environmental care.

Politics significantly impacts environmental sustainability through policy-making and governance. The effectiveness of environmental policies and regulations in Nigeria largely depends on the political will of leaders to enforce them. Unfortunately, issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, and political instability often undermine these efforts (Eze, 2016). For example, political leaders may prioritize short-term economic gains over long-term environmental sustainability, leading to the exploitation of natural resources without adequate measures for conservation (Ibrahim, 2017). Moreover, political alliances and conflicts can affect the implementation of environmental policies, as competing interests and power struggles can hinder coordinated efforts towards sustainability. The interplay between religion and politics further complicates the pursuit of environmental sustainability in Nigeria. Politicians often leverage religious sentiments to gain support, which can influence environmental policies. For instance, political leaders may align with religious groups that have specific views on land use, resource management, or conservation efforts, impacting policy decisions (Akande, 2017). This symbiotic relationship can either advance or hinder environmental sustainability, depending on how religious and political leaders address environmental issues. Engaging religious leaders in environmental advocacy and ensuring political commitment to sustainable policies are crucial steps towards achieving environmental sustainability in Nigeria.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

In the literature review, it was shown what environmental sustainability entails. It was shown that it deals with the natural resources and how they can be managed without endangering future environmental needs of humans. Next, literature on the impact of environmental sustainability was reviewed. The reviewed literature indicated that when the environment is sustained, it has impact on human activities. Furthering the review was a look at the connection between religion and environmental sustainability wherein literature reviewed indicated that religion can impact human attitudes to the environment. This was linked with the interplay of both religion and politics where it was shown in the literature that religion can also influence political decision-making to affect the sustainability of the environment. While these literature have been helpful in giving some direction to the present study, it was observed that in terms of methodology and study area, there is a lacuna in the reviewed literature. Methodologically, the present study is quantitative, using

quantitative method of data collection and analysis. The reviewed literature are not quantitative. Equally, the reviewed literature were not focused on Benue State, Nigeria strictly. These are the areas that the present study addresses itself in other to fill in the identified gap in literature.

### **Study Area**

Benue State, located in the north-central region of Nigeria, is renowned for its rich agricultural resources, often referred to as the "Food Basket of the Nation" due to its fertile land conducive to crop and livestock farming. The state is bordered by Nasarawa to the north, Taraba to the east, and Enugu and Ebonyi to the south, with River Benue running through its expanse, enhancing its agricultural potential (Okoli, 2018). Additionally, Benue State is a hub for diverse ethnic groups, predominantly the Tiv and Idoma, who contribute to its vibrant cultural heritage (Ameh, 2017). The state's capital, Makurdi, serves as a central administrative and commercial center, facilitating economic activities and connectivity within the region (Ogwuche, 2019). According to 2006 census, the state has an estimated population 4,253,641 persons. This number will have doubled since 2006 is a long time ago. However, since that was the only census in recent memory in Nigeria, the study will make do with it, only noting that the present population of the state is way higher now. Many ethnic and sub-ethnicities can be found in Benue state with the Tiv, Idoma, and Igede ethnicities being dominant. There are still minority ethnic groups of the state which include the Etulo, the Igbo and the Jukun.

In terms of religion, the state boasts of people of diverse faith. This is to say that many religions are found in the state. Foremost among these religions is Christianity which dominates in the state. Roman Catholicism seems to be dominant as far as Christianity is concerned in the state. Other Christian denominations exist in the state too. Traditional religion is strong in the state, with many Christians combining their faith with traditional practices. This is not strange, since according to Mbiti (1969) and Uwaegbute & Odo (2018), conflating traditional religious practices with the practice of Christianity is common among Africans. Ancestor veneration is a fact in the state (Onmoke 2018), with traditional practices still being observed in many respect. All these make for a multi-religious practice in the state where religion influences people's life styles and decision-making. This makes Benue state a good study area on how religious beliefs influence environmental sustainability.

### **Research Method**

This study adopted a survey research design. The survey research is a quantitative research method used for collecting data from a set of panels or respondents. According to Emaikwu (2013), survey research design is one in which a group of people or items are studied in their natural setting by collecting, analysing and interpreting data from people considered to be a representative sampled of the entire population. The population of this study comprised 1,454,303 in all the religious groups in Benue State. The population cuts-across the twenty-three Local Governments Areas of the State. The population was gotten from the Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN Benue State Chapter Annual Statistical Data, (2024). The sample size for this study comprised of 400 respondents from the study population. This is based on TaroYamene (1967) as cited in Emaikwu (2019) who states that for a study of known population N and error level, the minimum sample size requirement should be given by the formula.

A structured questionnaire titled: Religion, Climatic Change and Environmental Sustainability Questionnaire (RPCCESQ). The instrument contains 15 items, which is divided into 3 clusters: A - C with each cluster addressing a research question. Five items were for each Cluster. A four-point rating scale is provided for each item of

the questionnaire as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1

Data from the respondents were collated and analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and since four-point rating scale is adopted 2.50 was used as mean cut-off point decision rule on respondents' opinions on each item as whether it has influence or not. Hypotheses were tested using chi-square statistics at 0.05 level of significance. Chi-square statistics tool was adopted because it is use to compare observed data with data we would expect to obtain according to a specific hypothesis (Fisher & Yates, 2016). The decision rule for rejection or otherwise of the hypotheses is based the *p* value and alpha value. Hypothesis of no significance influence was accepted for any hypotheses whose *p* value is equal to or greater than alpha value of 0.05 ( $p \geq 0.05$ ). While any hypothesis whose *p* value is less than alpha value of 0.05 ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) was rejected.

**Results**

Based on the analysed data, the following findings are thus discussed  
**Research Question 1:** What is the impact of religion climate change in Benue State?

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Impact of Religion Climate Change in Benue State**

S / N	Item Description	N	S A	A	D	S D	x	S t d	Decisi on
1	Religious leaders pass out the message of environmental preservation to the masses.	400	180	120	80	20	3.91	.51	Accepted
2	Religion has no impact on people lives in relation to their environment	400	80	81	160	80	2.40	.22	Not Accepted
3	Religion helps to address the moral deficit on the part of humans living in the environment.	400	240	140	40	20	3.86	.66	Accepted
4	Religious leaders are familiar with importance of ecological wellbeing.	400	80	200	80	40	3.87	.87	Accepted
5	Religious leaders do not inculcate values to address moral deficit concerning the environment	400	40	80	80	200	2.95	.50	Not Accepted
<b>Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation</b>							<b>2.73</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Table 1 show mean (x) result from 1.90 – 3.40 with Standard Deviation (SD) of 0.86 – 1.05. While the cluster mean x = 2.73 and SD .94. This result indicates that items 1, 3, and 4 have x greater than 2.50 while items 2 and 5 have x less than 2.50. This result means that religion have impact climate change in Benue State.

**Research Question 2:** What is the impact of religion on environmental sustainability?

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Impact of Religion on Environmental Sustainability**

S/N	Item Description	N	S A	A	D	S D	x	S t d	Decisi on
6	Religion stands on campaign to mitigate environmental disaster	400	240	80	40	40	3.30	.11	Accepted
7	Religious leaders synergize their effort to the prevention human activities that are hazardous to the environment.	400	280	60	40	20	3.87	.57	Accepted

8	Religious institutions take scientific approach for sustainability of the environment.	400	40	40	80	20	60	.83	Not Accepted
9	Religion offers guidance on how to live a life that is in accordance with sustainability	400	80	240	40	0	4.49	.83	Accepted
10	Religion provides viable means through which environmental management can be achieved	400	100	100	100	100	3.51	.76	Accepted
<b>Cluster Mean and Standard Deviation</b>							<b>2.89</b>	<b>0.76</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

Table 2 show mean (x) result from 2.25 – 3.30 with Standard Deviation (SD) of 0.83 – 1.12. While the cluster mean x = 2.89 and SD .76. This result indicates that items 6, 7, 9 and 10 have x greater than 2.50 while items 8 has less than 2.50. This result implies that religion have impact on environmental sustainability in Benue State.

**Hypothesis 1:** Religion has no significant impact on climate change in Benue State.

**Table 3: Chi-Square Analysis on the impact of Religion on Climate Change in Benue State Test Statistics**

Chi-Square	17.600 <sup>a</sup>
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.001

Table 3 shows that  $\chi^2 = 17.600$ ,  $p < 0.05$  at  $df = 3$  and  $N=400$ . Therefore, the stated hypothesis is rejected. This implies that religion has a significant impact on climate change in Benue State.

**Hypothesis 2:** Religion has no significant impact on environmental sustainability.

**Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis on impact of religion on Environmental Sustainability Test Statistics**

Chi-Square	48.960 <sup>a</sup>
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Table 4 shows that  $\chi^2 = 48.960$ ,  $p < 0.05$  at  $df = 3$  and  $N=400$ . Therefore, the stated hypothesis is rejected. This implies that religion has a significant impact on environmental sustainability.

**Discussion of Findings**

Based on the analysed data the following findings are discussed:

The first finding revealed that religion have impact on climate change in Benue State, Nigeria. This was also confirmed with test of hypothesis 2 which revealed that religion has a significant impact on climate change in Benue State. This result entails religious leaders pass on the message of environmental preservation, helps to address the moral deficit on the part of humans living in the environment and hence religious leaders are familiar with importance of ecological wellbeing it contributes enormously in impact on climate change in Benue State, Nigeria. This finding is consistent with Ottuh (2018) whose study revealed that on a general note that weather and environmental scientist set the agenda for environmental prevention through scientific means but religion helps to work on the mind of the stake holders and carry out the campaign



of the agenda to their adherents. By so doing, religion is playing its role in environmental protection.

The second finding revealed that religion have impact on environmental sustainability in Benue State, Nigeria. This finding was confirmed with test of hypothesis 3 which revealed that religion has a significant impact on environmental sustainability. This result means that religion stands on campaign to mitigate environmental disaster, religious leaders synergize their effort to the prevention human activities that are hazardous to the environment. It offers guidance on how to live a life that is in accordance with sustainability and that it provides viable means through which environmental management can be achieved. This finding tallied with Eche and Amadi (2020) whose findings revealed that religion has solution to all challenge human beings face in the world including environmental problems. The study proved that religion provides the most viable means through which effective environmental management can be achieved in Benue State, Nigeria, since the three main religions practised in the state are rooted in environmental ethics and values.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made:

- i. religious leaders should endeavour to adopt appropriate measures in motivating their members to change their behaviours towards sustainable environment in the state. This is so since there is still room for improvement towards sustaining the environment in the state.
- ii. the study recommends adherence to religious moral values by both leaders and the led.
- iii. religions in the state need to collaborate with the government in the campaign for tree planting especially in the area of deforestation and the preservation of animal species. Intensified efforts are still needed from religious leaders in the state towards teaching their adherents the need to sustain afforestation.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that religion has an immense impact environmental sustainability in Benue State, Nigeria. This influence is particularly evident in how religious teachings and ethical values shape decisions and societal behaviors toward the environment. Religious doctrines often emphasise stewardship of the earth, encouraging communities to adopt practices that protect and preserve natural resources. In Benue State, religious leaders have played a crucial role in advocating for sustainable environmental practices, mobilising their followers to engage in activities that reduce pollution, conserve water, and protect forests. These efforts have contributed significantly to the state's overall environmental sustainability by fostering a culture of respect and responsibility toward nature.

Moreover, religion supports political efforts in maintaining orderliness through the ethical values it instills in individuals. By promoting ideals such as honesty, integrity, and care for creation, religious teachings help cultivate an "ideal heart" in individuals, leading to more conscientious and environmentally friendly behavior. This moral guidance helps bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that environmental regulations are not only enacted but also followed. In Benue State, the integration of religious values into environmental policies has proven effective in achieving sustainable outcomes, highlighting the indispensable role of religion in addressing climate change and promoting environmental sustainability. Through these combined efforts, religion and politics

work hand in hand to create a more sustainable and orderly environment.

### 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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