

Influence of Religious Beliefs on the Conservation of Natural Resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to examine the influence of religious beliefs on the conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State. To achieve the purpose of this study, two null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The simple random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the six communities used in the study, as well as the selection of two hundred sample used for the study. A fifteen (15) item four point likert scale questionnaire was the instrument used for the collection of data. To test the hypotheses formulated, Pearson product moment correlation statistical technique was used for data analysis. The results obtained from analysis of data revealed that, there is a significant relationship between Christianity, Islam and conservation of natural resources. Based on these findings, recommendation was made that awareness creation on environmental conservation should become an integral part of religious doctrines.

Keywords: Religious, beliefs, Conservation, Natural, resources

Introduction

At one time, human beings were just another consumer somewhere in the food chain. Humans fell prey to predators and died as a result of disease and epidemic just like other animals. The simple and crude tools they used would not allow major changes in their surroundings. As human population grew rapidly, and as their tools and methods of using them became more advanced, the impact of human activities on the environment and its resources increased tremendously. This interaction between humans and the environment over the years somehow benefited mankind while the environment was

constantly subjected to more torture, degradation, deprivation and neglect by man. It is indisputable that, every human activity has a definite effect on the environment, which can either be positive or negative (Abang, 2005).

Sociology is the study of society. It is largely concerned with understanding, behaviour and experiences of people in the many different groups of which society is made. This concept is very important in the study of people, institutions and relationships. Sociology as a discipline and as a science is dynamic and relevant in the study of behaviour in terms of how the various social forces in the environment help to shape man's attitude. Social factors are the active determinants of culture. All human beings are primarily driven to action by the desire to satisfy their needs, and this is the power behind social as well as individual action. Religious adaptation takes place during the process of socialization as religious norms and values are transmitted from one generation to another (Anijah-obi, 2002).

The natural environment is of crucial importance and requires no emphasis by us as human beings. It is in it that life support system is found. Human beings as culture building animals, made possible by their very highly evolved brains, undertaken forms of learning to attain increased control of the environment. This learning which could be self-directed, as individuals or groups, motivated man to impact upon the living environment as he attempt to explore, exploit and expropriate the natural resources of the environment to serve his needs (Ikpeme, 2007).

As human activities goes on inestimably, a lot of pressure becomes exerted on the carrying capacity of the living environment. Wanton and careless exploitation of environmental resources are on the increase in order to meet the needs of today's generation without providing for the requirement of future generations. The result is that, most environmental resources would be threatened while others suffer extinction (Obadan, 2003).

He further stressed that the rural communities are demarcated by specific boundaries and the resources in them are limited. Such limited resources can easily be exhausted through over-exploitation when it is compared to an ever increasing population that continues to expand. This situation calls for conservation, if the rural environment should succeed contributing to the national management of land, the forest and water resources and the improvement of the living conditions of the inhabitants.

When human population was small in relation to the earth's resources, short-terms exploitation may have been permissible because abuses were small and generally repairable. Today such actions are not tolerated because very many people share this planet. Not everybody owns land but every human being uses water; hence water is a

great treasure. We drink it, wash with it, and make thousands of uses with it in our day-to-day activities. In spite of its importance to human survival and prosperity, water is one of the most poorly managed resources in the human environment. The attitude of squandering and polluting it as we like have created severe water crisis in recent times (Frederick, 2003).

He further stressed that, the rural communities are demarcated by specific boundaries and the resources in them are limited. Such limited resources can easily be exhausted through over-exploitation when it is compared to an ever increasing population that continues to expand. This situation calls for conservation or curtailment of excessive resource use. Conservation in the rural environment should contribute to the rational management of the land, the forests and water resources and the improvement of the living conditions of the inhabitants.

The influence of religious beliefs on natural resources conservation is dynamic and cannot be over-emphasized in terms of its contribution to attitude formation and behaviour towards natural resources utilization and management. These attitudes have varying impact on various natural resources of the environment.

Asim (2006) opined that, God Almighty is the creator of the heavens and the earth. The Bible records in the book of Genesis that, in the beginning God created the heaven and earth. And God said, let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seeds, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself upon the earth and it was so. The water was also given the divine instruction to bring forth different kinds of creatures in it, and was so. God therefore, pronounced blessing on them to grow abundantly and fill the earth. The creation of man as contain in Genesis was specifically for mutual existence. Therefore, a contrary behaviour by Christians or followers of this religion is considered as being against the will of God.

Asu (2000) maintained that, God did not encourage followers of Christianity to waste or utilize natural resources in ways that would threaten their existence. In the book of Deuteronomy, it is recorded that, when thou shall besiege a city a long time in making war against it to take it, thou shall not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them; for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shall not cut down them (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege only the trees which thou knowest that they be not thou shall build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued.

This passage holds that man should avoid wanton destruction of flora and other plant species within the environment. This view is strongly against claims that, the Christianity religion promotes indiscriminate utilization of natural resources, through assertions that God created every living creatures as food for man, but man must take absolute care to conserve and protect them.

Citing the same Deuteronomy chapter 10 verses 10-20. Amang and Ntui (2014) asserted that God does not encourage followers of Christianity to waste or utilize natural resources in ways that would threaten their existence. Akpan (2016) on his part opined that, God Almighty is the creator of the heavens and the earth. The bible records in the Book of Genesis chapter I verse I that, "in the beginning God created the heaven and earth. Verse II records that, "and God said, let the earth bring forth grasses, the herbs yielding seeds, and the fruit trees yielding fruits after their kind, whose seed is in itself upon the earth and it was so. Verse 20 records that, and God said, let the water bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great Whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the water brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after their kind, and God saw that it was good. And God bless them saying, "be fruitful, and multiply in the earth. Verse 25 records that, "and God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind and everything that creepeth upon the earth and after his kind, and God saw that it was good (Ikpembe, 2017).

Ntia (2015) stressed that, Christians are followers of the acts of God as recorded in the Holy Bible. The account of creation shows that God encourages mutual existence between man and other creature on earth. Any contrary practice by followers of Christianity is considered as being against the will of God.

Azeez (2006) conducted a study to examine religious factors and environmental management in Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design. The study used a sample of two hundred and fifty (250) respondents randomly selected from the study area. In assessing the relationship between Islamic religion and environmental management, Pearson product moment correlation analysis was used for data analysis. The result of this analysis revealed that, the calculated r-value of 1.171 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.196 when tested at 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that, there is a significant relationship between Islamic religion and environmental resource management in Gboko Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Based on the result of the study, it was recommended that, environmental education and mass literacy education should be promoted to enhance environmental resource management and conservation.

Islam teaches that, the role of people on earth is that of Khalifa or trustees of God's creation, whereby humans are entrusted with the safe keeping of the earth and its variety of life. The prophet Mohammed is quoted as saying "there is a reward for doing good to every living thing". The first global environmental forum from an Islamic perspective held from October 20-25, 2000 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia with UNEP as a partner. The Jeddah declaration notes that sustainable development from an Islamic perspective is the development and rehabilitation of the earth in a manner that

does not disrupt the equilibrium established by God for everything in this universe. It further notes that environmental protection is an integral part of sustainable development and cannot be considered in isolation (Ibrahim, 2003).

Isa (2004) holds that, Q'uran describes the relationship between man and the various elements of the universe in which he subsists. It states, Allah is he who created the heaven and earth, and causes water to descend from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you, and makes the ship to be of service to you, that they may run upon the sea at his command, and has made of service unto you the river and makes the sun and the moon, constant in their course to be of service unto you, has made of service unto you the night and day. And he gives you all you ask of him, and if you will count the bounty of Allah, you cannot reckon it. Lo; man is verily a wrong doer and ingrate (Q'uran 14:13).

Man's control of other creatures therefore is a special favour from Allah which Muslims realize and should not be abused. It is a privilege not a right. Thus, Muslims do not consider other creature as man's property to be used recklessly. Rather man holds them in trust for the creator to whom man would account for their use or abuse. In other words, man as trustee, must not deliberately and unnecessarily deny the creatures of their dues or abuse them. The holy Q'uran decrees that man must not be prodigal in his use of natural resources. He should waste not, so that he may want not. Hence, the Q'uran directs that, eat and drink (of Allah's provisions) but waste nothing for Allah does not love wasteful fellow (Q'uran 7:54-56).

Research questions

Two research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between Christianity and conservation of natural resources?
2. To what extent does Islam relate to conservation of natural resources?

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were posed to direct this study:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between Christianity and conservation of natural resources.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between Islam and conservation of natural resources.

Methodology

The survey research design was considered most appropriate for the study. The area of study is Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State. The population of the area stood at 13,506 (NPC, 2016). The sample consists of community members residing in the study area who are members of the two religious groups. The simple random sampling technique was adopted to select two hundred

(200) respondents used for this study. The instrument used for the study was a constructed and validated questionnaire tagged Religious Beliefs and Conservation of Natural Resources (RBCNRQ). The instrument was divided into two parts. Part 'A' contained personal information about respondents; while part 'B' measured the variables of the study using four point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). For each positive item response, SA was assigned 4, A had 3, D had 2 and SD had 1 point. The reverse was the case for negative items. Face validity was established for the instrument of the study by using three (3) experts in Measurement and Evaluation in the Faculty of Education. The Cronbach alpha method was used to ensure reliability of the research instrument and the result obtained from the analysis of data showed a reliability range of 0.62 to 0.88. There were 15 items altogether in the questionnaire. The statistics used in testing the hypotheses was Pearson product moment correlation. It was tested at .05 level of significance.

Presentation of results

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between Christianity and conservation of natural resources.

Table 1: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between Christianity and conservation of natural resources

Data in Table 1 shows that the null hypothesis is rejected. The result obtained from analysis of data revealed that, the calculated r-value of 0.194 is greater than the critical r-

Variables	$\Sigma x / \Sigma y$	Σx^2 Σy^2	Σxy	Cal-r
Christianity	2538	6441444	5414	0.194*
Conservation of natural resources	2876	827137.6		

Significant at 0.05; d = 198; critical r= 0.138; N= 200

value of 0.138 when tested at 0.05 level of significance and 198 degree of freedom. This implies that there is a significant relationship between Christianity and conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between Islam and conservation of natural resources.

Data presented in Table 2 shows that the null hypothesis is rejected. The result obtained from analysis of data reveals that the calculated r-value of 0.206 is greater than the

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between Islam and conservation of natural resources

Variables	$\frac{\sum x}{\sum y}$	$\frac{\sum x^2}{\sum y^2}$	$\sum xy$	Cal-r
Islam	2538	8282884	6416	0.206*
Conservation of natural resources	2876	827137.6		

Significant at 0.05; d = 198; critical r= 0.138; N=200

critical r-value of 0.138 when tested at 0.05 level of significance and 198 degree of freedom. This implies that there is a significant relationship between Islam and conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Discussion of the findings

Findings from analysis of hypothesis one which states that there is no significant relationship between Christianity and conservation of natural resources was rejected. The result obtained from analysis of data revealed that, the calculated r-value of 0.194 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.138 when tested at 0.05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom; this implies that, there is a significant relationship between Christianity and conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State. This agrees with the findings of Asu (2000) which asserts that God does not encourage followers of Christianity to waste or utilize natural resources in ways that would threaten their existence. The book of Deuteronomy records that, when thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them. For thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege only the trees which thou knowest that, they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down, and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it be subdued. The above view is strongly against claims that Christianity religion promotes indiscriminate utilization of natural resources, through assertions that God created every living creature as food for man; man must take absolute care to conserve and protect them.

Findings from analysis of hypothesis two which states that there is no significant relationship between Islam and conservation of natural resources reveal that the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was upheld. The result obtained from the analysis of data revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.206 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.138, when tested at 0.05 level of significance with 198 degree of

freedom. This implies that, there is a significant relationship between Islam and conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State. This result agrees with Isa (2004) who hold that, Quran describes the relationship between man and the various elements of the universe in which he subsists. It states; Allah is he who created the heaven and earth, and causes water to descend from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you, and makes the ship to be of service to you, that they may run upon the sea at his command, and has made of service unto you the river, and makes the sun and the moon, constant in their course to be of service unto you, has made of services unto you the night and day. And he gives you all you ask of him, and if you will count the bounty of Allah, you cannot reckon it. Lo; man is verily a wrongdoer and ingrate - (Quran 14:13).

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Environmental conservation issue should form an integral part of the teachings in various churches and mosques in the country to help reinforce positive attitude among their members, and change negative ones.
2. Various religious leaders in the country should be regularly sensitized on the need for environmental conservation and management as well as encourage them to always promote environmental sustainability among their followers.
3. There should be injection of traditional beliefs that have direct relationship with the conservation of natural resources to help reduce human destructive tendencies on the environment and its resources.

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