

---

**INFLUENCE OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND PRACTICES ON SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN AKAMKPA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

**SAM, IME EDET**

Department of Environmental Education, University of Calabar  
+2348063987888 | imesam12@yahoo.com

**ONNOGHEN N. USANG**

Department of Environmental Education, University of Calabar  
+2348171953333

&

**ETEPIA, TITUS E.**

Department of Environmental Education, University of Calabar  
+ 2348034437976 | [etepia2016@gmail.com](mailto:etepia2016@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

The main purpose of this study was to examine the influence of African traditional religion and practices on sustainable conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Two null hypotheses were formulated to direct the study. The hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The literature reviewed was based on the sub- variables of the study. The survey research design was adopted for the study. The choice of this design was to enable the researcher examine the phenomena under investigation as it exists presently in the study area. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select six autonomous communities that have played significant role in the conservation of the natural resources available in the environment. To select the 400 respondents used for the study, stratified random sampling techniques was used. The questionnaire was the instrument used to obtain data for the study. The instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha reliability test. The result of the test showed the calculated value range of .85 to .97 which implies that, the instrument is reliable enough to measure what is was purported to measure. Data obtained for this study was tested using Pearson product moment correlation ( $r$ ) statistical analysis. The results obtained from data analysis revealed that, there is a significant relationship between totemism practice, evil forest practice and sustainable conservation of natural resources in the study area. Based on the result from the findings, conclusion and recommendations were made. One of the recommendations is that, environmental conservation issues 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.

**Keywords:** African traditional religion, Indigenous cultural practices, Sustainable conservation, Natural resources, Environmental conservation.

### **Background to the study**

At one time, humans were just other consumers 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 tools they used would not allow major changes in their surroundings. But as human population began to grow and as their tools and methods of using them became more advanced, the impact that a single man could have on his or her surrounding increased tremendously. This interaction between humans and the environment has over the year's benefited mankind somehow while the environment has been constantly subjected to more torture, degradation, deprivation and neglect by man. It is indisputable that, every human activity has a significant definite effect on the environment and its natural resources, which may either be positive or negative (Mbang, 2010). Sociology is the study of the society. It is largely concerned with understanding the behavior and experiences of people in the many different groups which society is made. The key concepts are important in the study of people, institutions and relationships. Sociology as a discipline and science is dynamic, thus helping the study of human behavior in terms of how the various social forces in the environment help to shape man's attitude. Social forces 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 actions. Religious adaptation takes place during the process of socialization as religious norms and values are transfer or 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 the only planet in the universe where life is known to exist. It is in it that an intrinsic chain of support systems is found. Human beings as culture building animals, made possible by their very highly evolved brains, undertake forms of learning to attain increased control of the environment. This learning which could be self-directed, as individuals or groups, motivates man to impact upon the living environment as he attempts 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. Wonton and careless exploitation seem to focus on meeting the needs of today without providing for the requirements of our future generations. The result is that, future generations face the threat of environmental degradation and its consequences (Ibanga, 2008).

When human population was small in relation to the earth's resources, short-term 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, depend on forest for one need or another. Air also is a natural resource that is inextricably necessary for every human and other living things; hence water, forest, land and air are great treasure that are essential for needs satisfaction. In spite of its importance to human survival and prosperity, these resources are poorly managed in our environment. The attitude of wastefully exploiting, Squandering and polluting it as we like has created severe environmental crises in recent times (Fred, 2006).

He further stressed that, most 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 land, forest 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 behavior towards natural resource utilization and management. These attitudes have varying impact on various natural resources of the environment. Religion is one of the social institutions that can be used to address the problem of resource over-exploitation, mismanagement and utilization. Christians use the Holy Bible for teaching its members ethical values and norms that would promote a better society. There is no instance in the Bible where over-exploitation, mismanagement and wasteful destruction of natural resources are advocated. Therefore, religious teaching on the principles of conservation, protection and proper utilization of resources may change human attitude from wanton destruction of the environment and its resources.

Islamic religion on the other hand, is a religion that teaches its believers to exist in peace and harmony with people (members or non-members), and extend same harmonious co-existence to the environment and its natural resources. This teaching has shown in the way Muslims relate with the environment and its resources. But for this attitude to be sustained, those directly to the helm of affairs in this faith should endeavour to sensitize their believers to maintain a harmonious relationship with the environment (Adamu, 2011).

In African and particularly Nigeria, the African traditional religion has helped to conserve and preserve the environment and its resources. The existences of evil forests, sacred streams, and totemism, to mention but a few are promoted by the existence of African tradition religion. Due to punishment attached to the violation of the tenets of this religion, human beings are often afraid of doing anything especially in forbidden areas to avert punishment, banishment or death from the gods or goddess (Abiodun, 2009).

The main essence of this study was to examine and present findings on the influence of religious beliefs on the conservation of natural resources. The results obtained in the study may be useful to the following individuals and groups; students, lecturers, government and non-governmental organization, religious leaders, members of the host communities and researchers intending to carry out a similar research work as follows; the findings of this study may be relevant to students of environmental education and other related discipline as useful study materials for acquiring relevant knowledge on the subject matter of this study. Lecturers in the aforementioned disciplines may also see the findings of this study as a resource material for acquiring and imparting relevant knowledge to their learners. Government agencies like the ministry of environment and policy-makers may also find the results obtained in this study as baseline data required for designing strategies for effective utilization and management of natural resources. Non-governmental organizations working on environmental conservation and other related activities may find

the result of this study very useful as it will give them an insight into the nature of the situation under investigation. Religious leaders may also need the findings of this study to enable them assess the contribution of their religion to environmental conservation as well as its degradation. Members of the host communities in the study area may benefit immensely from the findings of this study as a medium for evaluating their attitude towards the conservation of natural resources. Researchers intending to carry out a similar study on a broader scope or in findings of this study as a reference material.

### **Statement of the problem**

The physical environment has witnessed significant changes in recent decades as a result of man's activities in his quest to satisfy his basic needs of life. The incidence of high population growth has further aggravated the pressure on available natural resources of the earth, resulting in fierce competition for these resources but humans. Everybody on earth has his personal value judgment, which determines his religious attitudes which influence behaviours towards peculiar beliefs that are associated with various religious who characterizes their norms and values which must be upheld by members of the religious bodies are expected to conform to the norms and values that govern followers of such religious institutions. The natural resources of the environment have suffered severe exploitation and degradation, and man has been identified as the critical agent that makes and unmakes the environment. There are varying opinions with regards to the role of religious beliefs in natural resources conservation. Some researchers have revealed that, religious beliefs have contributed significantly to natural resource conservation, while other views are on the contrary. The blame some religions as being responsible for wanton destruction of natural resources.

This study therefore, examined the extent to which African traditional religion and practice influence sustainable conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria?

### **Purpose of the study**

The main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of African traditional religion and practices on sustainable conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the relationship between totemism practice and sustainable conservation of natural resources.
2. Examine the relationship between evil forest practice and sustainable conservation of natural resources.

### **Research questions**

The following research questions are posed to guide the study;

1. To what extent does totemism practice relate to sustainable conservation of natural resources?
2. How does evil forest practice relate with sustainable conservation of natural resources?

### **Statement of hypotheses**

The following hypotheses are formulated for the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between totemism practice and sustainable conservation of natural resources.
2. Evil forest practice does not significantly relate with sustainable conservation of natural resources.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Totemism and conservation of natural resources**

It has been acknowledged in the findings of Eneji, Benson, and Uveri (2009) that deforestation, illegal hunting, grazing which pose a threat to wildlife populations are major problems facing Nigeria. Based on the services provided by these biological resources for both human and other living things, it has long been recognized that the abundance and existence of these forest resources are under serious threats from human activities. Many management techniques have already been adopted to conserve and manage these forests, but the results so far seem to be at best a mirage. The interplay between belief systems and nature is complex and deeply rooted, recognition of this link has grown enormously in the last few years (WWF, 2005). Local people have developed a variety of consistent resource conservation and management strategies in tropical Africa, Asia, and South America in the past (Appiah-Opoku, 2007). In some African societies, for example, Totems were often the basis for laws and regulations, it was a violation of cultural and spiritual life to hunt, kill, or hurt an animal or plant totem. Totems are found among different clans and tribes in various African communities. For example, in Zimbabwe, the Shona people have 25 different totems Murombedzi (2003).

According to Eneji, Mbakwe and Omari (2012) in Africa and indeed Nigeria, the traditional belief system holds the ascription of supernatural powers to objects called gods and goddesses; The belief system is that the gods protect the community members from harm, famine, bareness, impotence, drought, epidemics, and war among others. The gods avenge their anger on whoever omits or commits any flaw for which their presence forbids, hence, the cultural system holds to a very high esteem all the precepts of the laws of the gods (Shastri, 2002). The species that were regarded as sacred multiplied because clans associated their survival with a totem animal and never allowed that animal to become extinct.

In almost every traditional African setting or community, each community has what they revere or hold sacred either as the presence of their gods or their goddesses, or there is a very important role such objects played in the course of their existence and history. The belief in chimpanzee as “totem”, that is animal into which human beings could transform is also common in many localities in the forest zones of Nigeria (Ayeni 2003).

In Nnewi, Awka and Mbaise communities in South east zone of Nigeria, python is man’s friend; the killing of python is an abominable act, so it is held sacrosanct. Among the Ngas of Plateau State, Nigeria, it is believed that the spirit of the gods lives in Python and that it gives protection to the people. The Tiv people regard the green snake as a totem.

They believe that the snake assisted them in crossing the River Congo in Central Africa, so they see it as a friend and do not kill it. Among the Ngas and Gumei in Plateau State, Mahogany tree is regarded as sacred, that a lot of sacrifices must be made to remove spells on the people and the entire land when the tradition is tampered with. In Umuaro, the male deer (stag) is a totem because it did something for the community. In the whole of Cross River, there is hardly any community that exists without a sacred grove, evil forest, sacred pond, evil stream, or forbidden forest where some part of the environment is delineated for the worship of the gods (Eneji *et al.*, 2009). In Bekwarra, (Gakem) of Cross River State, the road runner (anyiribom) is not killed. Ancient legend has it that during war, the bird follows the trail of Gakem people and wipes their footprint so that the enemies may be prevented from tracing their direction and attacking them.

### **Evil forest and conservation of natural resources**

Local people have developed a variety of consistent resource conservation and management strategies in tropical Africa, Asia, and South America in the past (Appiah-Opoku, 2007). Traditional African societies also observed environmental ethics that help in regulating their interactions with the natural environment (Shastri, 2002). For instance, it is observed that African traditional religion (ATR) is a religion with environmental characteristics, features and symbolism; but the proponents and propagators of Christianity saw the ATR's belief systems, worship and practices as rather inimical to the growth, unity, peace and cohesion of our communities, whereas, this is exactly what the ATR stands for in every society or community (Appiah-Opoku, 2007). The introduction of western religion and formal education somehow eroded the rich cultural values and religious diversities of Africans and also changed their belief and worship systems (Smith & Wishnie, 2000).

Furthermore, the creation of forest reserves and the Cross River National Park to protect forest and forestland for future generations has also removed control from traditional authorities leaving less forests land for the ever-growing population. This is also noticed on the pressure put on natural resources by the growing population in terms of housing human population, clothing and feeding them and providing an aesthetic environment for the populace. The forest is particularly very important to African; this is so in terms of both tangible and non-tangible benefits derived there from. These benefits include timber, rattan, cane wood, resin, gum, mat, rope and other non-timber forest products like afang, bush mango, bitter kola, hot leaf, otasi, (afro mumu), mushroom, spices among others. Non-tangible benefits include environmental services like local climate modification, carbon sink, windbreakers, nutrient recycling, and watershed protection among others. Outside the above benefits, forest products and wild animals also provide valuable sources of income, household tools and some therapeutic medicine (Falconer, 1992; Wilson, 1998). If this is the case, why then do people continue to destroy forests and overexploit forest resources that are so vital to their own survival and still remain antagonistic to a system that seeks to conserve those resources? Based on the services provided by the forest for both human and other living things, it has long been recognized that the abundance and existence of these forest resources are under serious threats from human activities.

Many management techniques have already been adopted to conserve and manage these forests, but the results so far seem to be at best a mirage. Traditional African Religion (ATR) has latently been discovered to be one of such efforts geared towards the preservation of both forest and other natural resources. ATR has inherent environmental resource conservation and management principles, why is this religion not promoted by conservation experts for the conservation and management of these resources? Which specifically are those aspects of the religion that can be adopted or promoted for the management and conservation of our natural resources? It is on this premise that the authors x-rayed the role of traditional African religion in the conservation and management of forest and other natural resources in Cross River State, Nigeria.

The word *religion* is derived from a Latin word *religio*, which means both earnest observance of ritual obligations and an inward spirit of reverence (Paden, 2009). In modern usage, *religion* has an ambiguous meaning that reflects the enormous variety of ways the term can be interpreted. At one extreme, many committed believers recognize only their own tradition as a religion, understanding expressions such as *worship* and *prayer* to refer exclusively to the practices of their tradition (Paden, 2009). By defining religion as a sacred engagement with what is taken to be a spiritual reality, religion is not an object with a single, fixed meaning, or even a zone with clear boundaries. It is an aspect of human experience that may intersect, incorporate, or transcend other aspects of life and society. Such a definition avoids the drawbacks of limiting the investigation of religion to Western or biblical categories such as monotheism (belief in one god only) or to church structure, which are not universal. In Buddhism, gods are not as central as the idea of a *Buddha* (fully enlightened human being). In many traditional cultures the idea of a sacred cosmic order is the most prominent religious belief. Because of this variety, some scholars prefer to use a general term such as the sacred to designate the common foundation of religious life.

In all cultures, human beings make a practice of interacting with what is taken to be spiritual powers. These powers may be in the form of gods, spirits, ancestors, or any kind of sacred reality with which humans believe themselves to be connected. Sometimes a spiritual power is understood broadly as an all-embracing reality, and sometimes it is approached through its manifestation in special symbols. It may be regarded as external to the self, internal, or both. People interact with such a presence in a sacred manner—that is, with reverence and care. *Religion* is the term most commonly used to designate this complex and diverse realm of human experience (Paden, 2009). Just as Africans have grown over the ages, so also is the Africa Traditional Religion. ATR began as a set of code of conducts and ethics guiding the activities of man in his society. In an attempt to enforce the precepts of this new ethics and code of conduct, the community members charged with the enforcement of these rules, code and ethical behavior formed themselves into an association, where their rules, code of conduct and membership was widely jealous and accepted. As time progresses, communicating with the ancestors to guide human existence became expedient, so a chief priest is always elected by a serving priest who teaches the convert the way of the gods and also how to make incantations and appease the gods, so this new apprentice takes over the duty of divination in the event that the chief priest is no more or he is seriously ill. This trend progressed to a cult or a sacred group since one person

may not force the entire community to obey all rules, so membership was now open to the public. Recruiting of members became open. Those who became committed to this new order form themselves and began making sacrifices to these gods they hold sacred; this was how the African Traditional religion came about. Traditional African religion (ATR) as done in most part of African communities is environmentally friendly and sustainable, thus contributing so much to natural resources sustainability and conservation.

In Africa and indeed Nigeria, the traditional religion holds the strength on the ascription of psychic/supernatural powers to objects called gods and goddesses. The major tenet of African traditional religion and belief system lies in the belief that the abode of the gods and goddesses can be within the community. The community gods may decide to have their abodes on rock, streams, pond, tress, land or anywhere they so desire. The gods choose their followers through the rites of initiation with a core messenger who is the mouthpiece of the gods living among human beings. The gods or goddess communicate their will to the people through the juju priest or chief priest. This belief system states that the gods protect the community members from harm, famine, bareness, impotence, drought, epidemics, and war among others. The gods avenge their anger on whoever omits or commits any flaw for which their presence forbids, hence, the cultural system holds all the precepts of the laws of the gods to a very high esteem (International Institute for Environment and Development, 2002). Western religious conversion, cultural orientation and acculturation have impacted very negatively on society in the course of man's existence. Because the Christianity has consistently seen nothing good in ATR, hence it has forced its adherents to see nothing good in ATR as such the belief system, practice, worship, reverence and ascription of psychic powers to the gods have been completely rendered impotent by the teachings of the Christian religion.

From the very first page of The Bible, Genesis 1: 26, in the story of creation God gave man an order, so fiat an authority to rule over the whole world. God gave man the authority to subdue the earth, all the creatures of earth and all it resources. Wilson (2008) observed that by implication this word dominion has both domination and stewardship apparatus. From the domination perspective, humans are said to have domination over the natural environment in ways that empowers us to treat nature the way it pleases us. This perspective sees natural environment as having been merely instrumental or having extrinsic value and provides justification for humanity's exploitation of natural resources. This is premised on the fact that it is our right as superior creatures, heir apparent and controlling God's creation on earth. This is the beginning of our environmental woes and conflict (McCammon, 2013). In most parts of Africa, things like sacred groves found in Ghana and other West African countries are very practical systems of indigenous strategies for the management and conservation of our natural environment within the rural communities. In his research on traditional and indigenous methods of conserving biodiversity, Environmental Protection Council, (1976) identified four indigenous methods for conserving biodiversity in Ghana and other West African sub region,(Nigeria inclusive), these methods include: religious traditions: temple forests, monastery forests, sanctified and deified trees, traditional tribal traditions: sacred forests, sacred groves and sacred trees, royal traditions: royal hunting preserves, elephant forests, royal gardens etc,

livelihood traditions: forests and groves serving as cultural and social space and source of livelihood products and services (Badola, 2000).

Confirming the position of the Holy Qur'an on conservation, some key chapters and verses supports the conservation of natural resources: Fitrah, Mizan and Tauhid, Khalifah, these portions identified specifically the role of man in resources conservation. In Sumatra, some management policies support the introduction of religious doctrines into land management policies, these areas are Al-Mawat, land regeneration plan, Harim for water resource protection, *Himoar* for sustainable resources management (Henshey, 2011). For Africans there is no clear separation between what is secular and what is sacred. Everything and every act are looked upon in a religious and customary perspective. Africans view themselves as part of the environment (Mkenda, 2010).

Man is conceivable only in this cosmic interweavement. This web of relationship is what makes Africans view the earth as their mother and themselves as her children. Little wonder, Africans refer to their land as mother earth. Despite the fact that humanity, nature and the gods are distinct concepts, they belong to some ontological categories that are interrelated and interdependent. Therefore plants, animals, rock, water and other non-living things are part of nature, which is the product of creation deserving to be respected as much as human beings who are also part of nature. This is what makes Africans regard themselves as being in close relationship with the entire cosmos (Taylor, 2002). This position of man being a constituent part of the environment and God's creation, it is expedient that man must protect the interest of other part of God's creations, this was confirmed by Mkenda (2010) and Snoo and Bertels (2001).

Henshey (2011) posited that in traditional African societies like Nigeria, Ghana, and many others, many people believed that rocks, trees streams, ponds and forests were the manifestation of the power of the Supreme Being. He saw these things as ideal places to meet their supreme being or the gods. Cox (1995) holds that in traditional African societies there are many shrines, and these shrines were associated with big trees such as mimosop, fig trees and baobabs, iroko, mahogany among others. This forced Deb, (1997) to conclude that these trees together with the vegetation around were preserved as sacred places for worship. Africans did not just attach much importance to trees and herbs just for spiritual purposes, but also because trees, herbs and plants in general were useful in enhancing human life. Tree leaves, bark, roots and grasses provided herbal medicines to human beings and to wild and domestic animals; trees were also seen as being symbols of god's presence among people.

Thompson and Homewood (2002) also found out that rocks, ponds, lands, streams and other part of the environment were also the abodes of the gods, so shrines, sanctuaries, temples and sacred groves were all meant for the worship, consultation and appeasements of the gods. This was also supported by the findings of Eneji et al. (2009), Paden (2009), Appiah-Opoku (2007) and Kimmerer (2002). In almost every traditional African setting or community, each community has what they revere or hold sacred either as the presence of their gods or their goddesses, or there is a very important symbolic reason attached to such objects in the course of their existence. In almost every community in Cross River, there is hardly any community that exists without a sacred groove, evil forest, sacred pond, evil

stream, or forbidden forest. Where some part of the environment is delineated for the worship of the gods (Eneji et al, 2009).

In Bekwarra, (Gakem) of Cross River state, the road runner (anyiribom) is not killed. Ancient legendry has it that during war, the bird follows the trail of Gakem people and wipes their footprint so that the enemies may be prevented from tracing their direction and attacking them. In Etung local government the god of “*ogbogoro*”; is believed to be the god of fruitfulness and the gift of children. When there is poor harvest in Ejaghamland, (Etung and Akamkpa) the people make sacrifices to this god. When a woman after marriage cannot have children, the god of *ogbogoro* is appeased with a sacrifice, thereby making request for children from such gods. The Ogolobipond located in Adihe village, Otukpuru ward, Bekwarra, is a mysterious pond harvested by the entire Bekwarra kingdom once every seven years. Mudfish is the only species of fish harvested and shared together by everybody present; any other species of fish caught during this day is owned by whoever catches it during the harvesting period. It is a taboo for anybody to go fishing in the pond on his own; it is completely forbidden and very detrimental to any trespasser. So, entrance into the pond alone is frightening. Within the pond in question there is an iroko tree and a mahogany tree, these trees are well over seventy years. There is also a cobra well over thirty years and more than 3 meters long. These are believed to be mysterious (Eneji et al., 2009a; Eneji, et al., 2009b; International Institute for Environment and Development, 1992).

In Beten also in Bekwarra, there is another rock called ‘Uka Ochiifu’ the rock here is believed to be the tomb of those killed during the first Bekwarra intertribal war with the Tivs of Benue state. This rock also is believed to be the place where the Nigerian and Biafran soldiers killed during the civil war were buried; nobody does anything within the rock zone. In Bewo another community in Bekwarra, there is a forest and a stream where there is human handprint. Ancestral legend has it that when Odama Ashide had a problem with his brother, he migrated away from Obanliku and as they got to this small stream in Bekwarra, Odama being full of age had to put his hands on the rock by the shore of the stream to enable him cross the stream, his hand remained imprinted there till today. In this forest and the stream, fishing and other activities are not allowed within this place. In Etung, there is a sacred pond called Salt Lake (Ejagham Lake). Harvesting of fish here is strictly prohibited, but when fish leaves this lake to another stream, harvesting can be done there in the stream. There is also the traditional Ekpe cult in most Ejagham and Efik communities, while in Obudu the Ekwong traditional institutions guide the conduct of men in the community.

There is an evil forest at Iruan and Arangha all in Boki, these evil forests are where bad people in the community are sent to go and die. If you are a witch or a wizard and have caused havoc in the community, or one dies in an accident such as auto crash or from a tree or palm tree, such corpse is taken to this forest. Some of these evil forests are the burial ground for the royals of the community. In Biase, there is also a burial ground for slaves, nobody wants to be associated with slavery, so the area remains a very thick forest since it is believed that the last slave buried there was before the stopping of slave trade in Nigeria. In Alifokpain Yache, in Yala local government area, there is also a sacred grove where the

remains of the ancestral fathers of the Alifokpa people were buried hundreds of years ago, no farming, felling of trees or harvesting of vegetables is done here. There is also a pond in Yache in Yala LGA, which nobody goes near there, here crocodile, iguana and some wild sea animals are found here. If anybody strays to this pond, the person may be eaten by the wild beast, but believes that the person would be killed by the spirit. There are forests where children born like animals are thrown. This forest is also forbidden from entrance except on such occasions. In Bateriko, some part of the forest is strictly reserve as the home of the gods, here no entrance is allowed into this forest, even when crops are cultivated close to the area, it does not give any good yield (Oham, 2012).

### **Methodology**

The survey research design is adopted as the most suitable design for the study. This design was considered appropriate for the study because it is economical in the study of large and small population. Above all, this design investigate situation as it exists presently in the study area. The population of this study consists of all community- members in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River, Nigeria. The study area is Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The area is situated in South-South geo-political Zone of Nigeria. The area is bound to the North by Biase local government area, South by Odukpani local government area, in the east it is bound by Akwa Ibom State, and in the west by the Republic of Cameroon respectively. Located in the tropical rain-forest zone, the area is blessed with abundance of natural resources such as forest beach, limestone, and rich cultural diversity that account for why the state is the leading role player in tourism and hospitality business.

The population of the study consists of all the inhabitants of the study area. According to National Population Census (2006), the population of Akamkpa local government area is 151,125 people living in the area. The actual population for the study comprised of farmers, timber dealers, and hunters. It is put at 85,875 people. The purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting six autonomous communities which include Awi, Iwuru 2, Netim, Iko Ekperi, Iko Esai, and Ayaebam communities that play significant role in the use of indigenous traditional practices in the conservation of environmental resources in the area.

To select the respondents, the researcher adopted a stratified random sampling technique to draw the respondents from each study centre. The use of percentage by the researchers is to avoid the tendency of being biased in the selection of respondents. The sample for the study comprised of four hundred (400) respondents from five autonomous communities in the study area. They comprised both male and female community-members resident in the study area.

The questionnaire was the only instrument used to obtain data for the study. It was tagged: Influence of African Traditional Religion and Practice on Sustainable Conservation of Natural Resources Questionnaire (IARPSCNRQ). This instrument was constructed primarily for data collection. It was designed by the researchers and validated by two experts in test, measurement and evaluation. Some items were removed while others were modified and used for the study. The instrument was constructed using a four-point Likert

type scale. The instrument measured the sub-variables of the independent and dependent variable respectively. To test the hypotheses, Pearson product moment correlation statistical analysis technique was used.

**Results**

**Hypothesis one:** There is no significant relationship between totemism practice and sustainable conservation of natural resources. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between totemism practice and conservation sustainable of natural resources  
N=400

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Totemism practice	1490	5715		
			5685	0.771
Conservation of natural resources	1475	5810		

Significant at 0.05, df = 398, critical r=0.113

Data presented in Table 1 shows that hypothesis one which was stated in a null form was rejected. The alternate hypothesis was accepted. The result obtained revealed that, the calculated r-value of 0.771 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.113 when tested at 0.05 level of significance with 398 degree of freedom. This implies that, there is a significant relationship existing between totemism practice as a form of African religious practice and sustainable conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis two

Evil forest practice does not significantly relate with sustainable conservation of natural resources. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between evil forest practice and sustainable conservation of natural resources  
N=400

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum XY$	r-cal
	$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$		
Evil forest practice	1494	5722		
			5691	0.793
Conservation of natural resources	1475	5810		

Significant at 0.05, df = 398, critical r=0.113

Data presented above in table 2 shows that the null hypothesis is rejected, while the alternate hypothesis is accepted. The result obtained from analysis of data revealed that, the calculated r-value of 0.793 is higher than the critical r-value of 0.113 when tested at 0.05 level of significance with 398 degree of freedom. This implies that, there is a significant relationship between evil forest practice and sustainable conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Discussion of findings**

Hypotheses 1 was rejected while the alternate was accepted. Result from data analysis revealed that, the calculated r- value of 0.771 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.113 when tested at 0.05 level of significance with 398 degree of freedom. This implies that, there is a significant relationship between totemism and sustainable conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. This finding is in agreement with the findings of Ayeni (2003) who observed that, in almost every traditional African setting or community, each community has what they revere or hold sacred either as the presence of their gods or their goddesses, or there is a very important role such objects played in the course of their existence and history. The belief in chimpanzee as “totem”, that is animal into which human beings could transform is also common in many localities in the forest zones of Nigeria.

In Nnewi, Awka and Mbaise communities in South east zone of Nigeria, python is man’s friend; the killing of python is an abominable act, so it is held sacrosanct. Among the Ngas of Plateau State, Nigeria, it is believed that the spirit of the gods lives in Python and that it gives protection to the people. The Tiv people regard the green snake as a totem. They believe that the snake assisted them in crossing the River Congo in Central Africa, so they see it as a friend and do not kill it. Among the Ngas and Gumei in Plateau State, Mahogany tree is regarded as sacred, that a lot of sacrifices must be made to remove spell on the people and the entire land when the tradition is tampered with. In Umuaro, the male deer (stag) is a totem because it did something for the community. In the whole of Cross River, there is hardly any community that exists without a sacred grove, evil forest, sacred pond, evil stream, or forbidden forest where some part of the environment is delineated for the worship of the gods (Enejiet *al.*, 2009). In Bekwarra, (Gakem) of Cross River State, the road runner (anyiribom) is not killed. Ancient legendry has it that during war, the bird follows the trail of Gakem people and wipes their footprint so that the enemies may be prevented from tracing their direction and attacking them.

Hypothesis 2 was rejected and the alternate was retained. Result revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.793 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.113 when tested at 0.05 level of significance with 398 degree of freedom. This implies that, there is a significant relationship between evil forest practice and sustainable conservation of natural resources in Akamkpa Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. This investigation is in line with the findings reported by Henshey (2011) who posited that in traditional African societies like Nigeria, Ghana, and many others, many people believed that rocks, trees streams, ponds and forests were the manifestation of the power of the Supreme Being. He

saw these things as ideal places to meet their supreme being or the gods. Cox (1995) holds that in traditional African societies there are many shrines, and these shrines were associated with big trees such as mimosop, fig trees and baobabs, iroko, mahogany among others. This forced Deb, (1997) to conclude that these trees together with the vegetation around were preserved as sacred places for worship. Africans did not just attach much importance to trees and herbs just for spiritual purposes, but also because trees, herbs and plants in general were useful in enhancing human life. Tree leaves, bark, roots and grasses provided herbal medicines to human beings and to wild and domestic animals; trees were also seen as being symbols of god's presence among people.

Thompson and Homewood (2002) also found out that rocks, ponds, lands, streams and other part of the environment were also the abodes of the gods, so shrines, sanctuaries, temples and sacred groves were all meant for the worship, consultation and appeasements of the gods. This was also supported by the findings of Eneji et al. (2009), Paden (2009), Appiah-Opoku (2007) and Kimmerer (2002). In almost every traditional African setting or community, each community has what they revere or hold sacred either as the presence of their gods or their goddesses, or there is a very important symbolic reason attached to such objects in the course of their existence. In almost every community in Cross River, there is hardly any community that exists without a sacred grove, evil forest, sacred pond, evil stream, or forbidden forest. Where some part of the environment is delineated for the worship of the gods (Eneji et al, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of the findings, it is concluded as follows: there is a significant relationship between totemism practice, evil forest practice and sustainable conservation of natural resources.

### **Recommendations**

The researchers based on the result of the investigation have made the following recommendations

1. Environmental conservation issues should form an integral part of the Biblical 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. Adequate attention should be given to the practice of certain cultural norms such as evil forests, sacred river as well as the observation of traditional taboos, which would promote effective conservation of natural resources in the study area and beyond.

## References

- Abiodun, H. E. (2009). Environmental injustice: Human health and the environmental inequalities. *Journal of Public Health*, (3), 62-71.
- Adamu, A. I. (2011). Human values and their role in the development of forestry policy in Nigeria. Lagos: University press.
- Anijah-obi, F. N. (2002). *Fundamentals of Environmental Education and Management*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press.
- Appiah, Opoku, K. (2007). Totemism in African Societies: The good, the bad and the ugly. *Journal of Social Work*, 8 (11), 27-37.
- Ayeni, H. I. (2003). The relations among threatened species: Their protection, and taboos. *Conservation Ecology*, 1 (1) 6-14.
- Badola, J. S. (2000). Human activities and environmental health hazard. *Journal of Sociology*, 15 (1), 15-23.
- Cox, A. (1995). Traditional beliefs and conservation of natural resources: Evidences from selected communities in Zambia and Kenya. *International Journal of Biodiversity and Conservation*, 12 (6), 76-86.
- Deb, H. D. (1997). Environmental negligence: towards a theory of environmental injustice. *Journal of Behavioural Science*, 43 (2), 581-603.
- Eneji, E. R., Benson, H. I. & Uveri, A. B. (2009). Traditional system of conserving biodiversity for eco-tourism in Cross River State. *Journal of Development Economy* 23 (3) 107-113.
- Eneji, E. R., Mbakwe, S. M. & Omari, R. H. (2012). Community management of natural resources in Africa: Impacts, experiences and future directions. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 8 (9), 210-226.
- Environmental Protection Council (1976). Human-nature interactions and biological attractions in disaster resilience. Oxford: Oxford University press.
- Falconer, M. (1992). *Environment: Perspective and Prospects*. Ghana: University Press.
- Fred, S. H. (2006). The contribution of the physical environment to sense of place. *International Journal of Environment, Science and Technology*, (2), 8-19.
- Henshey, G. A. (2011). *Totemism and Taboo*. New York: George Routledge and sons.
- Ibanga, E. U. (2008). Study of environmental perception, attitudes and values. Ibadan: University press.
- Ikpeme, E. E. (2007). *Environmental health: lecture monograph* University of Calabar. Unpublished.
- International Institute for Environment and Development (2002). *Nature without nurture: Man's interaction with nature and its impact*. Oxford: University Press.
- Kimmerer, P. (2002). *Environmental science: In concept and practice*. London: University press.
- Mbang, J. I. (2010). *Health, human development and the community ecosystem: concept and practice*. Lagos: Haruna Publishing Ltd.
- McCammon, A. (2003). Ecological Management in Sub-Sahara Africa. *Journal of Resources Management*, 28 (3), 82-96.
- Mkenda, E. A. (2010). *The Secret of the Totem*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Murombedzi, H. M. (2003). *The Environment in its Natural State. Hand book for Environmental Managers*. Zimbabwe: Ipsam Publisher Ltd.
- Oham, A. J. (2012). The importance of evil forest in conserving biodiversity. *Journal of Urban Planning/Survey*, 10 (1) 36-48.
- Paden, T. M. (2009). Communities, wildlife and the 'new conservation' in Africa. *Journal of International Development*, 11 (3), 285-293.
- Shastri, P. L. (2002). *Environmental Management and Resource Utilization in West African Societies*. Rwanda: University Press.
- Smith, C. & Wishnie, M. P. (2000). Forest resource management south African societies. *Journal of Nature and Forest Management*, 8 (1), 41-47.
- Snoo, B. A. & Bertels, C. (2001). The role of Islam in promoting sustainable conservation of resources. *Journal of Environmental Science*, 40 (3), 38-52.
- Taylor, R. H. (2003). *Population increase and environmental challenges in developed nations*. Ghana. University press.
- Thompson, W. A. & Homewood, D. (2002). Indigenous beliefs and practices in ecosystem conservation: Response of the church. *Scriptura*, 107 (3), 145-155.
- Wilson, H. E. (1998). *Wildlife conservation in West Africa. Handbook for resource managers*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Worldwide Fund for Nature (2005). Preserving nature for its benefits and aesthetics. *Journal of Economic Geography*, 12, (1), 321-325.
- .