

**TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES ON SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT, A CASE STUDY OF YAKURR LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA, WEST AFRICA**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess traditional environmental practices on sustainable development of resources protection conservation and preservation in Yakurr local government area of cross river state, Nigeria, West Africa. In order to effectively carry out the study, three research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Questionnaire was administered to respondents and the data obtained were statistically analyzed to test the variable to ascertain their significance. Two hundred Yakurr residents were selected through purposive, stratified and simple random sampling from four communities, fifty people from one community were chosen from each zone strata into south, east, north and west for the sampling, and the heterogeneous groups made up of different group of occupation, religion, gender and educational status using environmental resources in the study area. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was used to analyze the data. The result reveals that the people of Yakurr Local Government Area believe and practice various friendly environmental behavior and attitude that protect, conserve and preserve sacred forests and streams water resources for the present generation to come and meet them. On the strength of these results, recommendations among others were made that it is necessary for environmental education to be taught right from the primary level of education.

Keywords: Traditional Environmental Practices, Sustainable Development, Sacred Bushes, Sacred Streams.

Introduction

Religious belief, spiritual practices and cultural values in Nigerian societies encourage environmental protection, preservation and conservation. This is because these practices and values advocates for the need to maintain harmony with the environment, the

harmony between man and the supernatural, between the living and the ancestors and descendants, between members of the community, man and natural objects such as trees, forest, streams, ponds, rock and hills where the spirit of ancestors and gods are believed to reside awaiting rituals and sacrifices (Awake magazine, 2008).

Through the ages, man has depended on the environment for his livelihood. This prolonged dependence brought about rapid changes in the earth's environment culminating in noticeable changes in the earth support system of air, land, water and other resources. These changes have engaged man's interest for long time but the more man learns about the environment, the more concern he becomes for the future. The over use of the earth's resources underscore the fact that the earth is under severe stress. The need to arrest this trend and secure the future gave birth to sustainable development which has been of significant global concern especially from the second half of the twentieth century. Sustainable development came as unifying approach of concern over the environment, economic development and the quality of life. It was conceptualized in the world conservation strategy (International Union For The Conservation Of Nature (IUCN), 1980).

The concept of sustainable development was undoubtedly embedded in the environmentally friendly traditional practices of the Yakurr people even before the concept of sustainable development was fully conceptualized and came to a limelight as a world view. Whereas the people's socio-economic development takes root on the exploitation of the natural resources in their environment, their eco-friendly beliefs and practices help to plough back and conserve the resources for future use. This is in tune with the concept of sustainable development which is a development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generation (Iwara, 2010).

Yakurr traditional environmental practices even before the emergence of the concept of sustainable development was sustainable in worldview. Eteng (2009) alleged that the pre-Christian belief system of preserving and conserving the environmental resources as a world view already existed in traditional Yakurr beliefs, values, cultures and tradition even before the arrival of Christian missionaries into Nigeria. Eteng (2009) further reinstated that the Yakurr as traditionally united people believes in Supreme Being (Obasewoden) with a pantheon of divinities for effective governance and surveillance of a departmentalized world. The "Obok Upoh" divinity located between Ekori and Ugep villages, "Ekew" between Ekori and Assiga, "Iminakoli" between Ekori and Nko, "Mgbeke" between Ekori and Mkpani are the most venerated of the divinities which exist up till today.

These divinities attain to people with a cashier of grievances, perform various functions ranging from fertility to security and custody of community ethics and instil the spiritual values of environmental resources protection on the people. Obongha (2005) observed that among the traditional beliefs of the Yakurr people are taboos against the destruction or desecration of certain sacred bushes, streams, objects, places, animals and other environmental facilities. These laws that are in form of oral transmission from generation to generation have survived over the centuries. These taboos also form the custom and culture of Yakurr people up till date.

Ekeng (2007) noted that the ancestors make sure that they abide by taboos to the extent that they handed it down to others unadulterated. What existed several centuries ago, for instance, stem down undue wild adventurism, they admonish that, "if you kill a spider, god will fall down", one imagines the enormity of the offence and he/she have to protect a spider for sustainable existence. Moreover, aphorism and mythical fables, using

mythical figures like the “Isusuen” or the tortoise stories and proverbs serve as environmental protection, preservation and conservation purposes.

In a study carried in Ugep, Yakurr Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria by Obongha (2005), it was discovered that nature is held in great awe, so sacred places like bushes, streams, objects, animals and creations were not to be tempered with. An abuse constitutes sacrilege and is punishable in diverse ways. For instance, kill and eat the *kesekpang* fish in Ekori and get your nose chopped off by the spirits and gods, pass faeces improperly in the kotati forest in Ekori, Iminakoli between Ekori and Nko, and Illumoh between Ekori and Ugep and have the faeces rubbed all over you by the spirits or gods.

Eteng (2009) in another study observed that, psychic forces and spiritual powers are available in plants, animals and inanimate objects, thus bushes, trees, stones, animals of various types, waters, air, land are treated with respect. The Obokupoh Nkankang and illumoh forest between Ekori and Ugep are believed to hide people who desecrate them by throwing them into darkness. At idomi, kejidom, the gods who controls the forests stretch of Yaduma does not permit the indiscriminate cutting of even plant leaves and the killing animals within this territory. Even personal valuables dropping from passersby are said to be immediately inhabited and so must not be picked, so the people of Yakurr holds nature with respect and sacred.

The research area lies in the central part of Cross River State of Nigeria between Biase, Abi and Obubra Local Government Area with headquarter in Ugep. The study area is colonized by tropical forest with several species of plant growth. The people speak and understand a common language of Lokeh, they live in close units or clans with village and clan heads and linked together by internal trade, geographical influences of land, forest and waters. The indigenous citizens are predominantly farmers, hunters, traders and civil/public servants.

Human societies whether pre-industrial or industrial, non-literate or literate, traditional or modern hold certain attitudes and values towards the environment in which they live; since human socio-economic growth is firmly anchored on natural resources in our environment, whatever problem that affect these resources are bound to bounce back on the people, disrupt living standard and even bring salvation, suffering and death.

The societies from of old do feel the impact of environmental problems and finding solutions to these problems of the environment usually calls for collective effort through knowledge, attitudes, ethics and skills acquisition. All over the world, there have been cry and call for sustainable development as a way of life for all people. This is because various modern industrial, agricultural, commercial, and urban transportation activities of man have negative impact on the environment. To be specific, these activities lead to environmental degradation. (Enang, 2010).

Etuk (2003) and Attah (2003) affirmed that environmentalists often emphasize the eroding of man’s environment by highlighting aspects of the multi-faceted features responsible for the problem, including deforestation, erosion, flooding, global warming, waste management etc. from western standpoint. These numerous features all work against these common essential trust “food security and biodiversity conservation” which traditional practices preserved for humanity. To sustain the environment up to the arrival of western civilization, traditional practices were carried out. Many of these practices had influences on religious belief, norms, ethics, sacred bushes, sacred streams, livestock domestication and bush fallowing farming practices, among others.

Scientific research has expressed concern on the negative impact of human activities on the environment. Statistically, it is feared that 50% of the world’s flora and

fauna are on the path of extinction within a hundred years. That tropical deforestation may result in the loss of half or more of the existing species on earth during the next 75 years, while in Nigeria the World Commission for Environment and Development WCED (2012) estimated that 43% of the forest land in Nigeria has been lost in 12 years to human environmental practices. It is on this basis that the study seeks to investigate on traditional environmental practices on sustainable development in Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, West Africa.

Methodology

The research design used in this study was ex-post facto and also employing the survey method for data collection. Survey method was directed towards determining the nature of the situation as it exists at the time of investigation. Ex-post facto design was used because the issue of study has already existed so there was need to identify those traditional environmental practices that have resulted to sustainable development of protection, preservation and conservation of natural resources. The design takes a general look at the variables through the use of questionnaire that was administered to respondents carrying out various religious belief, myth practices and folklores, to see how they relate to sustainable development.

The research uses survey or field method because the study deals with representative samples drawn from a large population of the people living in Yakurr Local Government Area and using environmental resources for various purposes. Purposive and stratified random sampling was employed to get the units while simple random sampling techniques was used in selecting the respondents or subjects from each units in order to maintain fair representation. Fifty respondents were selected from each of the four selected communities making a sample size of two hundred.

The instrument was validated to ensure that items in the questionnaire represent the subject of interest and are accurate. The test-retest method of the reliability was used in ensuring reliability of the instrument. The researcher administered thirty (30) questionnaires to thirty residents to those not used in the pilot study. The thirty instruments were administered at one-week interval. That is, in the first week, the researcher administered the first set of thirty questionnaires (test-retest method). Result obtained from the first and second test were analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation co-efficient to establish the relationship between the two results. The result was 0.86 (high relationship).

Result

The result of data analysis carried out on data collection on demographic information was done using frequencies and percentages while the hypothesis was tested using Pearson product moment correlation inferential statistical test, tested at .05 level of significance.

Table 1: Frequency and percentages of study sample on demographic variable.

variable	group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Community	Ugep	50	25
	Idomi	50	25
	Nko	50	25
	Nkpani	50	25
	Total	200	100
Gender	Male	80	40
	Female	120	60
	Total	200	100
Occupation	Farming	52	26
	Trading	60	30
	Hunting	70	35
	Civil/public servant	18	9
	Total	200	100
Religion	Christianity	82	41
	Traditional	65	32.1
	Islam	35	15.2
	Others	18	9
	Total	200	100
Educational background	No schooling at all	38	19
	FSLC	52	26
	WASC/SSCE	72	36
	OND and above	38	19
	Total	200	100

Source: Field work: 2019.

Table 1: shows the description of the sample in terms of demographic variables. It shows that four communities and 50 people from each community making 25% resulting to a sample size of 200 were used. 80 (40%) were male while 120 (60%) were female. 52 (26%) were farmers, 60 (30%) were traders, 70 (35%) were hunters and 18 (9%) of the respondents were civil/public servants.

For religion, the analysis indicated that 82 (41%) were Christians, 65 (32.1%) were traditional worshippers, 35 (15.2%) were Moslems and 18 (9%) were other worshippers. Finally, for educational status, 38 (19%) had no schooling, 52 (26%) had first school leaving certificate, 72 (36%) had WAEC/SSCE certificate while 38 (19%) of the respondents had OND certificate and other higher certificates/degrees.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between keeping of sacred bushes and sustainable development.

Table 2: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between keeping of sacred bushes and sustainable development. (n=200)

Variable	$\Sigma\chi$ $\Sigma\gamma$	$\Sigma\chi^2$ $\Sigma\gamma^2$	$\Sigma\chi\gamma$	r
Keeping of sacred bushes (χ)	2974	46874	58620	0.227
Sustainable development (γ)	3882	81234		

Sig. at 0.5 level, crit. $r = 0.138$, $df = 198$

The result of the analysis as presented in Table 2 shows that the calculated r-value of 0.227 is higher than the critical r-value of .138 at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom with this result the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between keeping of sacred bushes and sustainable development was rejected. This then implies that keeping of sacred bushes significantly lead to protection, conservation and preservation of forestland.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between protection of sacred stream practices and sustainable development.

Table 3: Pearson product moment correlation analysis of the relationship between protection of sacred stream practices and sustainable development (n=200).

Variable	$\Sigma\chi$ $\Sigma\gamma$	$\Sigma\chi^2$ $\Sigma\gamma^2$	$\Sigma\chi\gamma$	r
Keeping of sacred bushes (χ)	2437	32053	47915	0.165
Sustainable development (γ)	3882	81234		

Sig. at 0.5 level, crit. $r = 0.138$, $df = 198$

The result of the analysis as presented in Table 3 shows that the calculated r-value of 0.165 is higher than the critical r-value of .138 at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom With this result, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between protection of sacred stream practices and sustainable development was rejection. This then implies that protection of sacred streams significantly lead to stream preservation and conservation.

Discussion

Findings of hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant relationship between keeping of sacred bushes and sustainable development of conservation and preservation of forest land. The finding of this hypothesis is in line with Obongha (2005) who asserts that Yakurr people traditional way of life believes in the spirits gods. Farming and hunting are outlawed in stipulated sacred bushes to protect the shrine inside it. Anybody who attempts to disobey the order by entering the portion of the sacred forest is punished by the gods; either he is infected with sickness which could even extend to his household, death or his farmland not flourished. When the gods are offended for violating the sacred forest, "Leku", that is, a feast in the case of Lekpankom people of Ekori is organized to appease the spirit gods. The belief of the people helps in the existence of forests till this present generation.

Analysis of hypothesis two revealed that there is a significant relationship between protection of sacred stream practices and sustainable development. The finding of this hypothesis is in line with Eteng (2009) who asserts that the Yakurr people protect several streams which they termed to be sacred. They believe that the spirits gods dwells in those streams so the streams and the fishes in them are protected from destruction and pollution. Consequences of punishment accompanied those who destroy these streams.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it is concluded that the people of Yakurr Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria play an important role in environmental resources existence and extinction. The traditional environmental practices of the people contribute positively on environmental resources protection, conservation and preservation. The people belief of protecting sacred bushes, streams, bush fallowing farming practices among others has contributed to resources protection, conservation and preservation to this present time.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were necessary.

1. Introduction of environmental education should be invoked right from the primary school level of education to give the younger generation an environmentally conservation and preservation sense of direction.
2. Legislation should be enacted and enforced against indiscriminate bush burning, hunting, trap setting, fishing etc. in order to protect, preserve and conserve nature resources.
3. Environmental protection organizations like the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should be given financial and technical support by the government to assist them in awareness enlightenment, and promoting information dissemination to the people.

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