

**AFRICAN RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AND
SUSTAINABILITY: EXPLORING THE GODLIGHT CONCEPT**

BY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper is an inter-disciplinary discourse. It explores the intersection of African Religion and environmental management and sustainability, focusing on the concept of GodLight and environmental management and sustainability within the ambit of African context. The paper employs ethnographic, participant observation, analytic and comparative methods. Findings by the research reveals that, the environment is under degradational threats due to man's incessant perilous activities which counteract African Religion and GodLight concept on environmental management and sustainability. African spirituality and GodLight concept are interwoven which foster environmental stewardship and sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity conservation is also at the verge of collapse today due to man's recklessness and impunity towards nature, which remains lamentable today. The research recommends that, there should be integration of African ethology and GodLight concept on global environmental management and sustainability. Stringent and punitive measures should be put in place by relevant authorities for environmental safety, its judicious and continuous use. There should also be a designed road map out policy on education, enlightenment, sensitization on environmental management and sustainability at all times. All hands must be on deck to support community –led conservation and sustainable initiatives for environmental safety, its judicious use and for continuity. Conclusion, this study exhibits a high sense of romance that lies between African spirituality and GodLight concept on environmental management and sustainability which showcase the interwoven relationship of humanity, nature and the divine. Africa Religion and GodLight concept reiterate reflective and responsible stewardship for environmental management and sustainability which should be fostered by all and sundry both now and for posterity sake.

Keywords: African Religion, GodLight concept, environment, Management and sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Man is a mystery unto himself. He has not fully captured nor understood who he is, even though he has knowledge of other things (Anumiri 75). Man is considered also as one of the rationally endowed creatures placed at the centre of the universe by the Supreme Creator. The intricate relationship between African Religion and environment has gained relevant attention

in recent years to GodLight perspectives in environmental management and sustainability. The GodLight in African Religion puts a divine energy or sacred power inherent in the natural world, which is pervasive as central theme in African Religion been the oldest faith on the planet.

Thus, notion of environmental management and sustainability bearing God light concept has significant implications for environmental management and ecological conservation which is today at its worst degradational stage and collapse due to man's incessant reckless impunity. Nature which is the image and manifestation of GodLight, ensures man lives in an interacting community, calls for well managed and well balanced ecology to be maintained. Similarly also, African spirituality encompassed diverse traditional religion which has long recognised the interwoven of human and non human entities as infused into nature by the creator for purposeful maintenance and harmony of all existing realities (Busia 14).

It is a delicate and engraved reality that, African Religion cannot be said to exist without the interplay of the two worlds, physical and non physical which are creative work of the Divine creator Force. In view of this, Gaiya maintains similarly that, there is no sharp dichotomy or opposition between the visible and invisible, sacred and profane (9-10). Since religion permeates all the departments of life of Africans, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the profane, between the spiritual and the material areas of life (1). African Religion with its diverse existing denominations across thousands of African cultures offer a very spectacular perspectives on environmental conservation, sustainability in the perspective of GodLight which is highly interwoven with human human and natural worlds.

The paper will explore the God light concept as an essential element in African spirituality, and its implications for environmental management and sustainability. In another related development, by examining the interconnectivity of African Religion, cosmology, and ecological practices, this paper aims to unveil the significant role of God light in enhancing sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and cultural conservation through critical analysis of indigenous knowledge spiritual values, and cultural contexts. This paper furthermore seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between faith, environment, and African spirituality. It is the crus of this paper to address the knowledge gap by exploring the GodLight concept of potential and environmental management and sustainability which is today been yearn as a global worrisome phenomena seeking quick response for conservation and sustainability of the environment in the position of African Religion.

Elucidation of Key words:

African Religion

African Religion has been defined to mean "an institutionalised system of symbols, beliefs, values, practices which ate focus on the questions of ultimate meaning to different societies" (Gbenda, *African Religion and Christianity...* 2). In another succinct view also, "African Religion has been defined as the indigenous religion of the African people (Sarwuan 1). In view of the above definition, Adasu similarly asserts that "African Religion is one which resulted from the sustaining faith of the forebears of the Africans" (14). In another word, Gaiya further maintains that "African Religion is African institutionalised system of symbols, beliefs, values, practices which are focus on the questions of the Ultimate meaning to different societies" (2). In the words of Kanu, "African Religion is therefore a religion that has been with Africans for many generations and with which they have lived their lives and solved their existential problems from time immemorial. It is a religion that is co-terminus with the African people and their Society" (7).

GodLight:

GodLight refers to the era to the divine energy or light that emanates from a higher power or divine. It also symbolised guidance, wisdom, and enlightenment. In another recap, it is that which connects spirituality to environmental conservation (Meta AI).

Environment:

Environment has been defined to mean the sum total of water, air and also with the human beings, other living organisms and property (Gudaku 73). In another definition, environment is viewed to denotes the unit from which resources needed for human sustenance and development is directed. It implies the components of our ecological system (earth), the interactions therein and the changes that occur (Dukon 3).

Management:

The act of running and controlling a business or similar organisation (Hornby 8th ed. 902).

Sustainability:

This refers to the ability to maintain or support or a process, a system, or activity in definitely without depleting natural resources or harming the environment and human well being (1507).

Human-Nature Interactions in African Contexts: A Critical Investigation

The intercourse between humans and nature in many African cultures is embedded in a philosophical framework that highlights the interconnectedness of human, animal, plant, and natural bodies (Sabastine 36). This perspective is rooted in the concept of Ubuntu, which emphasizes the importance of community and the interconnectedness of all things (Tutu 23). Nature is often viewed as the material universe, which encompasses existing realities living in interdependent relationships (Mbiti 15). It is acknowledged that man is a mystery unto himself, having not fully understood his own existence despite possessing knowledge of other things (Anumiri 75). This paradox is reflected in the African concept of "Ntu," which emphasizes the interconnectedness of human existence and the natural world (Gyekye 67).

The Interconnectedness of Humans and Nature

Humans and nature are intricately connected, with each having a profound impact on the other. The natural world is not just a physical environment, but a spiritual and philosophical one as well (Idowu 45). In many African cultures, nature is believed to possess spiritual energies and powers that can be harnessed for human well-being (Senghor 90). This perspective emphasizes the importance of living in harmony with nature, and recognizing the intricate web of relationships that exists between humans, animals, plants, and natural bodies (Gaiya 4). The relationship between nature and humans is like the double edges of a sword where there is no dicotomy between the duo sides. This implies also to humans and nature. Both humans and nature are products of Supreme Spirts. Both humans and nature are believed to their origins and finality in the Supreme Being (Kanu103 & 119).

Hence, elements of nature like rain, stone, trees, air, shelter, are inseparable with human relationships because they anchor is conjunction between them and their maker (Gbenda, *Religion and Ecology*...55). Man cannot survive without nature vice versa applies to nature because they are both created to share in the power of the Animator-creator. To remove man from nature relationship is for both beings to be without meaning and existence. Both shed light on one another and work in an integral harmonious relationship.

African Religion and Cosmology

The relationship between African Religion and cosmology is complex and multifaceted. Despite the existence of various sects across thousands of African cultures with distinct worldviews, there are approximately 1,000 African tribes, each with its own religious system and language (Gaiya 4). The concepts of African Religion and cosmology are intertwined due to their inseparable impact on each other. African Religion considers humans as the center of God's creation, emphasising the interconnectedness of the spiritual, natural, and human realms (Mbiti 15). This interconnectedness is reflected in the African concept of Ubuntu, which emphasizes the importance of community and the interconnectedness of all things (Tutu 23).

The Interface between African Religion and Cosmology

African Religion often views the cosmos as an interconnected system, where the spiritual, natural, and human realms are intertwined. Ancestors play a significant role in African Religion, serving as intermediaries between the living and the departed (Idowu 45). The environment is considered a sacred, living entity that exists in harmony with natural and spiritual factors. This highlights the importance of maintaining balance and order in the cosmos, which is achieved through the recognition of a sacred force responsible for this orderliness (Gyekye 67). African Religion and cosmology are intricately connected, emphasizing the importance of living in harmony with the natural world and the spiritual realm. The recognition of a sacred force responsible for maintaining balance and order in the cosmos underscores the significance of environmental conservation and sustainability (Senghor 90).

Ecological Worldview of Select Sects of African Religion

African Religion encompasses various sects across different African cultures. This paper examines the ecological worldview of select sects of African Religion below:

The Yoruba Orisha Tradition (West Africa)

The Yoruba Orisha Tradition emphasizes maintaining order between the natural and human worlds, respecting the divine architecture of the universe. The Orishas represent complex concepts, forces, and energies that shape the world and human experiences. The world is viewed as a sacred creation of the Supreme Designer, requiring care to ensure harmonious living among biotic and abiotic factors (Adega 61).

Mumuye Vaa/Vaka (secret symbolic cult) (Taraba, North Eastern Nigeria)

The Mumuye people have a traditional and customary practice called *Vaka/Vaa*, an ancestral symbol representing saints who lived harmonious lives. This symbol serves as a moral and ecological control in society, ensuring environmental conservation is regarded as a religious duty (Bonzena 12). The cult shares in the abundance of the earth's riches, designed and empowered by the Divine Illuminator. It prohibit environmental deegrational activities by meeting punishment on those found wanting especially on reserves.

Dogon Cosmology (Mali)

The Dogon people's cosmology includes a creation myth that fosters balance and harmony in the cosmos. They believe that signs, symbols, and substitutes constitute a vast system of correspondence, where every term is interlocked within specific categories (Anyanwu 256). The concept of Nommo emphasises spiritual energy or force that animates all living things.

Maasai (Kenya) Spirituality and Environmental Harmony

The Maasai people's cosmology, as noted by anthropologist Elli Kopytoff (1971), highlights the importance of living in harmony with nature and respecting the sacred balance of the created world (Kopytoff 123). Their spirituality emphasizes resilient respect for nature, living unharmed with the environment, and believing in a harmonious moral order to conserve and ensure environmental sustainability (Spear 56). This worldview is reflected in their traditional practices, such as their emphasis on conservation and sustainable use of natural resources (Homewood & Rodgers 102).

Zulu (South Africa) Cosmology and Environmental Stewardship

The Zulu worldview, as described by historian Guy, presents a complex cosmological system, including the creation myth and the importance of ancestors as living intermediaries between the people and the Supreme Being (145). They believe in *Unkulunkulu*, the Great, Great, Great Ancestor who created the world, and recognize humans as his caretakers (Berglund 34). This cosmology is reflected in their emphasis on environmental stewardship and caution against ecological degradation, which is believed to have potential repercussions on the community (Hammond-Tooke 212).

Exploring Environmental Management and Sustainability in the Context of African Religion

The primacy of the human being in the African universe is due to the central place the human person occupies within the universe. However, God in the African universe by his attributes is a reality and not an abstract being whom one enters into communion and communication (Kanu 94-

95).Environmental management and sustainability in the context of African Religion are deeply rooted in traditional practices, beliefs, and values that consider the earth as sacred. Sacred groves, forests, streams, rivers, and mountains are treated with utmost respect, as they are considered sacred and hold spiritual observational significance (Anyacho, *Religion in Society...* 271). This reverence for nature is reflected in the concept of "Ukama," which emphasises the interconnectedness of humans, animals, and the natural world (Mbiti 20). Similarly, the Yoruba concept of "Ase" highlights the sacred power of nature and the importance of living in harmony with the environment (Idowu 56).

The Eco-Theology of African indigenous Religion is revered through Nature and manifested in the religious culture. The religion is based Devine revelations of God, and attributes to humans is in God(Gbenda, *Religion and Ecology...* 43). Since the Supreme Being who is all powerful , all knowing and all present, therefore , the responsibility of humans to maintain harmony with the cosmos and create harmonious relationship with beings , fauna, flora, and spirits of the ancestors becomes imperative I order to sustain perfect harmony with the Creator-Animator and other of his agents. Africa's ardent responsibility to nature is deeply engraved in the belief that all things were created by Him for harmonious continuity and as such, there must be a relationship of mutual obligations between all created things (46).

Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Spiritual Values in Environmental Safety

Traditional knowledge refers to traditional knowledge and practices that are highly employed by indigenous communities and that are rooted in their cultural context. Thus, this knowledge comprised of stipulated practices and beliefs related to forestry, fishing, and agriculture. It is interested to note that, spiritual values and other aspects of forces as totally engraved part and parcel of African indigenous knowledge system on ecological preservation. African adopts a holistic and inclusive approach that recognises the relevance of traditional knowledge and spiritual values, individuals and communities can work towards promoting environmental sustainability and ensuring that needs of the present generation are met without compromise of the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. However, the main duty of man in African indigenous knowledge and spiritual values in the environmental management is to maintain a spiritual equilibrium between him and the unseen powers in the environment (Anyacho, *Religion in Society...* 167).

To illustrate great significance of indigenous knowledge and spiritual values in environment management according to anthropological studies, the bush men of the Kalahari desert in Botswana, these gatherers and hunters work only two and half day in a week in order to maintain a satisfying level of livelihood and environmental sustainability. They are able to do

so because of the influence of their indigenous system of mythologies, social institutions and rituals, and because of their rivers, trees, mountains on which their survival depends on. Further more as reiterate, many people from the industrialised world who have ventured into that desert, after working with the most sophisticated technologies for weeks without end, soon grew tired and abandoned it (Przenwoxny 38-39). From the excerpt enraged above, the place of indigenous knowledge and spiritual values in environmental management cannot be over downclaimed in this regards.

African Religion and Environmental Management and Sustainability: Exploring the Godlight Concept

It is evident that, un-utilised nature in African forest, mountains, rivers, animals, amongst others are usually associated with certain powerful or harmful spirits. Either nature concerned is believed to be inspirited by these powerful spirits as the case of earth, animals, a river, forest, rock or it is believed that powerful spirits have made it their homes in the case of forest, mountains, rivers. It is not uncommon in Africa, to find people refusing to eat from particular river because that river is believed to be a god and the fish in it, it's children. However, as reiterated, the earth and all it contains possessed souls which give them their powers (Anyacho, *Religion in Society*...167).

Hence, African Religion and environmental management and sustainability in the GodLight concept is seen as source of guidance, healing, and transformation that can be used to promote environmental sustainability. Such view was supported by Asante when he buttressed that "in the heart of Africa's view of the world is a religious gem, awaiting potency of belief in pan-vitalism, whose critical theological enhancement could be attributed towards the solution of environmental degradation bearing thr in erasable engraved GodLight concept (290-292). Hence, sacred bodily beings in the environment for instance, the sacred tar waa (rock of fire) located in Dong 'A' of Lamma District of Zing Local Government Area, Taraba State is preserved from man degradational activities like bush burning, mining, and hunting for the safety of biotic and abiotic factors, which are inter-related as kin to all the bodily and spiritual beings. Equally also, the shin borr (herbal protectors) are gifts of nature to man, which are used in the preservation of the environment against ecological degrades and invaders. Thus, there is strong affiliation between the people and nature. God light concept bears a many mental impact in African Religion when it comes to environmental management and sustainability.

Thus, strong relation between the sacred and the people bear testimony to the engraved GodLight concept in African indigenous preservation and sustainability, where there a strong

relation between the sacred and the profane, and it is a religious duty engraved in the teaching of African Religion, divine order and care of the earth which men religiously inhabit. The environment and African Religion are kin to each other, in practice and in reverence. At the heart of the African lies the understanding that speaks for environmental management where the African is considered an inseparable existing reality with nature. He is further seen as kin to all creatures, gods, spirits and nature (Asante 290-291).

Furthermore, the African is concerned with nature; not only is he subject to nature's fierce wrath, but also is sustained by nature's bounty and shares kinship with that which makes up nature (Anyanwu161). In another excerpt as points out, the preservation of the environment in African Religion in Mumuye Traditional Religion is considered a sacred encounter between the human and the sacred. For instance, *nee gbal zala/ shongang* (medicine men), received their calls or revelation or directives on healing from spiritual beings, who are considered agents of *kpanti-Laa* (God Almighty), and the environment

Recommendations

The paper recommends the following:

1. Enhancement of African Godliness and kinship on environmental safety: African values of Godliness and kinship should be enhanced to include a responsible attitude towards nature as a sacred entity for sustainability.
2. Integration of GodLight concept principles for environmental conservation and sustainability: GodLight concept principles should be integrated into environmental education and policy to aid in mitigating environmental degradation.
3. Support Community-led Conservation: Community-led conservation initiatives should be supported to boost environmental management and sustainability.
4. Education and Awareness: Education and awareness programs should be implemented to address environmental degradational activities and promote traditional conservation approaches.
5. Collaboration between indigenous and modern environmental practitioners: Collaboration between indigenous and modern environmental practitioners is necessary to ensure environmental safety and sustainability.
6. Responsible Attitude to Nature: A responsible attitude towards nature should be promoted, including reverence for nature to be preserved.
7. Champion of environmental management and sustainability: African religious leaders and custodians should champion environmental management and sustainability.

8. Punitive measures: Punitive measures should be put in place to serve as deterrents for violators of environmental and conservation laws.

9. Integration of Indigenous knowledge and environmental policy: African spiritual values of indigenous knowledge should be integrated into environmental policy.

Conclusion

The environment is an integrating community for both biotic and abiotic factors, where every component plays a vital role in maintaining the delicate balance of nature. African spirituality emphasizes the interconnectedness of human, animal, plant, and natural bodies, recognizing the kinship between humans and nature. This perspective underscores the importance of living in harmony with nature, fostering a deeper sense of reverence and respect for the natural world.

Ultimately, embracing African spirituality can inform a more holistic approach to environmental management and sustainability, recognizing the sacredness of the land, waters, and air. By acknowledging the intricate web of relationships between humans, animals, plants, and natural bodies, we can work towards a more sustainable future, where humans live in harmony with nature and recognize their place within the larger web of life.

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