

ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is confronted with escalating environmental challenges such as oil pollution, deforestation, desertification, urban waste crises, and biodiversity loss, which undermine both ecological stability and human well-being. While global discussions on sustainable development emphasize the integration of ethical, ecological, and economic concerns, Nigeria's environmental discourse often remains restricted to policy and technocratic frameworks with minimal philosophical reflection. This article examines the role of environmental philosophy in shaping a more holistic approach to sustainable development in Nigeria. It situates the analysis within global theoretical traditions such as deep ecology and biocentrism, while also engaging African eco-philosophical perspectives rooted in communalism, Ubuntu, and harmony with nature. The paper argues that environmental philosophy provides critical ethical insights by addressing intergenerational justice, human–nature relationships, and the moral obligation to protect ecological integrity. Drawing on examples from the Niger Delta's ecological crises, northern desertification, and urban waste management, the study demonstrates that unsustainable exploitation of natural resources not only degrades the environment but also undermines social justice and human dignity. The article further proposes a normative framework that integrates environmental ethics into governance, education, and policy, emphasizing renewable energy, environmental education, and indigenous knowledge systems as pathways to resilience. It concludes that embedding environmental philosophy in Nigeria's sustainable development strategies is indispensable for achieving ecological justice, cultural renewal, and intergenerational responsibility.

Keywords: Environmental philosophy, sustainable development, ecological justice, Nigeria, deep ecology, Ubuntu, intergenerational responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is confronted with a complex web of environmental challenges that threaten its ecological balance, social stability, and developmental aspirations. The country's natural resources, while abundant, have been subjected to unsustainable exploitation and mismanagement. Deforestation in the southern rainforest zones continues at an alarming rate due to logging, agricultural expansion, and fuelwood dependence (Food and

Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2020). In the north, desertification accelerates the loss of arable land, exacerbating food insecurity and forcing population displacements (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification [UNCCD], 2019). Oil pollution in the Niger Delta exemplifies the destructive consequences of resource exploitation, with oil spills and gas flaring devastating farmlands, rivers, and livelihoods (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2011). Rapid urbanization compounds these crises, as cities such as Lagos, Kano, and Port Harcourt grapple with mounting waste disposal challenges and inadequate environmental infrastructure (Akinbami, 2021). Climate change further magnifies these problems, manifesting in rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall patterns, flooding, and biodiversity loss (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023).

Globally, the discourse on environmental philosophy has highlighted the interdependence of human well-being and ecological sustainability. Philosophical perspectives such as anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism interrogate the moral foundations of humanity's relationship with nature (Attfield, 2018). Sustainable development, articulated in the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987) and enshrined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015), emphasizes the balance of economic growth, environmental protection, and social justice. Within this discourse, environmental philosophy serves as a normative lens for evaluating how societies conceptualize their duties to the natural world and to future generations (Light & Rolston, 2017). However, Nigeria's environmental policies and legal frameworks often adopt a technocratic and reactive posture, emphasizing regulation, enforcement, and short-term economic priorities while neglecting deeper philosophical questions of justice, ethics, and human-nature relations (Okonkwo, 2020). This weak integration of philosophical reflection into policy undermines the transformative potential of sustainability discourse in the Nigerian context.

The aim of this study is to explore how environmental philosophy can contribute to sustainable development in Nigeria by illuminating ethical principles, intergenerational responsibilities, and indigenous values that are often overlooked in formal policy-making. Specifically, the study seeks:

1. To examine the intersection between environmental challenges in Nigeria and global philosophical debates on sustainability.
2. To identify gaps in Nigeria's environmental governance that stem from insufficient philosophical grounding.
3. To propose a normative framework that integrates environmental ethics into governance, education, and sustainable development practices.

In light of these objectives, the following research questions guide the inquiry:

- ❖ How do Nigeria's environmental challenges reflect the absence of philosophical depth in policy responses?
- ❖ What contributions can environmental philosophy both global and African make to Nigeria's sustainable development agenda?
- ❖ How can philosophical reflection inform ethical, cultural, and policy reforms toward ecological justice and intergenerational responsibility?

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to bridge philosophy, ethics, and public policy in addressing Nigeria's ecological crises. By embedding environmental philosophy within the discourse of sustainable development, the research highlights the need for governance structures that go beyond economic pragmatism to embrace justice, stewardship, and moral accountability (Thompson, 2019). Such an approach can foster policies that are not only technically sound but also ethically grounded, thereby contributing to a more holistic and enduring model of development in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Defining Environmental Philosophy

Environmental philosophy is a branch of philosophy that critically examines the moral, metaphysical, and epistemological foundations of humanity's relationship with the natural world. At its core, it raises questions about value, responsibility, and justice in ecological contexts (Light & Rolston, 2017). Three major orientations dominate this field: anthropocentrism, biocentrism, and ecocentrism. Anthropocentrism views nature primarily in terms of its utility to humans, often framing environmental protection as necessary for sustaining human life and development (Nash, 1989). Biocentrism, by contrast, attributes intrinsic value to all living beings, emphasizing respect for the life of both humans and non-human organisms (Taylor, 2011). Ecocentrism extends the moral community further, recognizing the inherent worth of ecosystems, species, and natural processes, thus promoting holistic stewardship of the Earth (Callicott, 1999). These paradigms shape different approaches to sustainability and environmental ethics in both global and local contexts.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

The notion of sustainable development gained prominence with the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, which defined it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987). This concept was further advanced through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which highlight the integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions of progress (UN, 2015). Within Africa, sustainable development also involves navigating unique challenges such as poverty, climate vulnerability, and dependence on extractive industries (Sachs, 2015). Thus, the African

regional context calls for strategies that harmonize ecological preservation with socio-economic realities, emphasizing indigenous values of communal harmony and stewardship of nature.

Nigerian Environmental Policy Frameworks

Nigeria has adopted several policy instruments aimed at environmental protection and sustainability. The National Environmental Policy provides a comprehensive framework for environmental management, seeking to balance economic growth with ecological preservation (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2016). More recently, the Climate Change Act 2021 established the National Council on Climate Change, mandating integrated strategies for mitigation and adaptation across sectors (Olawuyi, 2022). Despite these legal frameworks, challenges of weak enforcement, corruption, and lack of public participation persist, limiting their effectiveness in addressing Nigeria's mounting environmental crises.

Philosophy and ethics offer critical insights that strengthen the normative basis of environmental sustainability. Philosophical inquiry compels societies to consider not only how development is achieved but also why and for whom. Environmental ethics emphasizes values such as justice, responsibility, and intergenerational equity, challenging policies that prioritize economic gain at the expense of ecological integrity (Attfield, 2018). In the Nigerian context, this nexus is especially crucial given the tension between rapid economic growth and widespread ecological degradation. Embedding philosophical and ethical reasoning into environmental governance can therefore foster more holistic, culturally grounded, and morally accountable approaches to sustainable development.

THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORKS

Philosophical frameworks provide the normative grounding for interrogating environmental issues and formulating sustainable responses. In the context of Nigeria, such frameworks not only illuminate the ethical dimensions of environmental crises but also offer culturally relevant pathways toward sustainability. This section explores selected theoretical perspectives: deep ecology, African eco-philosophy, Aquinas' natural law, and the capability approach. Together, they provide complementary insights into the moral, cultural, and developmental aspects of environmental sustainability.

Deep Ecology

Arne Naess' theory of deep ecology emphasizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and calls for radical changes in human attitudes toward nature (Naess, 1989). Unlike "shallow ecology," which addresses environmental issues only to the extent that they affect human welfare, deep ecology regards the biosphere as possessing inherent worth independent of human utility (Devall & Sessions, 1985). The eight-point platform of deep ecology advocates biodiversity

preservation, population reduction, reduction of material consumption, and structural changes in modern societies. Applied to Nigeria, deep ecology challenges extractive practices such as oil drilling in the Niger Delta and deforestation in Cross River State, arguing that these activities undermine the integrity of ecosystems and reduce biodiversity for short-term economic gain. It also critiques Nigeria's dependence on fossil fuels, calling instead for renewable energy transitions grounded in respect for the natural world (Akinbode, 2020).

African Eco-Philosophy

African eco-philosophy, rooted in indigenous traditions and cultural practices, emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and the spiritual realm. Concepts such as Ubuntu "I am because we are" extend moral consideration to the community of life, including land, rivers, forests, and animals (Ramose, 2002). Similarly, traditional Nigerian cosmologies often view nature as sacred and communal, rather than a private commodity. For example, many Igbo and Yoruba traditions recognize sacred groves and taboos against overexploitation of natural resources (Onah, 2019). Such indigenous philosophies resonate with ecocentric perspectives and provide culturally relevant foundations for sustainability. Importantly, African eco-philosophy critiques the imposition of Western models of development that prioritize industrialization over ecological balance. Instead, it emphasizes harmony, reciprocity, and respect for nature as integral to communal well-being (Workineh, 2014). In Nigeria, incorporating these perspectives into policy could strengthen community-based environmental stewardship, particularly in rural and traditional societies.

Natural Law and Moral Responsibility

St. Thomas Aquinas' theory of natural law provides another lens for analyzing environmental responsibility. For Aquinas, natural law reflects the rational order of creation, accessible to human reason, and obliges humans to act in ways consistent with the common good (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, Q.94). Applied ecologically, natural law implies that exploitation of the environment beyond sustainable limits constitutes a violation of moral order and divine intent (Finnis, 2011). In Nigeria, where religious traditions significantly shape public morality, natural law provides a theological-philosophical basis for ecological responsibility. For instance, oil spills that destroy farmland and water bodies in the Niger Delta not only harm ecosystems but also undermine human dignity, social justice, and the divine mandate of stewardship (Uwaegbute, 2021). By grounding environmental sustainability in moral and spiritual responsibility, natural law offers a framework that resonates with Nigeria's religiously informed cultural landscape.

The Capability Approach

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum's capability approach provides a human-centered framework for evaluating development in terms of people's freedoms and opportunities (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). Applied to environmental sustainability, it emphasizes that

environmental degradation undermines fundamental human capabilities such as health, food security, shelter, and community life (Holland, 2008). In Nigeria, desertification in the north reduces agricultural productivity and erodes livelihoods, while flooding in southern cities threatens housing and health. Thus, ecological degradation becomes not only an environmental problem but also a justice issue, depriving citizens of essential capabilities. Integrating the capability approach with environmental philosophy underscores the need for development models that prioritize ecological well-being as essential for human flourishing. It also highlights intergenerational justice, as the erosion of natural resources diminishes the capabilities of future Nigerians.

Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive philosophical lens for sustainable development in Nigeria. Deep ecology emphasizes intrinsic ecological value; African eco-philosophy grounds sustainability in cultural values and communal ethics; natural law appeals to moral and religious responsibility; and the capability approach underscores the human dimension of ecological justice. An integrative application of these frameworks can help Nigeria transition from a narrow, technocratic understanding of environmental policy to a holistic model that embraces ethics, culture, spirituality, and justice.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

Nigeria, endowed with abundant natural resources and diverse ecosystems, is paradoxically beset by acute environmental crises. These challenges not only undermine ecological integrity but also erode human well-being, economic stability, and cultural continuity. While environmental problems are often analyzed in technical and economic terms, this section situates them within the broader framework of environmental philosophy and ethics. Four interrelated challenges oil exploration and ecological degradation, deforestation and desertification, urban pollution and waste management, and climate change impacts will be considered in depth.

Oil Exploration and Ecological Degradation in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta, one of the world's most significant wetlands, epitomizes the environmental paradox of resource wealth and ecological devastation. Since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956, the region has experienced thousands of oil spills, gas flaring, and widespread pollution of land and waterways (UNEP, 2011). Farmlands have become infertile, fisheries depleted, and potable water sources contaminated (Okonkwo & Etemike, 2020). From the standpoint of deep ecology, the destruction of ecosystems for economic profit exemplifies an anthropocentric logic that values nature only for its utility to humans. In contrast, a biocentric or ecocentric ethic would recognize the intrinsic worth of mangroves, rivers, and aquatic life, demanding their protection regardless of human exploitation.

African eco-philosophy further underscores the communal implications of this crisis. The pollution of rivers not only harms ecosystems but also disrupts the cultural and spiritual ties of local communities that traditionally revere water bodies as sacred. Ubuntu philosophy emphasizes relationality—what diminishes the river diminishes the community (Ramose, 2002). From a natural law perspective, the degradation of the Niger Delta violates the moral order of creation and undermines human dignity, especially for communities who rely on land and water for subsistence. The capability approach similarly highlights how oil pollution erodes people's freedoms and opportunities by destroying livelihoods, health, and community life (Nussbaum, 2011).

Deforestation and Desertification

Nigeria's forest cover has been drastically reduced, with estimates indicating an annual loss of over 400,000 hectares (FAO, 2020). In the south, logging, fuelwood dependence, and agricultural expansion threaten biodiversity hotspots such as Cross River National Park. In the north, advancing desertification driven by climate change, overgrazing, and deforestation—renders vast areas uninhabitable, contributing to food insecurity, poverty, and migration (UNCCD, 2019).

Philosophically, deforestation reflects an unsustainable anthropocentrism that prioritizes short-term economic gain over ecological balance. Ecocentric philosophy insists on viewing forests as integral to the health of the biosphere, not merely as timber resources. African eco-philosophy resonates strongly here, since traditional Nigerian societies have long employed taboos, sacred groves, and communal rules to protect forests (Onah, 2019). The erosion of such cultural practices under modern pressures illustrates the neglect of indigenous ecological wisdom. From a natural law perspective, deforestation undermines the common good by destabilizing ecosystems essential to agriculture, water, and climate regulation. The capability approach identifies clear human costs: reduced food security, displacement of rural populations, and the erosion of environmental resources necessary for present and future generations to flourish (Sen, 1999).

Urban Pollution and Waste Management

Nigeria's rapid urbanization presents another major environmental challenge. Cities such as Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, and Port Harcourt face mounting crises of waste management, air pollution, and inadequate sanitation infrastructure. Lagos alone generates over 13,000 tonnes of waste daily, much of which ends up in open dumps, rivers, and informal settlements (Akinbami, 2021). Air quality in many Nigerian cities often exceeds World Health Organization (WHO) safety thresholds due to vehicle emissions, industrial discharge, and open burning of refuse (World Bank, 2020).

From an ethical standpoint, urban environmental degradation highlights issues of justice and equity. Poor and marginalized communities disproportionately suffer the effects of inadequate

waste disposal and air pollution, raising questions of environmental justice (Adeola, 2022). Deep ecology calls for a reduction in consumerist lifestyles that generate unsustainable waste, while African eco-philosophy emphasizes communal responsibility for shared spaces and resources. Natural law frames the failure of urban governance as neglect of the common good, while the capability approach highlights how environmental pollution undermines essential human capabilities, such as health, dignity, and access to clean living environments (Holland, 2008).

Climate Change and Its Impacts

Nigeria is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which exacerbate existing ecological and social problems. Rising temperatures, irregular rainfall, and flooding affect agriculture, water resources, and health (IPCC, 2023). In the north, desertification worsens food insecurity and intensifies herder–farmer conflicts, while in the south, sea-level rise and flooding threaten coastal cities such as Lagos. These dynamics illustrate how climate change multiplies vulnerabilities and widens inequalities.

Philosophically, climate change underscores the global dimension of intergenerational justice. Deep ecology highlights the unsustainability of fossil-fuel dependency, while African eco-philosophy emphasizes harmony and reciprocity with nature, calling for climate action rooted in communal solidarity. Natural law frames climate inaction as a moral failure to preserve the created order for future generations (Uwaegbute, 2021). The capability approach further demonstrates how climate change erodes the ability of present and future Nigerians to secure health, livelihood, and well-being (Nussbaum, 2011). Thus, climate change is not only an environmental or economic issue but also a profound ethical and philosophical challenge.

The environmental challenges facing Nigeria oil exploitation, deforestation, urban pollution, and climate change cannot be adequately addressed through technocratic policies alone. They are deeply rooted in anthropocentric assumptions, weak ethical frameworks, and neglect of indigenous ecological wisdom. Integrating environmental philosophy offers pathways toward more holistic responses: deep ecology reorients attitudes toward intrinsic ecological value; African eco-philosophy reclaims communal and spiritual dimensions of sustainability; natural law underscores moral obligation and stewardship; and the capability approach links environmental integrity to human flourishing.

PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON SUSTAINABILITY

Ethical Responsibility to Present and Future Generations

The ethical foundation of sustainability is grounded in the recognition that the earth’s resources are not the possession of the present generation alone but part of a shared trust for both current and future inhabitants of the planet. Philosophical discourse underscores the principle of

intergenerational equity, which affirms that future generations have legitimate moral claims on the natural environment (Brown Weiss, 1989). Hans Jonas articulates this in his imperative of responsibility, arguing that the unprecedented power of modern technology and industrial expansion requires humanity to act with foresight and restraint, since ecological degradation today may irreversibly constrain the lives of those yet to come.

In Nigeria, the ethical dilemma is acute: practices such as uncontrolled logging, oil spillage, and desertification not only jeopardize current livelihoods but also threaten the long-term survival of ecosystems that sustain future societies (Olawuyi, 2022). A philosophical reflection thus compels policymakers to adopt a long-range temporal horizon, where development decisions are evaluated not merely by immediate economic benefits but by their sustainability across generations. This orientation aligns with the Brundtland Report's (WCED, 1987) definition of sustainable development, placing moral responsibility for ecological preservation at the heart of governance.

Balancing Economic Growth with Ecological Justice

The tension between economic development and ecological sustainability is central to Nigeria's environmental crisis. While the exploitation of oil, gas, and other natural resources has contributed significantly to Nigeria's GDP, it has simultaneously produced profound ecological devastation, particularly in the Niger Delta (Okonta & Douglas, 2001). Philosophical reflection insists that such a model of development is inherently flawed, as it externalizes ecological costs and undermines long-term human flourishing.

From a normative standpoint, ecological justice requires that development strategies recognize the intrinsic value of ecosystems and the rights of non-human species to exist and flourish (Callicott, 1999). This implies moving beyond the anthropocentric paradigm, which regards nature solely as an instrument for human use, toward ecocentric approaches that affirm the interconnectedness of all life forms. For Nigeria, this balance might be achieved through green growth pathways, such as investing in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and climate-resilient infrastructure (Sachs, 2015). By embedding justice into economic planning, Nigeria could avoid the false dichotomy of "growth versus ecology," affirming instead that sustainable economies must rest on ecological integrity.

Human–Nature Relationship in Nigerian Cultural and Religious Traditions

Philosophical reflection on sustainability must also draw upon indigenous and religious traditions, which offer rich insights into humanity's moral relationship with the environment. In many Nigerian societies, nature is not viewed as an inert resource but as a living reality imbued with spiritual significance. The Yoruba, for instance, preserve sacred groves such as the Osun-Osogbo forest, which function as both cultural heritage sites and reservoirs of biodiversity (Awoyemi et al., 2012). Among riverine communities, taboos on overfishing and

restrictions on certain water bodies serve as traditional mechanisms of ecological conservation (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019).

Religious traditions reinforce this stewardship ethic. Christianity emphasizes the doctrine of creation, where humanity is entrusted with the responsibility of “tilling and keeping” the earth (Genesis 2:15), a mandate understood as stewardship rather than exploitation (White, 1967). Islam equally affirms ecological responsibility through the concept of *khalifa* (vicegerency), teaching that humans are trustees of God’s creation and must avoid waste and corruption of the earth (Foltz, 2003). These perspectives suggest that sustainability resonates with deeply held Nigerian cultural and spiritual values. Philosophically, this demonstrates that ecological responsibility need not be imported from outside but can be cultivated through the revitalization of indigenous ethics and religious teachings.

Justice and Equity: Environmental Degradation as a Violation of Human Dignity

Environmental degradation in Nigeria is not merely an ecological problem but a profound ethical injustice. The Niger Delta illustrates this reality most vividly: while oil companies and political elites profit from extraction, local communities suffer devastating consequences, including contaminated water, destroyed farmlands, and compromised health (Okonta & Douglas, 2001). This inequitable distribution of environmental burdens represents a clear violation of human dignity, as it strips affected populations of their basic capabilities for survival and flourishing (Nussbaum, 2011).

From a philosophical perspective, sustainability cannot be disentangled from justice. Schlosberg (2007) identifies three interrelated dimensions of environmental justice: distributional justice (fair allocation of resources and risks), procedural justice (inclusive participation in decision-making), and recognition justice (respect for cultural and indigenous identities). Nigeria’s environmental governance has historically fallen short on all three counts, excluding grassroots voices, marginalizing vulnerable groups, and prioritizing profit over dignity. Philosophical reflection thus reframes sustainability as not only a technical or policy issue but also a moral struggle for equity and respect. Embedding justice into Nigeria’s environmental policies would mean ensuring that development projects protect the rights of the poor, respect the intrinsic worth of ecosystems, and safeguard the dignity of both present and future generations.

In sum, philosophical reflection on sustainability compels Nigeria to recognize that environmental policy is inseparable from questions of ethics, justice, and cultural identity. Ethical responsibility toward future generations, the balance of economic growth and ecological justice, the wisdom of indigenous traditions, and the demand for justice all converge on a single point: sustainability is a matter of moral survival. Unless Nigeria integrates these philosophical insights into governance, it risks perpetuating a model of development that is ecologically destructive and ethically bankrupt. Conversely, grounding sustainability in

philosophy offers a pathway toward governance that is not only environmentally sound but also socially just and morally defensible.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the intersection of philosophy, sustainability, and Nigerian environmental challenges, showing that sustainability is not merely a technical or economic matter but fundamentally a philosophical and ethical enterprise. The environmental crises confronting Nigeria ranging from deforestation, oil pollution in the Niger Delta, desertification in the North, and urban waste mismanagement are symptomatic of a deeper moral crisis. These challenges expose the inadequacy of technocratic solutions that fail to engage with the ethical dimensions of human–nature relationships, justice, and responsibility. What is required, therefore, is a philosophical reorientation of environmental discourse in Nigeria, one that synthesizes global ethical principles, indigenous African wisdom, and contemporary governance frameworks.

At the core of this reorientation lies the recognition that environmental degradation is not only a threat to ecological balance but also a violation of human dignity and intergenerational justice. As Hans Jonas rightly argues, humanity bears a responsibility toward future generations, a principle that is profoundly relevant to Nigeria’s extractive economy, where short-term profit has too often outweighed ecological sustainability. Environmental degradation undermines the capabilities of present and future Nigerians, threatening their right to health, livelihood, and cultural identity (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). Thus, sustainability in Nigeria cannot be reduced to GDP growth or resource management alone; it must be framed as an ethical imperative grounded in justice, dignity, and responsibility.

In articulating such a framework, this work highlighted three critical dimensions. First, global ethical theories including deep ecology (Naess, 1989), environmental justice (Schlosberg, 2007), and the capability approach (Nussbaum, 2011) offer important categories for reframing Nigeria’s development trajectory. These frameworks expand the conversation beyond utilitarian economics, insisting on the intrinsic value of nature, the rights of marginalized communities, and the responsibilities owed to future generations. Second, African indigenous worldviews enrich this ethical foundation by emphasizing relationality, communal responsibility, and spirituality in human–nature relations (Behrens, 2010; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). Nigerian cultural practices such as the Yoruba’s preservation of sacred groves or the Igbo’s ritual restrictions on land use demonstrate that ecological consciousness is not alien to African thought but deeply embedded in its moral traditions. Third, religious traditions reinforce these values, with Christianity stressing stewardship and Islam emphasizing trusteeship (*khalifa*) over creation (Foltz, 2003). Together, these perspectives offer a pluralistic foundation for a Nigerian environmental philosophy.

Nevertheless, one of the recurring weaknesses in Nigeria's environmental governance is the disconnection between philosophy and policy (Okpara, 2019). While frameworks such as the National Environmental Policy and the Climate Change Act 2021 exist, their implementation has often been undermined by weak enforcement, corruption, and a lack of ethical orientation (Olawuyi, 2022). A philosophically grounded environmental policy would not only focus on technical fixes but also cultivate an ethos of responsibility among policymakers, industries, and citizens alike. Embedding philosophical reflection into governance can bridge the gap between normative ideals and practical action, ensuring that sustainability is not perceived as an externally imposed burden but as a moral necessity rooted in Nigerian cultural identity and communal well-being.

This research, therefore, proposes the development of a context-specific Nigerian environmental philosophy that integrates three dimensions:

1. **Ethical universals** from global philosophy—justice, dignity, intrinsic value, and responsibility.
2. **Cultural particulars** from African traditions and religious worldviews communal ethics, sacredness of land, and stewardship.
3. **Policy integration** the embedding of these values into Nigeria's legal and institutional frameworks.

Such a synthesis would enable Nigeria to move beyond the false dichotomy between economic development and environmental protection, toward a model of ecological justice that affirms both human flourishing and ecological balance (Sachs, 2015). Moreover, by articulating an environmental philosophy grounded in both universal principles and local traditions, Nigeria can contribute to the global discourse on environmental ethics, offering an African voice to debates often dominated by Western perspectives (Murove, 2009).

Ultimately, the pursuit of sustainability in Nigeria demands not just new policies or technologies but a new ethos of being a moral vision that situates humans as stewards, not exploiters, of the earth. Such a vision affirms that caring for the environment is inseparable from caring for humanity itself. By weaving together philosophy, culture, and governance, Nigeria has the potential to transform its environmental challenges into an opportunity for moral leadership, both on the African continent and in the global search for sustainability.

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