

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP FROM BIBLICAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

From biblical and ethical perspectives, environmental stewardship, offers profound insights into sustainable development, particularly in the context of Nigeria. This study explores the implications of integrating biblical teachings on stewardship and ethical responsibility into Nigeria's sustainable development practices. It argues that environmental care, as emphasized in Genesis 2:15 and Psalm 24:1, which form the data for the study, calls for humans to act as caretakers of creation, balancing development with the preservation of natural resources. Ethical responsibility further reinforces this concept by highlighting moral duties toward the environment, ensuring that development practices do not harm the ecosystem or compromise future generations' well-being. The study applied the qualitative research methodology. The study examines the environmental challenges facing Nigeria, including deforestation, pollution and the depletion of resources, and suggests that adopting a stewardship approach grounded in both biblical and ethical frameworks could significantly improve Nigeria's environmental sustainability. The study recommends that a comprehensive approach to environmental care, rooted in both theological and ethical principles, could pave the way for a more sustainable and equitable future for Nigeria, ensuring that economic development and environmental preservation were considered.

Keywords: *Environmental Stewardship, Biblical Perspectives, Ethical*

Responsibility, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Environmental sustainability has become an urgent global concern, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria, where deforestation, pollution, desertification and climate change pose significant threats to socio-economic development. These environmental crises, driven by industrialization, weak regulatory frameworks and poor ecological consciousness, demand comprehensive interventions (Nwosu & Nwajiuba, 2022). While scientific and technological advancements play critical roles in addressing environmental issues, a fundamental shift in values and ethical perspectives is equally necessary. Religious teachings, particularly those derived from the Bible, offer profound insights into humanity's responsibility for environmental stewardship, emphasizing the moral duty to care for creation (Hitzhusen & Tucker, 2020). The biblical foundation for environmental stewardship is rooted in the creation narrative. *Genesis 2:15 states, 'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it'* (New International Version). This passage underscores the divine mandate for humans to act as stewards rather than mere exploiters of natural resources. Similarly, *Psalms 24:1* reinforces this idea: *'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.'* These scriptures align with contemporary environmental ethics, which emphasize sustainability and intergenerational justice (Kearns, 2021). Christian theological perspectives, such as Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), advocate for a moral obligation to preserve the environment, condemning exploitative practices that harm ecological balance (Francis, 2015).

Beyond biblical mandates, environmental ethics as a philosophical discipline underscores the moral responsibility of humans toward nature. Different ethical theories provide frameworks for sustainable environmental practices. Virtue ethics, rooted in Aristotelian philosophy, emphasizes the cultivation of moral character and habits that promote environmental conservation (Sandler, 2017). Kantian deontology asserts that humans have a duty to protect nature irrespective of self-interest (O'Neill, 2018). Similarly, utilitarianism advocates for policies that ensure the greatest good for the greatest number, including future generations (Brennan & Lo, 2022). These ethical frameworks complement religious teachings in reinforcing the need for sustainable environmental practices.

Despite these theological and ethical perspectives, Nigeria continues to experience severe environmental degradation. The nation's reliance on fossil fuels, poor waste management systems and weak enforcement of environmental regulations contribute significantly to ecological destruction (Nwosu & Nwajiuba, 2022). Religious institutions, particularly churches, can play a pivotal role in influencing

public attitudes toward environmental conservation. Faith-based organizations have the potential to serve as platforms for environmental advocacy, encouraging sustainable practices through teachings, community engagements and collaborations with policymakers and private sector stakeholders (Agbiji & Swart, 2021). Initiatives such as tree planting, waste recycling and climate change awareness campaigns led by religious organizations can complement governmental efforts to achieve sustainability (Hitzhusen & Tucker, 2020).

This study explores environmental stewardship from biblical and ethical perspectives, focusing on its implications for sustainable development in Nigeria. It examines how religious teachings and ethical philosophies can shape environmental policies, influence public behavior and promote sustainable practices. By integrating biblical principles with contemporary ethical theories, this study proposes a faith-driven model for environmental conservation in Nigeria. The study ultimately argues that religious ethics, when effectively harnessed, can contribute significantly to the promotion of a sustainable and ecologically responsible society.

Conceptual Clarifications

This study is anchored on key concepts that require clarification to ensure conceptual precision and analytical coherence. The major concepts include **environment**, **environmental stewardship**, **biblical perspective**, **ethical perspective**, and **sustainable development**, particularly within the Nigerian context.

Environment: The environment refers to everything around human beings that supports life. This includes land, water, air, plants, animals, and natural resources. In Nigeria, the environment plays a major role in farming, fishing, industry, and daily living, but it is increasingly threatened by pollution, deforestation, and poor waste management.

Environmental Stewardship: Environmental stewardship means taking good care of the earth and its resources. It involves using nature responsibly and protecting it from harm. Stewardship teaches that humans are caretakers of the environment, not its owners, and must preserve it for future generations.

Biblical Perspective: From the Bible, environmental stewardship is seen as a duty given by God to humanity. Humans are instructed to care for the earth and not destroy it. This view teaches respect for nature and responsibility in the way natural resources are used.

Ethical Perspective: The ethical perspective focuses on what is right and wrong in how humans treat the environment. It encourages responsible behavior, fairness, and self-control in the use of natural resources. Ethical thinking challenges actions that damage the environment for personal or economic gain.

Sustainable Development: Sustainable development means improving people's

lives today without damaging the environment for future generations. It promotes economic growth while protecting nature. In Nigeria, this means balancing development activities with environmental care.

Nigeria: In context, Nigeria faces serious environmental problems such as oil spills, erosion, desertification, and pollution. Applying biblical and ethical principles to environmental stewardship can help promote better attitudes, policies, and practices that support sustainable development.

Theoretical Framework

Environmental Ethics Theory

Environmental Ethics Theory developed in the mid-20th century as a response to growing environmental degradation. One of its most influential proponents is Aldo Leopold, whose *Land Ethic* (1949) laid the foundation for modern environmental ethics. Other notable contributors include Arne Naess, the founder of *Deep Ecology*, and later scholars who expanded ethical concern beyond human interests to the natural world itself. Environmental Ethics Theory argues that the environment has moral value and should be treated with respect, not merely as a resource for human exploitation. It challenges the purely human-centered (anthropocentric) view of nature and promotes a broader moral responsibility that includes land, water, plants, animals, and ecosystems. Aldo Leopold's *Land Ethic* emphasizes that humans are “members” of the ecological community, not masters over it. According to the theory, an action is morally right if it preserves the integrity, stability, and beauty of the natural environment, and wrong if it damages it. This ethical approach promotes care, restraint, justice, and long-term responsibility in human interaction with nature.

Environmental Ethics Theory provides a strong foundation for examining environmental stewardship from biblical and ethical perspectives. Biblically, the idea that the earth belongs to God and that humans are caretakers aligns closely with the ethical claim that nature deserves respect and moral consideration. Ethically, the theory supports responsible environmental behavior, condemns reckless exploitation, and calls for accountability in the use of natural resources. In relation to sustainable development in Nigeria, the theory helps explain the moral roots of environmental crises such as oil pollution, deforestation, desertification, and waste mismanagement. These problems reflect ethical failure rather than mere technical or economic limitations. Environmental Ethics Theory therefore reframes sustainability as a moral obligation, not just a policy goal. By applying Environmental Ethics Theory, sustainable development is understood as development guided by moral responsibility, intergenerational justice, and respect for the environment. When Nigerian society, government, industries, religious institutions, and individuals, embraces ethical stewardship, development can

proceed without destroying the ecological foundations on which future generations depend.

Environmental Ethics Theory is particularly suitable for this study because it bridges biblical stewardship, moral responsibility, and sustainable development, offering a coherent ethical framework for addressing Nigeria's environmental challenges at both policy and value levels.

Literature Review

Environmental stewardship refers to the responsible use and protection of the environment through conservation, sustainable practices and ethical resource management. This concept integrates ecological, economic and social considerations to ensure that natural resources are maintained for future generations. It is rooted in diverse philosophical, religious and scientific traditions that advocate for the preservation of the planet (White, 2018). In contemporary discourse, environmental stewardship is an essential component of sustainable development, climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation (Folke, 2021). Environmental stewardship encompasses a range of practices aimed at protecting ecosystems and ensuring the sustainability of natural resources. According to Bennett (2018), stewardship is an ethical responsibility that involves active participation in environmental conservation. It can be classified into three main types: Ethical Stewardship: This perspective views humans as caretakers of the Earth with a moral obligation to protect nature. Religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam and Indigenous beliefs emphasize stewardship as a divine duty (Hitzhusen & Tucker, 2020). Scientific Stewardship: Based on ecological principles, this approach uses scientific knowledge to promote sustainable resource management and minimize environmental degradation (Chapin, 2020). Pragmatic Stewardship: This focuses on balancing economic development with environmental conservation. It is often integrated into corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Carter, 2019).

Climate change is one of the most pressing environmental challenges of the 21st century, and stewardship plays a crucial role in addressing it. Human activities such as deforestation, industrial pollution, and fossil fuel consumption contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, leading to global warming (IPCC, 2021). Effective stewardship strategies, such as afforestation, carbon separation and sustainable energy transitions, can mitigate climate change impacts (Rockström, 2020). Moreover, climate adaptation requires active participation from governments, organizations and individuals. Community-led conservation efforts and policies like the Paris Agreement (2015) illustrate the growing emphasis on collective environmental responsibility (United Nations, 2022). Biodiversity is essential for ecosystem stability, yet human actions threaten global species diversity.

Conservation initiatives, including protected areas, habitat restoration and wildlife protection laws, are integral to environmental stewardship (Watson, 2018). The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) highlights stewardship as a means to protect endangered species and maintain ecological balance (United Nations, 2022). Indigenous communities have historically practiced sustainable environmental management, and their knowledge systems are gaining recognition in global conservation efforts (Garnett, 2018). Collaborative stewardship approaches that integrate Indigenous knowledge and scientific research enhance biodiversity conservation strategies (Reid, 2021).

Sustainability is a core principle of environmental stewardship, ensuring that present needs do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet theirs. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 13 (Climate Action) and Goal 15 (Life on Land), emphasize responsible resource management and ecological preservation (UNDP, 2022). Industries and businesses increasingly adopt sustainable practices through circular economy models, renewable energy investments and waste reduction strategies (Geissdoerfer, 2020). Companies such as Tesla and Patagonia exemplify corporate stewardship by promoting sustainability and reducing environmental footprints (Jones & Comfort, 2019). Religious traditions have long advocated for environmental responsibility. Christianity, for instance, teaches the concept of *creation care*, emphasizing human responsibility in protecting God's creation (Hitzhusen & Tucker, 2020). Islam promotes *khalifah* (stewardship) and responsible environmental management (Nasr, 2018). Indigenous spiritual traditions regard nature as sacred and advocate for harmonious coexistence with the environment (Whyte, 2020). Ethical stewardship also includes principles of environmental justice, which address disparities in environmental impacts on marginalized communities. The concept of eco-justice calls for equitable access to clean air, water and natural resources, recognizing that environmental degradation disproportionately affects the poor (Bullard & Johnson, 2020).

Despite progress, several challenges hinder effective environmental stewardship. This includes, first, industrialization and economic growth often takes precedence over environmental protection, leading to resource depletion (Steffen, 2020). Second, weak enforcement of environmental laws and regulations undermines conservation efforts (Young, 2018). Lastly, many individuals lack awareness of their role in environmental stewardship, reducing participation in conservation initiatives (Agyeman & Evans, 2019). Environmental stewardship is a multifaceted approach that integrates ethical, scientific and economic considerations to promote sustainability. Addressing climate change, conserving biodiversity and advancing sustainable development require collective efforts from governments, businesses and individuals. By fostering a culture of stewardship, societies can ensure a healthier and more sustainable future for all.

Environment and Biblical Perspectives

The relationship between humanity and the environment has been a central theme in theological discussions, particularly within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Biblical perspectives on the environment provide a theological foundation for environmental stewardship, emphasizing creation care, divine ownership of nature and human responsibility. The Bible contains numerous references to nature, highlighting God's sovereignty over creation, the intrinsic value of the natural world and humanity's role as stewards. These themes have contemporary relevance, particularly in light of the ongoing environmental crisis. This paper explores biblical perspectives on the environment, examining key scriptural passages and theological interpretations, while integrating contemporary scholarly insights. The foundation of the biblical view on the environment is laid in the creation narrative found in Genesis. Genesis 1:1 declares, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (New International Version). This assertion establishes that the natural world is not a product of chance but a divine creation, reflecting God's wisdom and power (Psalm 19:1). Theologically, this implies that the environment is sacred and that humans must recognize God's ownership of all creation (Psalm 24:1). Scholars like Bauckham (2018) argue that the creation narrative presents a hierarchical yet interconnected order in which human beings, made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27), are given dominion over the earth. However, dominion (Hebrew: *radah*) does not imply exploitation but responsible stewardship (Horrell, 2020). This interpretation aligns with contemporary calls for sustainable environmental management, emphasizing humanity's role in preserving the earth rather than degrading it.

The biblical concept of stewardship (*oikonomia* in Greek) is central to environmental ethics. In Genesis 2:15, God commands Adam to "work" (*abad*) and "keep" (*shamar*) the Garden of Eden. The Hebrew terms suggest not only cultivation but also protection and preservation. This directive underscores the ethical responsibility of humans to care for the earth, ensuring its sustainability for future generations (DeWitt, 2019). The New Testament reinforces this stewardship ethic. In Romans 8:19-22, Paul describes creation as "groaning" in anticipation of redemption, a passage interpreted as recognition of the degradation of nature due to human sin (McDonagh, 2020). Similarly, Jesus' teachings, such as in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:26-30), emphasize God's care for nature, reinforcing the idea that humans should likewise show concern for the environment. The Bible contains numerous warnings about the consequences of environmental destruction. In Hosea 4:1-3, the prophet laments the degradation of the land, linking it to human sin: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying, and murder... Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away." This passage aligns with contemporary environmental crises,

where deforestation, pollution and climate change result from human greed and negligence (White, 2018). The prophetic warnings about environmental destruction serve as a call to ethical reflection and action.

The biblical principles of Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11) and Jubilee (Leviticus 25:1-7) provide models for sustainable environmental practices. The Sabbath commandment includes rest for both humans and the land, while the Jubilee law mandates that the land should be left fallow every seven years. These principles resonate with modern environmental theories advocating for responsible land use, biodiversity conservation and ecological balance (Hitzhusen& Tucker, 2020). The modern environmental crisis has led many Christian scholars and leaders to re-examine biblical teachings on creation care. Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* (2015) emphasizes that caring for the environment is a moral obligation, describing the earth as “our common home.” Similarly, Protestant theologians such as Wright (2021) argue that environmental stewardship is a core aspect of Christian discipleship. Churches and Christian organizations have increasingly engaged in environmental advocacy. The Evangelical Environmental Network and the Lausanne Movement emphasize the need for Christian engagement in climate action, highlighting the moral imperative to address deforestation, pollution and climate change (Borras, 2019). These efforts reflect the integration of biblical teachings with contemporary ecological concerns.

Christian environmental ethics increasingly engage with interfaith and indigenous perspectives. Many indigenous traditions emphasize the sacredness of nature and a harmonious relationship with the land, principles that align with biblical stewardship (Reid, 2021). The integration of these perspectives enriches Christian theology, offering a more holistic approach to environmental responsibility. The Bible presents a rich and compelling case for environmental stewardship, emphasizing God's ownership of creation, human responsibility and the consequences of environmental exploitation. The principles of dominion, stewardship and Sabbath provide ethical frameworks for sustainable environmental practices.

Ethical Responsibility and the Environment

The concept of ethical responsibility toward the environment has gained significant attention in recent decades due to the increasing impact of human activities on the planet. Ethical responsibility, in this context, refers to the obligation that individuals, organizations and societies have to care for the natural world in ways that sustain its health and ensure the well-being of all living beings. Philosophers, theologians and environmentalists have proposed various ethical frameworks to understand the moral obligations humans have toward the environment, focusing on issues such as conservation, sustainability and justice. This paper explores the ethical

responsibility toward the environment from different perspectives, including anthropocentric, biocentric and ecocentric viewpoints, and emphasizes the need for sustainable practices in light of the ongoing environmental crisis. Anthropocentric ethics, or human-centered ethics, argues that the environment holds value primarily in relation to its usefulness or benefit to human beings. According to this view, environmental conservation and ethical behavior toward nature are justified by the direct or indirect benefits they provide to human society, such as food, clean air and recreational spaces (Singer, 2019). While anthropocentrism has often been criticized for ignoring non-human interests, it has played a pivotal role in shaping policies that prioritize human needs, such as sustainable development initiatives and climate change mitigation efforts (Barton, 2020). For example, sustainable development, as defined by the Brundtland Commission in its 1987 report, *Our Common Future*, emphasizes the need to meet human needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This ethical framework promotes an inter-generational responsibility, urging people to consider how their actions affect the environment and the quality of life for future generations.

In contrast to anthropocentrism, biocentric ethics emphasizes the intrinsic value of all living organisms, arguing that every living being has an inherent right to exist, regardless of its utility to humans. Biocentric theorists assert that humans are not the only beings that matter morally; instead, humans should recognize the inherent value of animals, plants and other forms of life. This ethical viewpoint calls for the protection of biodiversity and the conservation of ecosystems to ensure the flourishing of all species (Taylor, 2018). The biocentric approach to environmental responsibility highlights the inter-connectedness of life and the importance of maintaining healthy ecosystems. Aldo Leopold's (1949) concept of the "land ethic" emphasizes that humans are members of a biotic community and should treat the land and its inhabitants with respect. Leopold argues that ethical behavior toward the environment must include preserving the health of ecosystems and recognizing the rights of non-human entities to exist in their natural habitats. This approach has informed much of modern environmental law, such as wildlife protection acts and conservation policies aimed at maintaining biodiversity (Leopold, 1949). Ecocentrism takes a broader, systems-oriented approach, arguing that the environment as a whole, ecosystems, biomes, and the planet, has intrinsic value that must be preserved for the well-being of the Earth system. Ecocentric ethics focuses on the inter-connectedness of all elements within the environment, including both living and non-living components. From this perspective, environmental ethical responsibility is not merely about managing resources for human use or protecting individual species, but about maintaining the health of the entire planet, including its physical and ecological processes (Naess, 2019). The deep ecology movement,

founded by philosopher Arne Naess, is a key proponent of ecocentric ethics. Naess (2019) argues that humans must adopt a more holistic perspective on the environment, recognizing that the Earth's ecosystems are interconnected and that human actions must align with the needs of the biosphere as a whole. This ethical approach has influenced environmental activism, particularly in relation to issues such as deforestation, climate change and ecosystem degradation, calling for radical shifts in human attitudes and behaviors toward the environment (Naess, 2019).

One of the primary ethical concerns in contemporary environmental discussions is inter-generational justice, the ethical obligation to consider the well-being of future generations when making decisions that impact the environment. The ethical responsibility to future generations requires that individuals and governments act in ways that ensure that resources are used efficiently, pollution is minimized and ecosystems are preserved (Rawls, 1999). The principle of inter-generational justice was articulated by the Brundtland Commission in its 1987 report, emphasizing that sustainability requires fairness to future generations in the allocation of resources. It asserts that the choices made today should not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This ethical stance has been influential in international agreements such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, which seeks to limit global warming and reduce the environmental impacts that disproportionately affect future generations. Environmental justice, a concept emerging from social and political movements, asserts that marginalized communities, particularly low-income and minority populations, often bear the brunt of environmental degradation. This includes exposure to pollution, climate change impacts and the depletion of natural resources. Ethical responsibility, from an environmental justice perspective, requires that all people, regardless of race, class or nationality, have equal access to a healthy environment and that they are protected from environmental harm (Bullard, 2019). The work of scholars like Bullard (2019) has emphasized the need for policies that not only protect the environment but also address social inequalities, ensuring that vulnerable communities are not disproportionately affected by environmental policies. Environmental justice advocates argue for the inclusion of marginalized voices in environmental decision-making processes, ensuring that all stakeholders have an equal voice in policies that affect their environments and health. As the global environmental crisis deepens, these ethical principles serve as a guide for creating policies and behaviors that foster a more sustainable and equitable world.

Environment and Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is a broad, evolving concept that seeks to balance economic growth, social development and environmental protection to ensure that

future generations inherit a world that is capable of meeting their needs. The relationship between the environment and sustainable development is a central issue in contemporary global discourse, particularly in light of growing concerns about climate change, environmental degradation and the depletion of natural resources. This paper will explore the interconnections between environmental sustainability and development, examining how societies can achieve development that is not only economically viable but also environmentally responsible and socially inclusive. The term sustainable development was popularized in the 1987 Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development), which defined it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition emphasizes the need to integrate long-term environmental considerations into development policies, ensuring that economic growth does not come at the expense of the natural environment or the welfare of future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Sustainable development, as articulated in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is underpinned by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which encompass a wide range of issues, from poverty reduction to clean energy and climate action. Achieving sustainable development requires a holistic approach that integrates environmental, social and economic dimensions into policy-making, thus promoting equity and justice for all people and protecting the planet's ecosystems (United Nations, 2015). Environmental sustainability is a cornerstone of sustainable development. Environmental protection involves the preservation of ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources to maintain ecological balance and safeguard the health of the planet. Human activities, such as deforestation, overfishing and pollution, have led to significant environmental degradation, which threatens the long-term viability of ecosystems and the well-being of human populations. For sustainable development to be achieved, environmental sustainability must be prioritized. This involves reducing carbon emissions, promoting renewable energy, conserving water, protecting biodiversity and creating green spaces. Efforts to address environmental degradation, such as the transition to a green economy, sustainable agriculture and clean energy solutions, are central to the agenda of sustainable development (Sachs, 2015). Climate change, in particular, poses one of the greatest challenges to sustainable development. As global temperatures rise due to human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, the planet faces increasing risks of extreme weather events, rising sea levels and disruptions to ecosystems. The adoption of climate-smart development policies, those that promote resilience and adaptability, has become crucial for the future sustainability of the planet (IPCC, 2021). Economic development is an essential component of sustainable development, but it must be decoupled from environmental harm. Traditional models of economic growth often

prioritize short-term profits over long-term sustainability, leading to resource depletion, environmental pollution and socioeconomic inequalities. Sustainable economic development, on the other hand, seeks to promote economic growth while minimizing negative environmental impacts. A key principle of sustainable economic development is the circular economy, which encourages the reuse and recycling of materials, reducing waste and ensuring that products and resources are used efficiently throughout their life-cycle. Circular economy models are gaining traction in various sectors, including manufacturing, agriculture and construction, as they offer opportunities to reduce environmental impacts and create sustainable business practices (Geissdoerfer, 2017). The concept of green growth, economic growth that is environmentally sustainable, has become a prominent framework for policymakers and businesses seeking to promote development without compromising the environment. This model emphasizes investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency and sustainable industries as key drivers of both economic and environmental well-being (OECD, 2011).

Social sustainability is another critical aspect of sustainable development. It is concerned with the equitable distribution of resources, social justice and the empowerment of marginalized groups. For development to be truly sustainable, it must address inequalities in access to education, healthcare, housing and employment, ensuring that no one is left behind. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly calls for the reduction of poverty, the achievement of gender equality, and the inclusion of vulnerable populations in decision-making processes. This social dimension of sustainability emphasizes the importance of fostering inclusive societies where individuals have the opportunity to thrive while ensuring that the benefits of development are shared equitably (United Nations, 2015). Despite the growing recognition of the importance of sustainability, several challenges remain in implementing sustainable development strategies. One of the major obstacles is the tension between economic growth and environmental preservation. Many countries, particularly in the Global South, face the challenge of balancing the desire for economic growth with the need to protect the environment. This tension is often exacerbated by external pressures, such as global demand for natural resources, climate change and the global economic system (Ghosh, 2018). Another challenge is the lack of political will and commitment to sustainability at the global and national levels. The influence of powerful industries, such as fossil fuels, often hinders progress toward a more sustainable future (Newell & Paterson, 2010). The adoption of the SDGs in 2015 marked a significant milestone in global efforts to achieve sustainable development, with governments, businesses and civil society all playing important roles in their implementation. International policy frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change, aim to set global standards for emissions reductions and environmental protection. However, for these agreements

to be effective, there needs to be stronger enforcement mechanisms, financial support for developing countries and a commitment to long-term sustainability (UNFCCC, 2015). As the world grapples with the impacts of climate change, resource depletion and environmental degradation, the need for sustainable development is quite appropriate.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Datum One - Genesis 2:15

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it. (NKJV)

This verse is a foundational text for understanding the biblical perspective on environmental care. It establishes the divine mandate for humanity to act as stewards of the earth. In the context of this paper, the passage has profound implications for environmental ethics, moral responsibility and the socio-economic impact of ecological sustainability. The verse contains two key Hebrew words that shape its interpretation: *'abad* (עָבַד): Translated as "to tend" or "to work," this word implies cultivation, labor and responsible management. It signifies active participation in sustaining the environment rather than exploiting it. *Shamar* (שָׁמַר): Translated as "to keep," this word means to guard, protect and preserve. It suggests a duty to maintain the integrity and well-being of creation. This combination of "tending" and "keeping" highlights the balance between utilizing natural resources and ensuring their sustainability. It aligns with the broader biblical theme of stewardship, where humans are entrusted with God's creation to manage it wisely.

The concept of stewardship derived from Genesis 2:15 extends throughout the Bible. Some related themes include the following: First, Respect for Creation (Psalm 24:1): *The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.* This reinforces the idea that humanity does not own the earth but is entrusted with its care. Second, Consequences of Environmental Neglect (Jeremiah 2:7): *I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.* This warns against environmental degradation due to human negligence. Third, Rest for the Land (Leviticus 25:4): The sabbatical year mandated that the land should rest, preventing overuse and promoting ecological balance. Fourth, Genesis 2:15 serves as an early command that aligns with these broader biblical teachings, emphasizing sustainability and moral responsibility.

The verse has direct relevance to modern discussions on environmental ethics, particularly in areas such as, Climate Change and Resource Management. The duty to "tend and keep" suggests responsible resource consumption, reducing carbon footprints and preventing deforestation. Just as Adam was called to cultivate the land wisely, modern agricultural practices should prioritize sustainability, soil

conservation and biodiversity. Faith-based advocacy for policies that protect the environment aligns with Genesis 2:15. Many Christian organizations emphasize creation care as part of social justice initiatives.

The Socioeconomic Impact of Environmental Stewardship is evident in, one, Economic Growth through Green Practices, Investing in renewable energy, sustainable farming and ecological preservation. Two, Public Health and Well-being. A well-kept environment reduces pollution-related illnesses and enhances the quality of life. Three, Education and Awareness. Religious institutions can play a vital role in promoting environmental consciousness based on biblical principles. Religious education can be a powerful tool in fostering ecological awareness. Teaching Genesis 2:15 in schools and churches can do the following, First, instill a sense of responsibility for nature. Second, encourage sustainable living practices. Lastly, bridge the gap between faith and science in addressing environmental challenges. Genesis 2:15 provides a strong theological foundation for environmental stewardship. It calls for a balance between using and preserving the earth's resources.

Datum Two: Psalm 24:1

Environmental stewardship is a fundamental ethical and theological responsibility that aligns with the biblical principle of creation care. Psalm 24:1 state:

The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world, and those who dwell therein." (NKJV)

This verse establishes the foundation for environmental ethics by affirming that the earth belongs to God, not humans. From a biblical and ethical perspective, this understanding calls for responsible environmental management, which has direct implications for sustainable development in Nigeria. Psalm 24:1 suggests that human beings are stewards, not owners of the earth. Other biblical passages reinforce this principle. For example, **Genesis 2:15** – God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden to *tend and keep it*, emphasizing the duty of care and preservation. And, **Leviticus 25:23** – The land belongs to God, and humans are only temporary occupants. These scriptures highlight the need for Nigerians to embrace environmental stewardship as a divine mandate, ensuring the protection and sustainability of natural resources. Environmental stewardship involves moral responsibility toward the environment. Ethical principles relevant to sustainability in Nigeria include, **Justice and Equity**. Ensuring that natural resources are used sustainably and shared equitably among present and future generations. Also, **avoiding environmental degradation**, such as deforestation, oil pollution and waste mismanagement. **In addition, sustainability. That is, balancing economic growth with ecological preservation to ensure long-term benefits.** The ethical framework rooted in Psalm 24:1 demands that policymakers, industries and individuals in

Nigeria adopt practices that protect the environment while fostering economic and social well-being.

Nigeria faces environmental challenges such as deforestation, desertification, pollution and climate change. A biblical and ethical approach to environmental stewardship, as implied in Psalm 24:1, can support sustainable development in different ways. First, the Nigerian government can integrate environmental ethics into policies to promote responsible resource management, enforce pollution control and encourage renewable energy adoption. Second, industries, especially in the oil and gas sector, must align their operations with sustainable development goals (SDGs) by reducing environmental degradation and investing in conservation efforts. Third, religious institutions and ethical leaders can advocate for environmental conservation through public awareness, ecological education and community participation in sustainability projects. Lastly, Nigeria must adopt climate adaptation strategies, such as afforestation, flood control and sustainable agriculture, to mitigate environmental disasters and ensure long-term ecological balance.

Psalm 24:1 provides a strong theological basis for environmental stewardship, emphasizing human responsibility toward the earth. From both biblical and ethical perspectives, sustainable development in Nigeria depends on a commitment to preserving God's creation. By adopting environmentally responsible policies, ethical business practices and community-driven conservation efforts, Nigeria can achieve a balance between economic growth and ecological sustainability.

Conclusion

Environmental stewardship, from both biblical and ethical perspectives, provides a compelling framework for addressing the environmental challenges that Nigeria faces in its pursuit of sustainable development. The biblical perspective, rooted in the belief that humanity is entrusted with the care of creation, emphasizes the importance of responsibility, accountability and the sustainable use of resources. This view calls for a deep respect for the environment, recognizing that human well-being is intricately tied to the health of the planet. Scriptures such as Genesis 2:15 highlight the duty of stewardship, urging a balance between development and environmental care. Ethical principles further reinforce this perspective, emphasizing moral responsibility towards the environment, advocating for justice and promoting actions that consider the well-being of both current and future generations.

In Nigeria, where environmental degradation, deforestation, pollution and the depletion of natural resources are prominent issues, the integration of biblical and ethical perspectives into national policies can offer transformative solutions. These perspectives provide a moral and philosophical foundation for promoting

environmental sustainability, influencing both individual behavior and collective action at the national level. By adopting practices that align with both biblical stewardship and ethical responsibility, Nigeria can move towards a more sustainable and equitable future, where economic development does not come at the cost of environmental degradation. The implications for sustainable development in Nigeria are profound. By incorporating environmental stewardship into the nation's developmental strategies, the country can mitigate the adverse effects of climate change, reduce environmental pollution and promote conservation efforts. This approach also ensures that development is inclusive, addressing the needs of marginalized communities and fostering a sense of collective responsibility towards the environment. Ultimately, the integration of biblical and ethical stewardship into Nigeria's development framework holds the potential for creating a sustainable society that respects both the environment and the moral obligation to future generations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to integrate these perspectives into sustainable development practices in Nigeria:

- i. National and local governments should develop a National Environmental Stewardship Framework that draws from both biblical teachings and ethical principles.
- ii. Sermons, community outreach programs and religious gatherings should be used as platforms for educating people about the importance of preserving the environment as a form of obedience to God's command to protect and nurture creation.
- iii. Religious institutions and faith-based organizations should set an example by adopting sustainable practices in their operations. For example, churches can engage in tree planting, waste management and sustainable water use initiatives.
- iv. Faith communities should also engage in advocacy for policy change, encouraging their congregations to support environmental policies that promote sustainability and social justice.
- v. There should be stronger collaboration between religious institutions, government agencies and civil society organizations to promote sustainable development.
- vi. The government and religious organizations should work together to promote land stewardship that emphasizes sustainability, helping farmers and communities understand the biblical and ethical importance of soil and water conservation, as well as preventing desertification and deforestation.

Suffice it to state clearly that, there should be a greater focus on inter-generational responsibility in environmental policy making.

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