

Impact of Religious Precepts on Environmental Policies in Urhoboland of Nigeria

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Abstract— This paper analyzes the influence of religious precepts on environmental policies in Urhoboland, Nigeria, emphasizing a deficiency in policies that prioritize Western models over indigenous knowledge. Employing qualitative methodologies such as interviews and content analysis, it demonstrates that the Urhobo holistic worldview integrates spirituality with environmental care. Religious views can facilitate policy acceptability by portraying nature as sacrosanct, yet may obstruct it when secular restrictions conflict with spiritual concepts. The research promotes the incorporation of these values into environmental policies to enhance their efficacy and sustainability, while also advocating for engagement with religious institutions and the integration of indigenous ethics into policy formulation.

Keywords: Religious Precepts; Environmental Policies; Urhoboland; Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Religion is a common phenomenon among many Nigerian peoples, including the Urhobo; therefore, it is imperative to investigate the extent to which Urhobo religious precepts influence environmental policies pursued by government agencies. As the Urhobo perceive the universe as an interconnected whole comprising God, spirits, ancestors, human beings, and non-human entities, it is necessary to assess how environmental policies address this holistic worldview to prevent the environment from becoming fragile (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). Owing to their strong belief in the protective power of the ancestors' spirits, any proposed policy perceived as threatening this belief may encounter community resistance. The relationship between society and environment implies that financial, social, and ecological well-being is fundamentally linked (Agha, 2003). Consequently, environmental policies that ignore the obligations, beliefs, and customs implicit in a people's culture risk losing credibility.

This research aims to provide valuable data to support environmental policy formulation in Urhoboland, ensuring alignment with the society's cultural underpinnings for sustainable development and enhanced human dignity. Studies indicate that indigenous religions have played significant historical roles in shaping governance structures and social orders; they are not mere vestiges of the past but remain dynamic forces capable of influencing contemporary policy-making (Ottuh, 2020; Akpan, Adie, & Code, 2019; Nwoye, 2019). It specifically evaluates the impact of religious precepts on environmental policy in contemporary Urhoboland. The comparative implications of religion to environment in other regions of Africa and the climate-specific contours of the issue are also reviewed (Akpan, Adie, & Code, 2019). By enabling such an evaluation, the study seeks to affirm the continued relevance of religious principles, which often encourage environmental stewardship and can inform effective policy design. Through its utilization of the Urhobo worldview and its indigenous values and customs, this study contributes to the overall understanding of environmental matters.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Religious practices often play a vital role in sustainable environmental education and urban development. This is evident in various regions of Africa, including the Urhobo sub-nation of the Delta state, Nigeria. Unfortunately, the prominent role religion plays in the formation and shaping of environmental policy has, however, not been empirically established or identified; rather, Western models have dominated policy formation and development (Ottuh & Omosor, 2022). Africa's longstanding tradition of environmental management and resource conservation continues to be influenced by indigenous systems and religious models. These indigenous approaches remain vital for achieving a sustainable environment in modern Africa (Ogunbode &

Oyekan, 2023). However, Western influence and modernization now dominate policy formation, often displacing indigenous knowledge systems. Religion's role in environmental discourse has expanded over recent decades, affecting attitudes, development approaches, and strategies worldwide. Religions rooted in environmental ethics and values offer viable avenues for achieving environmental sustainability (Eluu, 2015). Policy makers, religious leaders, and the public are encouraged to emphasize religious values related to environmental preservation in their daily lives. Therefore, the extent to which religious values influence environmental concerns, policies, and sustainable development strategies — particularly in the Urhobo community — requires thorough analysis, and forms the foundation for the subsequent investigation into indigenous influence on policy development.

In various instances, African indigenous traditions have identified unorthodox solutions that address environmental problems within the continent. Such methods extend beyond the confines of environmental regulations and legislative instruments that are often top-down and impose crossword solutions. The indigenous African solutions are different, diverse, and widespread but are usually effective because of the acceptance, respect, and adherence they command within their respective communities. In principle, such solutions also tend to enhance the level of acceptance for external policy solutions (Nwoye, 2019). In many regions of the continent, customary rules have been adjudged to be more effective in ensuring that commonly held resources were protected and kept from over-exploitation than statutory policies (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). Before the coming of colonialism, the perception of indigenous African people about the environment was largely religio-centric, and this played a critical role in how they relate with and treated the natural environment.

A clear understanding of the African environmental philosophy is central to understanding such relationship. This is largely missing from contemporary African environmental discourse and studies and also in environmental policy formulation. Most extant policies in use in African countries were devised, developed, and formulated elsewhere (Ugwu, 2013). Attempts at indigenous uniform policy have so far not been very successful, largely because of the large diversity educational, religious, and socio-cultural differences that arise from the multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic nature of the continent. However, some fundamental indigenous social values and religious precepts are widely shared, and serve to characterize the African conception of environment and human's interaction with it. Religious precepts constitute one of the core paradigms identified in the sphere of environmental policies in Urhoboland at both local and national levels (Agha, 2003). They thus represent a key impactful force shaping the regional ecological management framework.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this paper is analytical evaluation that uses content analysis of extant literature and qualitative interviews. The extant literature reviewed includes journal articles, textbooks, and other policy documents that have relevance with the role of religion in promoting environmental policies. The interviews were conducted with key local leaders to collect data. Purposefully selected religious leaders and government officials with environmental oversight responsibilities from Urhoboland participated. These interviews provided further empirical support regarding the influence of religious precepts on environmental policy formulation. The role of religion in shaping environmental views was explored by interviewing 56 members of the Urhobo communities, ages between 21 and 60, comprising both men and women. The interviewees were drawn randomly from 13 Urhobo villages and towns in areas associated with widespread oil production and gas flaring. The sample size was designed to yield generalizable insights from the audience most affected by both the policies themselves and the wider environmental degradation seen in the Urhoboland.

Initial evidence from both primary and secondary data sources indicates that the influence of religious precepts on environmental-policy formulation in Urhoboland diverges markedly from the patterns observed elsewhere. On the international stage, the impact of religion tends to wane both in absolute terms and relative to other vectors, including economic, scientific, and technological influences. Empirical findings from the European Union and the USA corroborate this trend, where religious considerations occupy a progressively diminished role in the policymaking landscape.

OVERVIEW OF URHOBOLAND

The Urhobo are a prominent ethnic group in southern Nigeria, situated adjacent to the northeastern Niger Delta. The Urhobo language is spoken by a population of around 7 million individuals. The Urhobo people inhabit a region delineated by latitudes 6° and 5° 15' North and longitudes 5° 40' and 6° 25' East (Ekeh, 2005; Ojaide, 2001). Their neighbours consist of the Isoko to the southeast, Itsekiri and Ijaw to the west, Edo people to the north, Ijaw to the south, and Ukwuani people to the northeast. The Ughelli and Agbon Kingdoms are the most ancient kingdoms in Urhobo country, dating back to approximately the 14th century (Ekeh, 2005). The Okpe Kingdom is one of the twenty-four kingdoms in Urhoboland, legally created in the 17th century. The Okpe people are recognized for migrating to establish contemporary Sapele, and the Orodje of Okpe continues to wield sovereignty over the territory of Sapele.

Urhobo indigenous governments are led by an Ovies (kings), who serve as the paramount political authority. His advisors include the Otota (speaker) and the Ohonvwore or Okakuro, generally referred to as Ilorogun (singular: Olorogun) (chiefs).

Additional title bearers include the executioners (Ikoikpokpo) and the warriors (Igbu). Other political titles pertain to the several kingdoms. The legal system delineates a sharp separation between civil and criminal acts (Ojaide, 2001). The region comprises evergreen forests abundant in oil palm plants. The region is traversed by a network of streams, whose volume and flow are directly influenced by the seasons. The wet season typically spans April to October, whilst the dry season extends from November to March.

Urhobo is situated inside the Atlantic woodland belt that extends from Senegal to Angola in Africa. Prior to the Portuguese entrance in the late 15th century, this region was characterized by an unspoiled environment, inhabited by woodland peoples who existed without external influences and cultivated their own civilizations (Ekeh, 2005). The predominant population of the Urhobo ethnic group inhabits the southwestern Nigerian states of Delta and Bayelsa, collectively referred to as the Niger Delta. For instance, Ofoni is an Urhobo community situated in the Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Annual fishing festivities encompass masquerades, fishing competitions, swimming contests, and dancing, and have become integral to Urhobo tradition. A biennial two-day event known as Ohworu occurs in Ewreni, located in the southern region of the Urhobo territory.

The primary emphasis of Urhobo traditional religion is the veneration of "Oghene" (Almighty God), the paramount deity, alongside the acknowledgment of Edjo and Erhan (divinities). The deceased are regarded as living entities (ancestors) and perceived as active participants overseeing their family's matters. Notwithstanding this ancient and intricate belief system, the impact of Western civilization and Christianity is rapidly gaining acceptance as a religion in numerous Urhobo communities (Ojaide, 2001). A significant number adhere to Catholic and contemporary evangelical groups. Epha divination, akin to the Yoruba Ifá and observed by numerous West African ethnic groups, using strings of cowries (Ekeh, 2005). Religion in Urhoboland is important, providing the foundation on which the law of the land is based. Religion remains paramount in the politics, culture, and traditions of the people, and its practice is considered a sacrifice to the ancestors. The identity of the Urhobo is entwined with the upright nature of their god and the sacred nature of their deity's covenant with the built environment. The Urhobo believe, as a theology, that a human does not die until his time is due (Ojaide, 2001). They believe that liabilities are due to ancestors through sacrifice and that such fault could prevent happy tranquility in the land and adequate peace in the body of the dead.

RELIGIOUS PRECEPTS

Religious precepts are essential concepts that direct moral conduct and behaviour across diverse religion systems. They function as definitive guidelines for

conduct, offering adherents a structure for moral existence and spiritual development. These principles encompass a broad spectrum of subjects, including personal conduct, ethics, interpersonal relationships, and spiritual growth (Ottuh, 2025). Instances of religious doctrines within various faith groups encompass Christianity, Buddhism, and Catholicism. In Christianity, precepts commonly denote biblical doctrines, including the Ten Commandments and the Great Commandment to love God and one's neighbours (Exod. 20: 1-17; Matt. 22: 37-40; Mark 12: 29-31). In Buddhism, the Five Precepts (Pancha Sila) serve as essential ethical standards, promoting the avoidance of damage to sentient beings, theft, sexual impropriety, deceitful communication, and intoxication (Ratanakul, 2007).

In Catholicism, the Precepts of the Church encompass the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays, confess sins at least annually, and provide financial assistance to the Church. Religious precepts are essential for spiritual growth and development since they offer guidance, safeguard against malevolence, promote spiritual advancement, and encourage community cohesion. Individuals can incorporate religious principles into their daily lives by studying and reflecting on sacred texts, seeking divine guidance through prayer, and participating in fellowship with fellow believers (Ottuh & Jemegbe, 2021). By comprehending and implementing religious doctrines, individuals can enhance their faith, cultivate spiritual development, and lead a life congruent with their spiritual principles.

The Urhobo people possess a profound spiritual legacy and cultural traditions, centered on their belief in a supreme deity named Oghene, regarded as the creator of all existence. They play a crucial part in ancestor spirits, referred to as Erivwin, who persist among their people through reincarnation or a second birth. Divination is a fundamental component of their religious beliefs, employed to ascertain the will of the divine and maintain balance in existence. They also believe in spiritual entities that govern human events and endeavor to synchronize their lives with these entities' intentions through divination and rituals. The Urhobo traditional religion encompasses several ceremonies and activities, including libation, prayer, and sacrifice, aimed at obtaining direction, protection, and blessings from the spiritual realm. The religion is frequently a collective endeavor, pursued for the welfare of the entire society rather than solely for individual salvation. They also hold a belief in an afterlife, wherein the soul persists post-mortem, and engage in rites to facilitate the deceased's transfer to the spiritual realm.

OVERVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES IN URHOBOLAND

Environmental degradation is a key concern worldwide, especially in Africa. Various environmental guidelines have emerged to promote quality of life and economic development while safeguarding the environment. Although religion shapes

the moral frameworks governing societal interactions with nature, official environmental policies rarely incorporate religious tenets (Agha, 2003). Since the 1980s, the Nigerian government has recognized the environment as a “National Asset” carrying responsibility for protection (Akpan, Adie, & Code, 2019). The 1999 Nigerian Constitution mandates safeguarding the environment for present and future generations. Consequently, numerous laws regulate actions detrimental to the environment (for example, noise pollution, gas flaring, and deforestation among others).

The National Policy on Environment for instance, seeks to create principles for the interaction of natural and human activities, establishing standards for human welfare and the national economy. According to the National Policy on Environment, “the Nigerian environment shall be protected and constantly improved as a valuable asset for the benefit of the people.” These policies involve managing pollution from industries, urbanization, agriculture, and vehicle emissions through environmental quality standards and guidelines. These afore mentioned policies apply to the whole of the Nigerian society for which the Urhoboland is also included.

Religious Beliefs and Environmental Stewardship

Religion remains a powerful, enduring force shaping societal and cultural dynamics worldwide. Throughout history, it has guided decisions and attitudes on a wide range of public policy issues, including environmental protection. This is certainly true in Urhoboland, a traditional geo-political entity within Delta State in the South-South region of Nigeria. Christianity, Traditional African and Islamic religions have shaped, and continue to shape the environmental beliefs and practices of the Urhobo people and influence both traditional and government policy. Environmental policy-setting is often crucial to a country’s limited economic growth and improvement of the citizenry’s living standards (Ogar, & Bassey, 2019). Understanding whether and how religious precepts facilitate or impede the achievement of environmental goals is thus of great importance for Urhobo welfare. Urhobo-language community policy and decision-makers need a comprehensive understanding of religion’s multifaceted role in environmental attitudes to develop frameworks that facilitate informed environmental behaviour by the local populace.

Religious principles directly influence the perception of environmental matters among the people of Urhoboland. Christian cosmology, for instance, portrays the natural world as made for mankind’s use. Subsequently, on the occasion of the International Year of the Environment in 1992, religious leaders professed that, since God commanded that the earth and its fullness be subjugated by human, nothing could be more legitimate than development, which is the end-result of subjugation. Tracing the religious history of the Urhobos in particular, human beings should protect the

environment in all its ramifications (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). In addition, the Urhobo traditional worldview acknowledges spiritual entities other than God as creators of the earth, determining and controlling the natural phenomenon of rain, heat, mountains, rivers, and so on.

Urhobo Religious and Traditional Practices Influence on Policy

Religious precepts have shaped political and societal priorities throughout history. Religion often framed the purpose of a political entity and how rulers presented their authority to their subjects. In some polities, ideals about personhood and concepts of the political were defined through the basis of religion. In pre-colonial Urhoboland, for example, pre-Islamic and pre-Christian views informed the institution of rulership (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). The relationship between religion and political leadership, therefore, lends to an understanding of how religious institutions may influence political questions broadly speaking. It is within this nexus that the question of environment, religion, and government and policy should be framed.

Traditional beliefs and customs play a significant role in shaping peoples' sentiments and practices towards the environment. Indigenous religious ideologies of the peoples of Urhoboland situated in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria are very pivotal points of departure in their attitudes to nature. The Urhobos practice respect for the spirit world, not just because it was essential requirement of an acceptable life but also because of the benefits it offered to the living. With the entire land dotted with streams, rivers, and sacred groves inhabited by nature spirits and other deities of the religious pantheon, respect for the environment was paramount (Ogar & Bassey, 2019). The spirits and deities were perceived as custodians of the earth in its pristine state and any desecration of the environment was therefore viewed as an affront against the gods (Oduma-Aboh, 2015). The deities became ombudsmen of the environment and their traditional injunctions against environmental excesses and impositions were considered highly binding for the preservation of their presiding habitats.

Predator interference with the ecology of the environment was therefore taboo and punishable by the gods. Members of the community were therefore careful not to offend the deities with wanton commercialization of the land hostage to their cultural injunctions and other socio-religious regulations governing the territories under their jurisdiction (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). The conventional prohibitions against defiling the water bodies through the dumping of refuse, industrial and domestic effluents, spitting, urination and unrestricted fishing and water transportation were therefore religiously reinforced.

Indigenous religious traditions in Urhoboland have continued in one form or the other as potent social mores, and like some of the contemporary practices, incorporate a positive and enabling precept for environmental friendliness and sustenance (Akpan,

Adie, & Code, 2019). The indigenous doctrines were also responsible for the observance of forest sanctity and invoking of mystical retribution against perpetrators. At inception, the realization that most of the deities were actively tied to specific environments' – water, streams, groves, trees – only heightened religious injunctions against their defilement and the excessive desecration of sacred space; the Urhobos were unusually religious people and the socio-religious norms of a community were largely a function of the extant spiritual convictions of its members.

Influence of Modern Religious Movements in Urhoboland

In Urhoboland, as elsewhere in Africa, members of the rapid expansion of modern religious movements are increasingly engaging with environmental questions (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023), and there are consequential conflicts between environmental protection and religious activities. Furthermore, a contradiction between major new religious groups and the laws has been reported. While some adherents are required to undertake purification or spiritual cleansing, planning and undertaking the exercise entails extensive tree cutting, which in turn obstructs law enforcement and policy implementation through the disruption of the renewal of green areas.

Informed by a number of interviews and a comprehensive review of official documents, the present study situates the local patterns within the broader African and global contexts, which permits a clearer evaluation of the role that these and other religious dynamics play in relation to the formulation and implementation of environmental policies (Ogar & Bassey, 2019). This reveals that religious precepts continue to shape governmental policies, or at least processes for policy formulation. On a regional scale, highlights public perception of the challenges to the enforcement of the protection of the natural environment (Akpan, Adie, & Code, 2019). Additionally, sets out recommendations which may enhance efforts to protect the environment both within Urhoboland and elsewhere on the continent.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The sampled religious leaders in this study emphasized the integral role of time-honored religious traditions in shaping collective environmental consciousness. They highlighted that such traditions continue to inform communal guides for individual and collective behaviour in everyday life, thereby affecting receptivity towards environmental regulations (Ogar & Bassey, 2019). The government official concurred, attributing some of the observed non-compliance with environmental policies to a strong adherence to religious doctrines that run counter to regulatory objectives (Akpan, Adie, & Code, 2019). This official underscored the challenges faced in sensitizing influential community members whose religious adherence undermines policy adherence. Collectively, the interviewees underscored the necessity of

incorporating religious perspectives when designing and implementing environmental management frameworks.

Religious leaders note that religion significantly mobilizes people and fosters commitments contributing to sustainable environmental practices. Tribal religion and Christianity remain the dominant faiths in the region, with a minority practicing Islam (Onimhawo & Ottuh, 2007). Traditional Urhobo beliefs hold nature sacred; the earth is personified as an all-sustaining mother, and ancestors see environmental abuse as a profound sacred offence, punishable by supernatural powers. These religious beliefs place humanity within an integrated natural order, implying obedience to divine ordinances that govern human interaction with the natural world (Ogar & Bassey, 2019). Consequently, religious precepts can exert powerful influence on people's attitudes to the environment and promote sound environmental management. Since the late 1980s the Catholic Church has been teaching parishioners that the earth is God's gift to all and must be protected for the common good (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023; Eluu, 2015).

Government officials working on environmental issues in the Urhoboland of Nigeria see that religious factors add a layer of complexity to policy creation and enforcement. These officials—employed by local, state, or national agencies—recognize that people often follow their religious leaders' and institutions' guidance more closely than secular directives, which can lead to resistance or suspicion of government initiatives. Consequently, religious considerations must be factored into policy development, as the willingness of policymakers, religious leaders, and the community to cooperate will ultimately determine the success of a regulation. Consequently, some officials doubt the effectiveness of current laws and argue that they may not be worth the trouble. Nevertheless, the belief that all parties must work together is widespread among Urhoboland government employees. For environmental regulations to gain acceptance, policymakers and enforcement agencies require religious leaders' endorsement and explanations, enabling believers to embrace initiatives without violating their theological commitments (Ogar & Bassey, 2019). Effective collaboration frequently hinges on engagement with religious figures, since, like priests in ancient Rome; these leaders possess explicit spiritual authority and a close relationship with their communities that confer significant negotiating power (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). Recognizing and fostering such partnerships, therefore, constitutes a crucial part of the region's environmental strategy.

Religious teachings frequently address the relationship between humans and the environment, with many traditions emphasizing the sacred character of nature and the responsibility of believers to care for it. In Urhoboland, such teachings also shape the manner in which environmental concerns are perceived by the community (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023), acting as a key framing device for broader environmental and

sustainability issues. An assessment of public perceptions nonetheless reveals a number of conceptual and practical challenges that limit the influence of religious precepts on ecological policy formulation or implementation. Religion is one of the most spiritual forces in human lives as well as a social institution, which forms an inevitable part of human nature; it is also a powerful agent for environmental conservation (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). Studies by Dlamini (2019) and Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2014) confirm that faith affects how people see and respond to nature and the ongoing climate change issues, as well as a catalyst of sustainable practices. The African Environmental Outlook (AEO) also reported in 2008 that a rising spiritual concern with the African environment has led to the identification of religion as an important entry point to achieve sustainable development (Ogar & Bassey, 2019).

Robert (2002) argued that to overcome today's environmental challenges, religion and spirituality must be seriously re-examined for their transformative potentials in influencing humans to live in harmony with the surrounding environment. If religion can influence people in many aspects of life; it can influence attitudes and actions in everyday activities and outdoor recreational activities such as hiking, camping, cycling, swimming, shore-fishing, and water skiing to the protection of the environment (Dunlap, 2008). The development and management of the environment in Nigeria, and Urhoboland in particular, cannot be overemphasized as religion is the building block of human nature and the living environment. It creates awareness and emphasizes the importance of protecting and conserving the environment. The religious precepts of both traditional and the Christian religions establish the relationship between humans and the environment, showing the importance of the environment in the life of a human being (Ogunkan, 2010).

The participation of the Urhobo community in environmental initiatives provides a measure of the influence of religious precepts on environmental policies. The community has demonstrated a broad understanding of environmental issues and expectations, and members have consistently complied with regulations and programs (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). Religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping these favorable attitudes toward environmental protection. Religious leaders have widely supported the environmental policies, mobilizing their congregations for compliance. Attendance at pro-environmental programmes remains high in religious venues, and spiritual leaders emphasize environmental stewardship as a precept of their faith (Ogunkan, 2010). However, considerable growth in environmental awareness is required to promote self-help initiation and monitoring at the community level, with particular attention needed for younger generations. Prior to policy introduction, efforts to sensitize the youth through religious channels are essential, as many exhibit apathy toward environmental issues (Eluu, 2015). The Urhoboland illustrates how religion can

contribute to mitigating environmental degradation through increased compliance and sustained individual and group activities aligned with pro-environmental principles.

Challenges in Implementing Environmental Policies amid Religious Precepts

Religious precepts pose challenges to environmental policy implementation in Urhoboland. When religious objectives conflict with environmental goals, policies frequently experience poor execution (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). Socio-political dynamics, including phenomena such as the 'oil curse' and mandated disruptions by militant groups, further hinder effective policy enforcement (Eluu, 2015). Disputes over land ownership among corporate entities, alongside inadequate funding, corruption, and insufficient infrastructure, also contribute to implementation challenges. Conflicts between religious and environmental matters work well in many countries. Such is not the case in Urhoboland, in the southern part of Nigeria. Religious precepts and the pursuit of environmental goals have held the potential for conflict throughout history. Historically, religion and environmental conservation have been intrinsically connected.

Some Urhobo religious tenets about the stewardship of the environment, as enforced through the oath-taking of priests, hold great potential for safeguarding resources and preventing indiscriminate exploitation. Environmental policies contend with strict religious doctrines based on pre-colonial cultural divisions of nature into two spheres divided by land-indoors, water-outdoors (Akpan, Adie, & Code, 2019). The Natural Resources Conservation Council actuated by religious tenets coexists with the Ministerial Technical Committee, the Division of Environmental Health, the Environmental Sanitation Authority, and private-sector groups to address environmental issues in Urhoboland. The government also seeks to control exploitation of natural resources and balance environmental management and economic development.

Among the Nigerian people, religious belief is a major cultural value and a motivational force, and it also shades attitudes toward the environment. Nigeria's Federal Environmental Protection Agency does not yet have an enabling act for conservation and protection of the environment for the nation's citizens. The agency, created by government controls activities related to the environment (construction, ventures, etc.) only after they have received prior government approval. Unfortunately, the act of controlling or monitoring industrial and mining activities is ineffective—especially for private businesses or agencies that have not been monitored and therefore break regulations (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). Environmental legislation by state governments is incomplete; generally the quality of environmental regulations at the state level is poor and implementation is ineffective (Obasola, 2013).

The Urhobo people of southern Nigeria have long been embedded in a religious landscape characterized by deep reverence for natural elements, a cultural heritage that

informs contemporary environmental challenges and policy responses (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). Socioeconomic factors further impact the efficacy of these policies. Unemployment, for instance, constrains the capacity of many to engage fully with environmental regulations, as economic survival can take precedence over ecological preservation (Ogunkan, 2010). The dependency on rivers and streams for various domestic, social, and spiritual activities disincentivizes care for these water bodies. Open defecation remains widespread, contributing to water quality degradation despite prohibitive regulations (Ogunkan, 2010). Biodiversity conservation is similarly impeded by a scarcity of alternative livelihoods, as traditional agricultural and hunting practices persist, posing threats to local fauna and flora.

The Way Forward

Environmental policies in Urhoboland face challenges regarding their alignment with the community's religious precepts. The influence of religious precepts on environmental policies in Urhoboland at present has been evaluated. Incorporating religious perspectives into broad policy frameworks aids the achievement of sustainable environmental protection outcomes within the community.

Integrating religious perspectives

Religious precepts exerted considerable influence on the formulation of environmental policy in Urhoboland, particularly during the 1980s and 1990s and even today. Noting the religious importance of water and sacred groves, Urhobo leaders drew on traditional religious values to defend these natural resources, thereby shaping environmental regulations and safeguarding constituents' and devotees' interests (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). Beyond protection of culturally significant sites, religious institutions in Urhoboland more generally helped to facilitate the acceptance of political initiatives aimed at ecological sustainability. The shielding of legal frameworks by religious sanctions encouraged greater adherence to environmental codes. Thus, the Urhobo case contrasts with other contexts in which religious precepts have impeded environmental policies. Examining factors that augmented the influence of religion in Urhoboland may yield important insights for urban development worldwide, where the extensive penetration of religious institutions offers promising scope for encouraging ecological well-being and forging a more sustainable society.

Promoting sustainable practices

The principles of environmental protection are closely linked to the goal of achieving sustainable development. Problems such as pollution, climate change, degradation, and loss of essential ecosystem services continue to pose serious challenges to development in many parts of the world, including Urhoboland in

Nigeria (Ottuh, 2020). Promoting sustainable development, prevention of environmental degradation, and the preservation of natural resources are thus necessary considerations for policy development. The development and implementation of effective environmental policies are crucial to ensure a healthy environment, support national economic growth, and enhance the quality of life in the region (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). These objectives can be effectively achieved by promoting sustainable practices rooted in the region's rich cultural and religious heritage.

Longitudinal studies

Future research on religious precepts' impact on Urhoboland's environmental policies should include longitudinal studies (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023). Such studies facilitate understanding of long-term trends and changes in either religious or environmental variables or how changes in one can influence the other over time. Tracking specific metrics, such as water quality or air pollution, through regular measurements at fixed locations over several years allows investigators to capture long-term variations in environmental performance (Ottuh, 2020). Similarly, sociological or behavioural surveys repeated at consistent intervals can provide insight into the evolution of religious stances and perceptions regarding environmental concerns. A time series framework applied to these data will reveal whether shifts in religious precepts prompt environmental policy decisions or whether policy changes stimulate religious responses (Ottuh, 2020). Observations suggest that the environmental impact grows as religious groups establish themselves more firmly: the longer a group remains in a spot, the more pollutants, odours, noise, or water contamination may accumulate. Therefore, a study monitoring both religious longevity and environmental state could clarify causality and temporal dynamics. Cross-cultural comparisons across African setting and beyond might also contribute to future efforts to establish a broader framework of religious-precept influence. Systematic data will determine whether similar patterns prevail elsewhere, reflecting particular traditions in Urhoboland or Africa more generally or if other mechanisms dominate in different contexts.

Cross-cultural comparisons

Many challenges from deforestation and land degradation associated with underdevelopment (Ogunbode & Oyekan, 2023) have received differing approaches worldwide, including religious ones. All religions, ancient and present, have their origins in cultural, historical, and spiritual or pragmatic issues in a particular geographical context; hence, their origin also dictates evolution over time and adaptation to other contexts through cross-cultural comparison. Large-scale land-use conversion, deforestation, and environmental degradation in many Urhobo

communities unexpectedly confront relevant environmental policies. In many African communities, policy efforts sometimes encounter difficulties because of religion. Cross-cultural comparison is a tool helping to understand many areas of cultural change enabling global understanding. To understand the comparative influence of religion on environmental policies in Urhoboland, carrying out the same conversion process in countries of the Urhobo type and observing policy implementations may be insightful. Most policies intended to conserve environment by international bodies, states, and communities often find it difficult to influence communities' attitudes because of religion. People tend to reduce reliance on policies, adopting a "wait and see" approach and, if the situation does not improve, seek alternatives. Many religious doctrines, particularly traditional ones, discourage interference with the environment and frown at excessive exploitation or conversion; continuous exploitation invites the gods' wrath. Consequently, many campaigners for better environmental practices and government officials find it difficult to achieve the desired results because the people suffer spiritually when policies compel them to contravene that religious conviction. Excessive demand for lands triggers hazard or ecocide, which religion is currently aiding to ameliorate.

CONCLUSION

So far in this paper, it has been noted that past studies have analyzed the role of religion in the Nigerian environmental crisis and continued to recommend further investigations into the influence of religious precepts on environmental policies. Religion offers a highly plausible means since it remains a major form of environmental education in Nigeria. The three main religions in the country hold environmental ethics and values that could serve as an effective panacea. These values should therefore form a critical part of a well-crafted environmental education strategy. Conversely, within Urhoboland—and, more broadly, within the African context—religion maintains a dominant, and in fact increasing, centrality as an environmental-policy driver. Here, religious precepts overshadow secular considerations, with regional and international political influences also contributing. Notably, policy goals, though shared, receive comparatively limited attention in the local setting. This divergence in influence may explain the comparatively sluggish development of Urhobo environmental policy relative to European counterparts, where robust economic and scientific backing accelerates progress.

Consequently, environmental stakeholders and policymakers, governments, nongovernmental organizations, religious leaders, and the general public must accord greater attention to religious values in the pursuit of a sustainable environment. Recommended measures include intensified public education on protection and preservation through governmental and religious institutions. Educational

establishments and places of worship ought to teach natural resource preservation and health. Churches and mosques should be sited away from residential areas, while environmental littering must be discouraged. Further recommendations entail encouraging afforestation of farmland, immediate cessation of deforestation, and avoidance of bush burning. Additionally, the religious education curriculum should incorporate themes on climate and environmental change. Urhobo religion affects the country's relationship with the environment in significant ways. This impact is felt through the institution of environmental policies and adherence to them by the Urhobo people. The religious worldview of the largest ethnic grouping in Delta State Nigeria should be given adequate attention in any formulation of environmental policies for the region if such policies must prove effective. Urhobo religious precepts spelt out within the framework of Urhobo religion remain a viable tool that has the potential to tackle environmental problems in Urhoboland if integrated into environmental policies.

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