



Traditional African Religion and Socio-cultural Practices in Environmental Resources Conservation

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Abstract

African religion is the indigenous religion of the African people with its existence as old as man. It is the religion that sticks closely to the environment which is up of both physical and non-physical including the spiritual components of human existence. There are lots of rules and regulations made by Africans towards guiding and protecting this natural habitat called the environment. This becomes the customs and traditions that guides and governs Africans in the use of the environments especially on matters of religious interest. This paper therefore seeks to present the nature of African religion—culture and environment; it aims at painting the picture that exists between African religions and Ecology as well as African religion and environmental pollution. The work also focuses on the state of African religion and environmental degradation. It suggests some ways forward on how to facilitate environmental peace as inherent in the religion of Africans. This will go a long way in conserving and revitalizing the environment to enhance convenience for religious functions before the close of the 21st Century.

Key Words: Religion, Culture, Environment and Sacred Authorities, conservation and resources management

Introduction

The conservation of natural resources globally is facing a serious threat from both the conservationist's perspectives and other forms of management system, which has almost failed to guarantee the continuous supply of environmental goods for the benefits of mankind. This failure has been attributed to the inelastic demands human beings have claimed for them self, which has been confirmed by the United Nation and other similar charter where world governments have ratified. The situation of resource conservation has become even more worrisome because human population has always been on the increase and the need for dependence on environmental resources is also ever increasing, but the capacity of the environment to meet the ever demanding request of human beings on the environment is limited by periods of regeneration and replenishment of these environmental resources, (Mkenda, 2010, Eneji, et al., 2012a, 2012b). Discussion on environmental parlance on how to conserve most environmental resources like minerals, soil, forest and wildlife resources, water resources among others is a top priority for most conservation experts and government. The situation is even more worrisome as government and other agencies charged with the responsibilities of managing public forest have meet a lot of disappointments, forest management systems like top-down forest management approach, government forest management approach, joint forest management (government and community) have all failed at one point or the other as a result of people's ineptitude towards forest resources and their management (Rim-Rukeh, Ierhievwie & Agbozu, 2013).

Several studies have shown that the conservation of natural resources involves the sustainable use of environmental resources to fend for the needs of humanity now and to be able to provide for the needs of the future generation without necessarily putting them to jeopardy. Rim-Ruke, et al., (2013) observed that natural

resource conservation has to do with the management of valuable natural resources such as timber, fish, topsoil, pastureland, minerals, forests, wildlife, parkland, wilderness and watershed areas. There are several definitions of the concept – conservation, some stressing the structural roots of anthropologist interests, others arguing from the point of view of economic reasons. Aniah, Arkum & Bonye, (2014) defined conservation as the maintenance of genetic species, and ecosystem diversity in the natural abundance in which they occur. Thomas (2003) sees conservation as the sacrifice of immediate rewards in return for delayed ones. Smith and Wishnie (2000) defined conservation as actions that prevent or mitigate biodiversity loss and are designed to do so. In time past, local people have developed a variety of resource management practices that continue to exist in tropical Africa, Asia, South America and other parts of the world (Appiah-Opoku, 2007).

Biodiversity loss has been a major concern to mankind, especially during the last quarter of the previous century. This concern culminated in the “Biodiversity Convention” that was opened for signature at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June, 1992. Since then different international fora, including the Beijing Conference for Women in 1995 echoed the problems of continuing environmental degradation (Appiah-Opoku, 2007). A lot of factors have been attributed as reasons for the sudden disappearance of most biodiversity species and other forms of environmental resources. Factors like infrastructural development, habitat decimation and fragmentation, agricultural expansion, hunting, quarry and mineral exploration among others. These factors have contributed in no small way to the decimation and disappearance of most species. Kideghesho, (2009) in his study found that another factor which has been found to have put so much pressure on natural resources is that of the growing human population with its ever demanding needs for housing expansion, agricultural expansion, other infrastructure and industrialization. Having gotten the powers to satisfy human needs, it therefore becomes very important for the protection of the natural environment especially to indigenous people since they derive most benefits from the environment. Despite the fact that many benefits are derived from the natural environment, human activities continuously degrade the environment, hence the need to adopt more sustainable methods of protecting the environment for posterity.

The loss of habitats has contributed notably to local extinctions and vulnerability of fauna and flora in different localities, including protected areas. The wildlife migratory corridors and dispersal areas, being habitats in their own right, are equally affected by anthropogenic factors – principally because they are not legally protected. Most biodiversity species have become either locally extinct or completely extinct; some species like Cape eland (*Taurotragus oryx*), Coke's hartebeest (*Acelaphus buselaphus*), buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*), oryx (*Oryx gazella*), lesser kudu (*Tragelaphus imberbis*), cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and lion (*Panthera leo*), gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla delhi*), among others have not been sighted in the corridor of the Cross River National park and other national parks within these zones, which is an area delineated for the purpose of conserving these species since the late 1980s (Eneji, et al, 2012a)

The relationship between Religion, Culture and the Environment (ecology)

In a more refine way; Gbenda (2010) describes Ecology as a branch of biology that studies living organism and their natural environment with the principle of continued relationship with every other element that makes up its environment. The author said that the environment is interconnected and interdependent having man, plants, animals, rivers, mountain and other depending and interdependent on one another. Mbiti (1919) observed that

religion comes to play in ecology when men utilizes the above natural or ecological factors like mountains, trees, animals, plants as objects, or places of worship. They are treated as sacred things believing that they are spiritual entities. To this, Gbenda (2010) further affirms that the awareness in religious traditions as sacred reality that is often recognized as a creature manifestation, a pervasive sustaining presence, a vital power in the natural world, or an epitome leading to the realization of inter-being. African religion finds its strength and success from the environment. It is important to note that if trees, insects, birds, mountains and other ecological habitats are destroyed, then the power of religion is equally being affected (Becker and Ghimire, 2003).

Collaborating with the above statement, Agbiji (2015) observes that in real African religious life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. The researcher owes his existence to others, plants and animals found in the land and even his past generation and his contemporaries. The author simply found that he is part of the ecological phenomena. To promote and ensure the survival of land, Africans respect, celebrate and judiciously use their rich diversity in the living environment in the interest of building a flourishing world. Sentiments, attitudes and practices that are directly or indirectly prejudicial to their living and other living things are resisted, rejected and condemned. Land is a strong factor of production housing the eco-life.

Indigenous African Religion also known as traditional African Religion involves human values, attitudes, beliefs and practices, based on various African world views in relationship to the environment, while the environment refers to the totality of the surrounding condition of an ecosystem or a person's existence and the way they relate with the world (Berkes, 2003; Bonye, 2008).

The environment according to these researchers covers the social, political, economic, spiritual and natural environment. In other word, it comprises of both the living and non-living things, (components) including water, air, land, all plants, man and animals and the existing relationships. African religion is shaped by African problems, needs and aspirations, expressed using symbols derived from the immediate environment. African religion is traditional, not because it is a fossil, static and incapable of adaptation to new situation and other changes, but because it is a spirituality that originated from the people's environment in ancestral world. Religion is the set of beliefs, feelings, dogmas and practices that defines the relation between human being and sacred or divinity of the gods within the environment. Culture is defined as those social behaviors and norms found within a given people. There are sets of rules and regulations that bind a given people together, while environment refers to all living and non-living things (components) that make up our surrounding, comprising the biological, physical and social components forms the environment (Himmelfarb, 2006; Davenport, De Luca, Jones, Mpunga, Machaga, Kitegile and Phillips, 2008).

In another dimension of relationship between religious belief and taboo systems are at the centre of life as a whole. This spiritual beliefs and taboos create respect for nature, reverence for hills, forest, and rivers. These are indications to show that the life of man in his religion is greatly influenced and directed by things found around his environment. To Gbenda, (2010) also, eco-theology of African religions is revealed through nature and manifest in the religious culture. This means that for African religion to be what it should be as it was, it must recognize natural creatures within the environment. Religion and the environment are dependent entities on each other with man at the centre of it to create interdependence. Gumo (2012) carefully outlines the following to show the relationship that exist between African religion and the environment;

- i. **Taboos:** A culture or religious custom that forbids people not to do, touch, use or mention certain things/words in their environment and within a given environment. Religion utilizes taboos as links between its practices and the environment. Without making taboos to ensure order in the environment, the society is bound to embrace confusion. Examples of some of those religious taboos are; adultery, teenage pregnancy, stealing, murder, disrespect for elders, incest, and so on. When these crimes are committed the society or that person has desecrated the land and must require a religious cleansing via some sacrifices to appease the gods. People in most communities are also forbidden from entering any forest designated as evil forest, exploitation or entrance into such forest is a taboo. Other parts of the environment that are also designated the abodes of the gods and goddess are pond, sanctuaries, rocks, streams, rivers, burial grounds and among others.

- ii. **Totems:** Taboos against specific actions and behaviors are common in virtually all human cultures. They are moral or cautionary restrictions placed on certain actions by authority of people (e.g. kings, priests, elders, etc.). They derive mainly from religious and long-established traditional beliefs and social customs, and some have developed as a response to environmental problems and logic derived from indigenous knowledge. Conservation-related taboos may be categorized as specific species taboos and habitat taboos. The specific species taboos protect flora and fauna in space and time; they regulate and prohibit harvesting, detrimental use and consumption. Habitat taboos control access and use of resources in a particular area, e.g. in sacred habitats, thus checking anthropogenic interference detrimental to flora, fauna and their habitats. Although they lack formal legal backing, taboos and regulations are very effective in regulating human behavior and forcing compliance to societal values and, therefore, enhancing conservation. Research has demonstrated their potential in protection and survival of the endemic, threatened and keystone species and their habitats

These are natural objects, animals or plants, regarded as a symbol by a given tribe or family. They are living thing such as birds, animals or a plant that people reverence and respect within the environment. Totemism as a religious practice can lead to an environmental protection whereby those plants and animals treated this way are allowed to live, increase and multiply exceedingly. In Umuaro, the male deer (stag) is forbidden, in Nnewi, the python is not killed or harmed; it is seen as a human being representing the gods of the land. In Gakem, the roadrunner (bird anyiribum) is not killed or eaten by the people because it was this bird that saved them by wiping the footprints of warriors from this community during war times, in Umuaro, the male deer (stag) is a taboo, in Nnewi, the python is a sacred animal which should not be killed, in Bekwarra, fox is not eaten, in Adihe in Bekwarra, snail is not eaten. The Muslim do not eat pig, because legend has it that during the Jihad war, there was scarcity of water, it was the pig that led them to a source of water for the warriors to have a drink to survive during that period. All these animals have at one point or the other done something peculiar for the people of that community, hence, they revered them and designate them as totemic.

- iii. **Knowledge of sacred places or objects:** defines sacred sites as ‘Power Points...A location, site, object, or edifice, believed to be sacred or to possess magical or supernatural energies, or to be the dwelling place of spirits of the dead, nature spirits or gods. The “power” at points emanates from an ineffable spiritual source, identified as cosmic in origin or part of the living earth. Coming in contact with it instills feelings of wonder, awe, fear, fascination, and mystery. Sacred sites include groves, forests, hills or streams and other water bodies. From time

immemorial, traditional societies all over the world have set aside such places and protected them from destruction through taboos and cultural beliefs. Africans set aside places, things and objects from the environment as sacred abodes of the spirit or gods. These sacred places are essentially used as avenues for religious ritual, initiation grounds and places for scarifies to the gods for one favor or the other. Places like evil forest, sacred ponds, sanctuaries, and grooves are designated as abodes of the gods and as should entrance, exploitation and disturbance is restricted by the community through the orders of the chief priest who serve as the mouth piece of the gods. Except on permission, entrance, disturbance and exploitation are seen as an offense and defaulters must pay some fine in form of scarifies to the gods to appease the gods.

- iv. **Belief that some African natural phenomena have mystic powers:** That the universe is full of powers that directly connect physical objects, animals and plants as such should be treated with honor. These mystical powers are sources of religious strength and sustenance.
- v. **Influence from religious authorities:** Chief priest, medicine men, diviners, prophets, soothsayers, rainmakers and initiation leaders who are the sacred authorities in African religions treat the environment with respects, though this is not specifically called conservation, but their practices have been seen to have contributed greatly to conservation, majorly because they depend on the environment to solve or mitigate people's problems.
- vi. **Rituals:** many rituals are carried out in a designated natural environment believed to be the abode of the gods or goddess. But if such a designated aspect of the environment is destroyed, then it means such ritual performance may be impeded by the activities of men.
- vii. **Initiation rite:** Rites of passage from adolescent to adulthood are carried out in some special places like in the river, pond, forest or evil forest. These rites of passage are performed to protect the environmental resources in Africa since some species of plants or animals have been set aside for this purpose. Taboos are set in favor of them equally.

Local people have developed a variety of consistent resource conservation and management strategies in many parts of Africa in the past (Kamla-Raj, 2006). Traditional African societies also observe environmental principles that help in regulating their interactions with the natural environment (Kideghesho, 2008). It has been recognized that Traditional belief system is embedded with environmental characteristics, features and representations unlike the Western culture which saw this belief system as inimical to the growth, unity, and cohesion of the communities (Appiah-Opoku, 2007). The coming to being of western civilization and culture eroded the rich cultural values, belief system and norms of the indigenous people and also changed their way of worship.

Himmelfarb, (2006) found that one of such approach is the use of traditional methods that have helped them to regulate interactions with their natural environment. The role of traditional beliefs in the conservation of a large number of elements of local biodiversity, regardless of their use value, dates back to creation (Berkes et al., 2000; Turner et al., 2000; Shastri et al., 2002). Traditional conservation ethics are capable of protecting biodiversity species in particular and the environment in general as long as the local communities have a stake in it. In fact, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) systems are infused with practices and concepts, and modes of teaching

and learning that can be related directly and indirectly to resource stewardship and conservation at various scales. However, despite considerable attention directed towards documentation of these systems and approaches to conservation, we still have a limited understanding about their development, evolution, and transmission over time and space Chacon (2012) and Krech (2005) have pointed out that the existence of traditional beliefs/taboo does not guarantee sustainable harvest of natural resources.

Traditional African religion (ATR) and cultural practices as done in most part of African communities are environmentally friendly and sustainable, thus contributing so much to natural resources sustainability and conservation (International Institute for Environment and Development, 1992). In Africa and indeed Nigeria, the traditional belief system holds the ascription of supernatural powers to objects called gods and goddesses. The major tenet of African traditional religion and belief system lies in the belief that the abode of the gods and goddesses is located on rock, streams, pond, tress, land or anywhere they so desire to live within the community. The gods choose their followers through the rites of initiation with a core messenger who is the mouth piece of the gods living among human beings. The gods or goddess communicate its will to the people through the juju priest or chief priest.

The belief system is that the gods protect the community members from harm, famine, bareness, impotence, drought, epidemics and war among others. The gods avenge their anger on whoever omits or commits any flaw for which their presence forbids; hence, the cultural system holds to a very high esteem all the precepts of the laws of the gods (Shastri et al., 2002). These beliefs and strategies are passed on to those who become initiated into adulthood in the community during the rites of initiation. The taboos and beliefs have legal backing in the rules and institutions of the communities which are strong enough to make people obey the religious and cultural regulations (Venkataraman, 2000; Cox, 2000). The role of traditional beliefs in the protection of natural resources is reflected in a variety of practices including sacred groves and Rim-Rukeh et al. (2013) sacred landscapes. For example, in India, particular patches of forests are designated as sacred groves under customary law and are protected from any product extraction by the community. Such forests are very rich in biological diversity and harbor many endangered plant species including rare herbs and medicinal plants. Tiwari et al. (1998) identified 79 sacred groves and their floristic survey revealed that these sacred groves are home to at least 514 species representing 340 genera and 131 families. About 1.3% of total sacred grove area was undisturbed, 42.1% had relatively dense forest, 26.3% had sparse canopy cover, and 30.3% had open forest. Notably, the species diversity indices were higher for the sacred grove than for the disturbed forest.

Study on two sacred groves, *Oorani* and *Olagapuram*, situated on the north-west of Pondicherry found a total of 169 angiosperms from both sites. The *Oorani* grove (3.2 ha) had 74 flowering plant species distributed in 71 genera and 41 families; 30 of them are woody species, 8 are lianas and 4 are parasites. The *Olagapuram* grove (2.8 ha) was more species-rich with 136 species in 121 genera of 58 families; woody species were fewer (21) while 9 lianas and 3 parasites occurred (Ramanujam and Kadamban, 2001). The traditional conservation of non human primates by Iban forest farmers in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, is an important part of their subsistence economy, and as such aided the promotion of certain aspects of the traditional Iban agroforestry system (Hutton and Leader-Williams, 2003). In a research on traditional and indigenous methods of conserving biodiversity, Ntiamoa-Baidu (1991) identified three indigenous methods for conserving biodiversity in Ghana and other West African sub region (Nigeria inclusive). The tribal communities of Urhobos in Delta Central – have a tradition of environmental

conservation based on various religious beliefs. An essential feature of Urhobos in the conservation of natural resources is totemism (the belief in a supernatural connection between a group of people and a group of objects like certain animal species, sometimes plants, or more rarely other objects). Usually, it is a taboo to kill or eat an animal totem (Tonukari, 2007).

Social taboos exist in invariably all cultures throughout the world, and represent a class of informal institutions, where traditional, religiously governed norms or taboo system define the human behavior. These taboos remain the prime factor guiding their conduct towards the exploitation of the natural resources. However, the singular role played by these informal systems of taboo in conservation of biodiversity has not been given its due importance. The present paper attempts to render forth the salient aspect of conservation borne out of the taboo system in practice surrounding the sacred natural sites, principally the sacred forests, in some communities of Delta State, Nigeria. The vital roles of beliefs, rituals and taboos in traditional natural resources management are emphasized. In another study by Aniah, Arkum & Bonye, (2014), the authors found that the environment is the Primary source of life (spiritual) ancestors and other gods live within them and communicate to us through them with the help of soothsayers and earth priests who are their custodians, for good health, high crop yields and peaceful co-existence of the whole eco-system.

The earth, that is trees, rocks, water bodies, and all the things that it holds, is considered "life" of the God Almighty. The earth is the mother and God the father. Livelihood - Production of goods and life and all the basic needs food, shelter and health come from the natural resources hence the need to protect and conserve them for future generations. Certain areas with trees, rocks, wildlife and water bodies with its aquatic life are considered sacred and needs to be protected. Food - fruits, nuts, leaves, Shelter- wood, earth, stones, water etc Health - roots, leaves, bark of trees and grasses are sources of herbal medicine”.

Religion and Environmental Pollution

Culture is comprised of values, beliefs and norms shared by a group of people. In this sense, ‘culture conditions individuals’ perceptions of the world, influences what they consider important, and suggests courses of action that are appropriate and inappropriate’ (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Broad comparisons of whole cultures have the tendency to ignore vast variations in values, beliefs and norms within cultures, thus reducing their expediency. Nevertheless, cultural difference clearly has an important impact on direct drivers. Cultural factors, for example, can influence and regulate people's behaviors towards the species and their habitats (e.g. consumption patterns) and, therefore, act as an important driver of environmental change. The traditional African cultural practices, previously regarded as inferior or incompetent, are increasingly gaining recognition as an important complement to existing conservation strategies. Studies have shown that synergy between traditional ecological knowledge and conservation science supports forest preservation in Ecuador (Kingazi, Mombo and Shemdoe, 2008).

The rationale for current efforts seeking to revive and promote traditional African cultural practices as a conservation option is backed by several arguments. One is that the use of practices coincides well with the philosophy of co-management approaches that advocate sharing of power, rights and responsibilities between the state and local resource users (Berkes, 2003). This argument is centered on the management capabilities of local communities and possible dangers of disregarding them. The fact that the communities have regular interactions

and are more familiar with resources in their environment than other potential actors makes them one of the best managers of resources, who could contribute effectively to current conservation efforts. The background to community-based conservation argues that: 'communities down the millennia have developed elaborate rituals and practices that limit off-take levels, restrict access to critical resources and distribute harvests.' Different scholars have cautioned that failure to involve communities actively in management of their resources leads to destructive use of resources ((Kingazi, Mombo and Shemdoe, 2008).

Enchantment and disenchantment: the role of community in natural resource conservation. The nature of benefits and the benefits of nature – why wildlife conservation has not economically benefited communities in Africa, this is because community members have not been actively involved in conservation activities because of the new paradigm shift in resources management. If communities members can be actively involved in managing resources, if their traditional practices are cherished and allowed, the conservation of resources will be a collective action by community members. Current literature attribute strengths of traditional cultural practices to their demonstrated role in thwarting depletion of resources, as a key incentive for conservation, their economic affordability, their reliability and sustainability (Kweka, 2009).

Anyacho,(2004) clearly defines pollution as the introduction of an undesirable changes in the particular features of concern such as the constitution and quality of water, air or soil . The author equally describes it as a term that refers to all the ways that human activity harms the natural environment. The researcher noted that environmental pollution has been singled out as one of the serious problem facing humanity and other forms of life in the environment. The researchers of this work are of the opinion that since man is at the centre of the environment whatever affects him affects his religion as well as the ecosystem. A polluted environment is an unfriendly environment for African religious activities as well as the interaction with eco-life.

Shishima (2008) asserts that traditional medicine with a strong affinity with African religion occupies a place in health engineering, the author sees it as a principal way in which Africans adapt to their environment and carry out their religious functions. The author continued by enumerating several medicinal practices undertaken by most medicine men and women as follows;

- i. Religious objects such as water from the shrine of deities and various objects are connected to religious cults and rituals.
- ii. Animals and birds and their feathers, beaks, gizzards, heads, feet, toes and horns; various animal skins, bones, skulls, quills, snake, iguana, monitor lizard, gecko and chameleon; various insect like butterfly, fly, wasp, beetle, cricket and bees are gotten from the environment for use in religion.
- iii. Plants such as herbs, leaves, roots and so on.
- iv. Living objects which include the bulk of nature found in plant and animal kingdom in the environment after consumption produces some pollution, if handled properly, they help in providing nutrient for the environment, but if handled wrongly, then they constitute nuisance to the environment. The question we have to ask is that, with the level of pollution today affecting the environment how can African religious practices be successful? Pollution therefore is strongly an agent against African religious practices because it does not only contaminate the environment and the abodes of the gods, but also destroy the aesthetic beauty of the environment.

In cognizance of the above discussion, Anyam, (2013) presents the nature of pollution in the following categories:

- i. Water pollution where oil spillage, dust from factories and other chemicals make the water unpleasant for man's consumption.
- ii. Air pollution occur when carbon fumes from vehicles and factories, bush burning, mines, refineries, fills the atmosphere thereby rendering it dangerous to human health .
- iii. Noise pollution occurs when excessive sound or noise is occupying the environment and does not permits serene atmosphere. Such noise includes; factory machines, loud speakers from stores and beer parlors, chambers, churches, mosque, market, airplane etc.
- iv. Land pollution occurs when the soil that should be used for religious function in Africa is contaminated by poor agricultural uses, mines, mineral exploitation, industrial and toxic waste and indiscriminate disposal of urban and domestic waste. All these are dangerous to the environment and hinder the effective and efficient African religious activities.

African Religions and Environmental Degradation

This is the dreadful conditions of diverse effect over man's health and prosperity due to pollution of air, water, soil and atomic pollution. It can also be seen as a process by which a condition or something changes to a worse condition or state. Kyernum and Agber (2013) identified the following factors as responsible for environmental degradation;

- i. Over population where an increasing population who depend on the forest products as well as available numbers of medicine men rely on it in various ways like grazing, harvesting honey, firewood, mining, social gathering, worship, charcoal burning among others.
- ii. Urbanization, this occurs when rural dwellers that move to urban areas are exposed to mode of change which hinders the development of their spirituality. It detaches people from their tradition and belief system.
- iii. Secularization where scientific discoveries, influences from foreign religion, modern education and industrialization are overtaking African religious practice. This goes hand in hand with destruction of some environmental goods/services related to African religion.
- iv. Modernization which entails new lifestyle imparted to African people with the belief that African indigenous beliefs and practices are archaic. The adoption of this new lifestyle endangered the spirit of African people. Others are;
- v. Recycling
- vi. Development of science and technology.

The above problems will affect African religious practices in the following ways;

- i. Scarcity of medical products
- ii. Deforestation
- iii. Displacement of spirits
- iv. Dislodgement and desecration of shrines and sacred groves
- v. Destruction and defilement of aquatic life and spirits.

Mercado (2005) posited that there is hostility on the part of inherited prejudices developed by past colonial theology and the feeling of superiority over against primitive religion of animism and polytheism . African religions is labeled as ‘empire Satan’ where pagans, heathens, idolatrous, polytheist, barbarous, superstitious fetishistic, primitive people live. In this kind of perception it is difficult to see sacred authorities operating in a free atmosphere. Kweka, (2009) in another perspective observes that the fear of syncretism on the part of Africans who have converted into Christianity is hindering many from consulting diviners, African medicine practitioner’s healers, priest/priestesses so that they will not be inculcated again with the culture of African Religion. This is another serious challenge to the practice of an indigenous culture that is closer to the environment. How African Environmental Ethics can succeed in this kind of scenario?

The author strongly commented again, that the worse hydra headed challenge is poverty. When you do not have enough as to fight and defend yourself, then the haves can beat you down and collect what belongs to you. The level of poverty and oppression in African raises another obstacle to not only the promotion of African Religion but also to economic democracy and justice that are needed to procure one’s need and ensure the fundamental Right of people are guarantee especially as it pertains to religions. Our rights are threatened and violated in many ways. During urban development such as; building of houses and industries, sacred places like shrines, trees, forests, ponds, lakes are destroyed without due consultation with the agents of African religions.

This means that the source of peace and strength by which African Religion derive their viability and joy are Destroyed hence; the promotion of African religious practice will be hampered (Kweka, 2009).

It is also a known fact that African religions is a religion of peace as stated above, every Sacred Authority carry out their duties from an atmosphere with decorum, hence fanaticism and fundamentalism are strong obstacles to the promotion of African religious beliefs. They are not compatible because it negates tolerance and acceptance. Jeff, (2006) work on challenges facing world’s heritage in African today, the author discussed that Africa is a magical continent with rich history and diverse heritage but lack of expertise and experience in heritage management by the government and Sacred Authorities have created a large vacuum in the management and sustainability of natural resources within Africa. Museums are not properly managed, conservation methods for our environments have been forgotten, thus, forest economic trees that should have been used by healers, priests, Artist, diviners and many others to promote African Medicine can no longer be found.

African continents with its beautiful palaces, wildlife, natural beaches have become homes for kidnappers, Terrorists, Armed robbers ritual killers and all manners of crimes today. Where then can the medicine man go in search of his medicinal materials? Where is the serenity in the forest to keep the spirits perfectly comfortable in their abode to enhance sacred authorities in solving human problems? Kidnapping now is not a respecter of personalities, kings, chiefs, Queens and other authority figures are the categories of people they kidnap and at times killed in a bid for wealth making. If authority figures who are the guidance of traditions are being handled

this way, then the chance of African Religion to live is slim consequently affecting the environment. Sacred Authorities such as chief priests, chiefs and others were in the past untouchable, the reverse now is the case (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005).

Ali (2007) citing Mkenda, (2010) argues further that the period between 1840 and 1860 marked a significant and rapid innovation in tropical medicine, particularly the invention of quinine to stem the scourge of malaria in the most endemic region of the world. From this assessment it will be known that western medicine encroached into Africa and diverted attention of African people from their indigenous medicine. The above author further observes that in some cases Traditional medicine was out rightly banned in some countries like South Africa based on the fact that the conception of disease and illness in Africa was historically embedded in “witchcraft” (Bello, 2006). In corroboration with this Shishima (2008) outlined some irregularities hindering the practice of Traditional medicine as: lacking records of diagnosis, lacks proper training standard, inherent complexity in drug preparation, and many others. All these are peculiar with all sacred authorities. African religious leaders are meant to perform religious functions or rituals according to natural or the order in the spirit world. Medicine men (Male & Female) are to heal the sick, through physical and spiritual means and providing advice on different areas of man’s problems. Seers are to carry out divination to discover the unknown, others like Mediums are possessed with spirits and communicate in what an individual with related spirit of divination to interpret, there are also seers seeing without training, elders are in charge of performing both family and community sacrifices. It may interest you to note that it is greed on the part of all these traditional leaders who have swallowed up their culturally given moral personhood enshrined in African ethics. The greed for money has overtaken them to the extent that interest has change from healing to the love of money (Mkenda, 2010).

Another challenge hindering the promotion of African traditional religion is the degree of widespread abuse on magic. Instead of using magic and medicine to promote well being, it is now used to eliminate mankind. Our Kings and Queens employ these magical powers to subdue their subjects in order to remain in power. Sacred places like forests, trees, waterfalls and rivers, lakes, rocks and mountain are symbols of meeting places between the kings and the gods or goddesses. If such places are not put into a common use, they will be desecrated and will no longer serve its purpose as was naturally or spiritually designed (Mkenda, 2010).

Lamenting on the fading of some elements of Traditional Religion the author discovered that it is partly because of the people’s movement from the village to live in the cities. While in the city urban life will carefully erode the indigenous culture as well as bringing in a discontinuity in the service such a people should assume after an authority figure’s death (Soutter, Ntiamoa-Baidu, Smith and Rana, 2003).

African Religion and Climate change

Climate change is defined as a significant change that persists for an extended period typically a decade or longer. It includes radical shift in weather and rise in temperature. This may result from rising sea levels due to the melting of the polarize caps, increase in storms occurrence, severe weather events, burning of some chemicals capable of destroying the ozone layer. Saj, Mather and Sicotte, (2006) noted that when this happens, it will impact negatively on man, animals, plants and other things/activities in the environment. Plants and animals products that are revered and useful for religious need in Africa are being destroyed because of unfavorable weather. In this scenario forest

product will be destroyed by chemicals thus inhibiting their uses by medicine men, while adverse change in weather contributes to lose of vegetation that of great importance in African religion.

Conclusion

The review has shown that African traditional religion has the potential of conserving environmental resources without necessarily compelling people to obey avoid breaking the foreign rules we have. These religious practices, values and belief system over the year have latently managed and conserved environmental resources, therefore it is incumbent on us to re-orient our younger generations on the efficacy of using traditional African religion and other value laden practices to conserve our environmental resource. This paper therefore conclude that traditional African religion is more environmentally friendly and has the capacity to conserve our environmental resources more than any other conservation approach, hence we should encourage the re-introduction of traditional African belief system, values, ethics and culture.

Way Forward

By traditional African religion, culture and belief system, some ethical values have been inculcated in community members where most of the citizens come from, through the practice of taboo, sanctuaries, sacred grooves, streams, ponds, evil forest, totemic belief system among others, latently, environmental resources have been protect, managed and properly conserved, unfortunately, the coming of the western religion with their enculturation and acculturation has infiltrated the sacred and psychic traditional belief which was a hidden way of environmental resources conservation. Something then needed to be done to intensify the effort of bringing back traditional African religion, culture, norms and belief system to help conserve our resources, it is in view of this that the following were suggested as the way forward. The following suggestions were made to reposition traditional African religion and their belief system in the conservation of environmental resources:

- i. Building a sustainable society: through the use of traditional African precepts, norms, ethics, taboo, totemic and belief system to encourage the conservation of our environmental resources for sustainability.
- ii. Enabling communities to care for their own environments with an effective local leadership at the community level where village elders, sub chiefs and chiefs are involved in environmental conservation. African religious practices will stay alive.
- iii. Changing personal attitudes and practices through value re-orientation towards environment and its resources. This will enable man see the environment and its resources as a symbiotic partner and not a parasitic partner, hence sustainability can be guaranteed. Individual must first attempt to change our values, attitudes and practices; consequently a collective effort will emerge and make the environment a worthwhile place.
- iv. Formulation of standard ethics, norms and values that can protect and manage our resources. This can be achieved through the strict prohibition of the use of chemicals for fishing and catching of rodents, thereby not desecrating the environment which is the abodes of the gods. This will help to preserve, conserve and secure both the physical, social and spiritual environment.
- v. Returning to the traditional system of governance. This will be beneficial since the kings is one of the community members, they can enact laws within the community and enforce such laws fr the benefits of the environment and its resources.

- vi. Rejuvenation of African culture such as music, proverbs, songs, languages, dressing and other works in harmony with spiritual entities in accelerating environmental friendliness with a view of drawing closer Spiritual entities in their abode.
- vii. Younger generations of Africans should be encourage to practice their traditional belief systems, values and culture instead of encouraging and promoting foreign and alien religion, culture and values. They must rise to challenge all negative attrition attributed to African and their culture.
- viii. Ethical matters must be given recognition as designed by culture at all times.
- ix. To ensure the survival of African religions in the hands of Sacred Authorities, there should be a re-orientation of Christian adherents and their dispositions towards it, this will help them to understand that anyone without culture or tradition is like a house without a foundation.

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