

**RESPONSES OF SOME ADHERENTS OF AFRICAN RELIGION, CHRISTIANITY
AND ISLAM IN TARABA STATE ON THE ECOLOGICAL DEGRADATION
(2014 – 2024)**

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Abstract

Taraba State is located in North Eastern Nigeria, West Africa with rich heterogeneous ethnicities and three religious faiths been practiced by their adherents. The State is blessed with abundant human and natural resources which are persistently been mismanaged and destroyed with absolute impunity as a result of man's incessant degradational activities which remained lamentable even till day. The paper examined responses of some adherents of African, Christian and Islamic Religions in Taraba State on ecological degradation from 2014-2024. The research made use of analytic, expository, comparative and descriptive and field methods of research. Data were collected from Focus Group Discussions, interviews and consultation of related books. The research further observes that, since man's creation by creator-Animator (God), man has advanced both scientifically, technologically and has continued to devise means of exploiting the ecosystem with utmost impunity thereby leading to environmental degradation which affects abiotic and biotic factors today. The paper equally recommends that, there should be continual preservation and judicious use of the environment by all and sundry. Also, Government, religious leaders, traditional rulers, policy makers and other meaningful individuals should come up as a team with stringent punitive and precautionary measures on how to save the environment from man's impunity, recklessness and continual degradation activities. Conclusively, the environment is the best home created and given to man by God, and care for it is not optional but a bounding duty on all and sundry to ensure is protected and judiciously use now and for posterity's sake.

Key words: African Religion, Christianity, Degradation, Ecology and Islam

African Religion

African Religion is the term that is used to describe the religion that was founded by the forebears of Africans (Anyacho 242). In another related definition, African Religion consist of an institutionalized system of symbols, belief, values, practices which are focus on the

questions of ultimate meaning to different African societies (Gaiya 2). In another manner, Shishima also viewed African Religion to mean the "indigenous religion that is native to the Africans" (1).

Christianity

Christianity is a religion founded by Jesus Christ who once lived in Palestine. In another definition, it is the religion that was established in Palestine through the person and activities of Jesus of Nazareth, is what is popularly known as Christianity (Anyacho180).

Ecology

The concept Ecology was first used in 1858 and later 1865 by the German biologist-H. Reiter. From believed that the term Ecology was coined by German biologist Ernest Haeckex in 1866(as quoted in Gbenda, *Religion and Ecology*22). According to Adah,"Ecology designates one of the basic dimensions of biology. The term comes from the Greek root "oikos" that means house or dwelling (16-17). While Asante similarly enthused, ecology to mean "the study of the relations of organisms and environment in the subtly balanced networks that forms the web of life" (290).

Islam

Islam is from the root 'slm' from Arabic it means to be in peace; to be an integral whole from this root Islam came to mean to surrender to God's law and this to an integral whole (Ogwuche et al 28). Islam began in Arabia at the beginning of the 7th Century to 9th of the Christian era in Pagan Jahiliya Arab environment and later spread to other parts of the world (Jomier5).

Introduction

Taraba State has its Headquarters in Jalingo, which is located in North Eastern Nigeria with approximately sixteenth Local Government Councils and two Development Areas. The State has heterogeneous ethnic groups like Mumuye, Jenjo, Jukun, Fulani, Kaka, Mambila, Kuteb and many other tribes (Taraba Diary 2-3). Notably, the environment is seriously under continual threat due to man's degradational activities which some adherents of African, Christian and Islamic Religions lamented seriously in Taraba State, Nigeria. The paper is aimed at examining responses of some adherents of African, Christian and Islamic Religions in Taraba State on the ecological degradation from 2014-2024 in Nigeria. The research is going to make use of descriptive, observational, comparative, analytic methods and phenomenological approach. Data will be obtained from both primary and secondary sources.

God is seen and regarded in African, Christian and Islamic Religions as creator- Animator of the cosmic universe which man treats with absolute impunity since creation. He makes each man a caretaker of a divine property, his own humanity and responsible manager of nature for many years, and which holds life so dearly (Ogwuche et. al 38). Noticeably, the use of

herbicides and pesticides on farm lands, increase land, water and air pollution among other activities disrupt the natural state of the environment. Man, other devastating activities include, mining of solid minerals, over grazing, deforestation, use of explosives and bullets in ethno-religious crises and banditry and kidnapping cases also increase disruption of soil profile leading to land slide, air pollution, gully erosion and loss of habitations for living creatures amongst others.

It has been observed in African Religion that, sanctions are normally meted on people by spirits or ancestors against those tempering with certain natural state and features of the environment (Nyadali, Oral Interview). Hence, in Islamic view, The *Tawhid* (unity), *Khilafa*(trusteeship) and *akhirah* (accountability or literary the hereafter) are pillars of Islamic' environmental ethics which condemns man's unabated degradational activities (Muftawo, Oral Interview). Asad aligned also that; mankind is given the role of trustee to safeguard the environment from total damages" (Al-Qur'an2:30) (3). However, this ardent task is at its weakest point today (3).

The Holy Qur'an (55:6) went further to clearly highlights that, the plants, trees bow in adoration to God the Almighty Allah is the source of the earth and its fullness, which clearly shows that nature must be protected. Islam been a religion of clear dogma emphasized sustainability, prohibit wastage of resources and their excessive use. No doubt, it is stated evidently in (verse7:31) thus "eat and drink, but not excessive indeed, Allah likes not those who commit excess"(Al A'raf). However, Green jihad in Islamic environmental Ethics is an appropriate forum for addressing the global environmental crises been championed by man which Allah forbids (Denny1-3).

In another excerpt, The Holy Qur'an and Hadith also are extremely rich in proverbs and speak of the Almighty Allah's design for creation and humanity's responsibility for preserving it (as qtd in Gbenda, *Religion and Ecology*109). Al-Qur'an (2:201). Islamic position is against deforestation which is evidently one of the degradational activities of man expressed in the Hadith narrated by Abdullah Ibn Habshi that Prophet Muhammed (SAW) said " He who cuts a lot of trees [justification], Allah will send him to hell fire (Abu Dawud as qtd in Tukur, Oral Interview).

It is lamentable to see the Christian scripture posits that, man has failed woefully in his totality to ensure care of the environment as enthused in the book of (Genesis 1:2-15). However, with such misuse of the earth, man is at risk from environmental crises created by the industrial revolution which unleashed many pollutants, leaving dreadful impact on lives and the environment to be lamented every noe and then (Otuibe94). These ecological degradations are perceived as pervasive of all facets of human activities (Przewonzynty10) that their menaces are regrettable and incessantly on the rise.

As similarly reiterated further, due to lack of trust and care for nature by man, such devastating works of him have culminated in making him to face daily crises in his relation to nature due

to continuous ecological mismanagement, ranging from overgrazing, bush burning, deforestation, uncontrolled and indiscriminate poaching, discharge of industrial and chemicals waste and mining of natural resources amongst other related activities (Asante289). Hence, the Holy Scripture in (Rom8:19-23) went further to add that “as the whole of creation eagerly waiting for God to reveal his son from beginning till now as the entire creation as known has been running in one great act of giving birth, and only creation but all of us who possess the first fruits of the spirits we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to set free”. On care of the environment also, in the book of Genesis (1:28), we are told that God created man in His own image, male and female He created them. And God bless them and said to them be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on earth (Gen. 1:31).

In a related view as posits, man thinks about and feels as in the image of a living force interacting with the living forces which needs to be protected but he remains an agent of environmental devastation (Nyameh, Oral Interview). In like view, Gbenda was not wrong to have enthused that, care of the natural environment is evidently seen as training for thereafter life in the company of God and angels in an environment that is perfect and balance (*Religion and Ecology*110). However, as observed, a look at the sacred universe as created by God vividly shows that, man’s destructive activities have continued unabated, leaving devastating impact on the ontological order of the universe which are been lamented by adherents of the trio religions in Taraba State Nigeria (Joseph, Oral Interview).

It is worth reiterating further that, if one takes an in-depth survey of the beautiful scenery in Taraba, the rock formation in Zing and Yorro, the games reserve in Gashaka, the beautiful salt spring in Wukari, the water in our major rivers which is a natural source of lively hood, and admiration, one is left with no option than to decry how nature is slowly been led to extinction as a result of incessant human degradational activities which posed threat to the survival of the ecosystem(Abdullahi,Oral Interview). It is the crux of this paper to excavate some of the responses of adherents of African, Christian and Islamic Religions on the environmental degradation 2014-2024 in Taraba State, after which some recommendations would be proffered.

Man, and Incessant Ecological Degradation in Taraba State from 2014-2024

In Taraba State, environmental degradation is a nagging devastating phenomenon ongoing, which affects the ecosystem from all strata, ranging from excessive climate change; flooding, excess heat, and drought. Thus, from 2014-2024, these phenomena are being attested from daily experiences of how nature is been battered by man's reckless attitude, which posed risk and challenge to its conservation, utilization and survival. There is also continual degradation of the earth by man's activities like deforestation, illegal mining, poaching, use of agro chemicals for farming and poisoning of aquatics in rivers, pools, stream, and discharges from

cars exhausts and industrial chimneys which are on the rise on daily basis which have serious effects on the environment in Taraba State, Nigeria (Kevin, Oral Interview).

It is sad as as further observed that, man has never relaxed in his reckless and impunity attitude towards the earth and everything in it as the environment on daily basis is robbed of its original nature (Otuibe 86). On the incessant environmental degradation, man's continual and reckless exploitation of natural resources in the environment, species of trees, mineral resources like precious stones, gold, quartz, uranium, quarry, limestone, affect the natural foundation of life and eco-spirituality of Taraba especially in place like Sardauna, Takum, Bali, Gashaka, Yorro, Zing, Wukari and host of others are destroyed as miners activities posed threat to the safety of the environment(Habu, Oral Interview).

Global ecological disasters are promoted vigorously by man, which are no longer hidden phenomena as one sees and experiences the rising impact of global warming affecting their ecosystem in Taraba State (Ayau, Oral Interview). Furthermore, man's actions towards the environment are considered reckless, and which result in tension or disharmony in human relationship with God, and constantly with man, his fellow men and environment, which were considered instead and cursed (Adodo 7).

As observed from 2014-2024 like Gumti Reserve Park in Gashaka, Taraba State and other State Governments's own forest and wild life reserves, which are homes to thousands of animals and other valuable natural resources are constantly under threat by man's conspicuous and reckless activities. Animals are also been hunted for bush meat by hunters, there by leading to their extinction. There are as well as other massive experiences of soil erosion in different parts of the state due to subsistent and mechanized farming where the use of agro chemicals leads to increase in land population leading to toxicity and soil acidity.

Other heinous activities of man include, improper and lack of functionable drainage system. Thus, common experiences show already existing drainages across some parts of the state are filled with heap of rubbish which breeds germs and bacteria, and also constitute blockages that eventually leads to massive flood disaster thereby displacing thousands of people from their homes and destroying houses and farm lands. A clear instance of places always affected by heavy flood from 2014-2024 include Ibi, Lau, Ardo-Kola, Donga, Jalingo, Wukari and Karim riverine areas to mention but a few. Other human activities like illegal mining in Gashaka, Sardauna, Gassol, Yorro, Zing and quarry or gravels excavation from the mountains by construction firms in Ardo-Kola, Wukari, Takum, Bali, Zing and Parts of Jalingo necessitate in the rise of global warming today.

Man's devastating and heinous activities have also led to massive extinction of valuable trees known as 'madrid' due to its high demand over seas, which have led to serious environmental hazards been experienced in Takum, Wukari, Bali, Sardauna, Yorro, Gassol, Kurmi, ArdoKola, Kurim Lamido and Zing to mention but a few. To support environmental friendliness, in 2023 His Excellency, Dr. Kefas Agbu in assumption into office as Governor

of Taraba State, he issued out a law prohibiting illegal mining and deforestation across the state in a bid to curtailed the effect of climate change.

No eye will doubt the ongoing environmental degradation in Taraba, which culminate in killing soil micro-organisms, extinction of valuable wild animals and economic trees, which also affect quality of abiotic and biotic factors in the environment which upset nature's delicate balance (Noku, Oral Interview). In another similar observation also, river beds have been reduced to stretch of dirty land, rich fishing grounds to poisonous bathes due to use of poisonous chemicals and other soluble intoxicants channelled into gushing waters (Otuibe 93). All elements which underline life for the body of nature are being weakened, and the immunization system of the earth is under heavy attack. In another related observation, man's unfriendly attitude to nature will mean not merely a reduction in number but extinction (Mc Donough515). As earlier observed, the earth is continually rubbed of its ability to offer man all he needs in an unimpaired fruitfulness (Schemaus 159).

Expects of African Religion, Christianity and Islam in Taraba State on the Ecological Degradation from 2014-2024

It is not exaggeration to say that from 2014 -2024, adherents of African Religion, Christianity and Islam in Taraba State do accord God the Glory that he is owner of the universe. God as indisputably affirmed, he is revered and worship as God the creator of the ecosystem which are preserved and judiciously use by man Al-Qur'an (40:57). It has been affirmed similarly also by the same Holy Bible that, from the very beginning of the sacred scripture, we learn that God created the world in six days (Gen. 2:2) after which He rested on the seven day (Gen. 2:3) which implies an orderly creation within periods.

Subsequently, the book of Prophet Isaiah (55:12) clearly describes the trees of the field will clap their hands, and (Psalm 98:8) in appreciation to God their maker. Also, the book of (Deut. 20:19) gives credence to the environment by condemning its devastation as it says that, "you should not cut down the trees around the city because you can eat their fruits". However, man's basic fundamental relation to the earth which existed in complete harmony since creation has now drastically changed and received new element of fruitlessness and futile competition as disarray of total harmony today (Otuibe83). Thus, at the instance of dwelling of God amongst humans is the mystery of incarnation, the value of an individual's personal being before God and the simultaneous insignificance of earthly life amidst natural environment as the context for God's revelation is being affirmed stronger (Adah17).

In another succinct view as also maintained, Biblical doctrine of creation in the book of (Gen. 1:2-15) stresses the goodness of whole created order, which is a reflection of the goodness of God which man continues to abuse till day in all facets of his daily exploration of nature. In another related campaigns against the destruction of nature, and on the occasion of the World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II (now St. John Paul II) presented a message entitled "The Ecological Crises: A Common Responsibility". Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* written on

the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of *Populorum progressio* echoes a sense of urgency on the need to care for the environment (as quoted in Adah 17). The book of (Gen. 2:15) also reminded us to be responsible care takers of the earth as God directs "be fruitful and have dominion over the earth". The book of (Ecclesiastes 1: 2-18) also went further to lament degradation of the ecosystem by affirming that "all things are full of weakness".

It is melancholic to further buttress that, relation of man to the earth is affected on daily basis by sin in a two-fold way. This claim was further lamented that, it is disastrous that man owing to his selfishness, his lust for power, his arrogance and his greed for wealth, degraded the earth contrary to its original state as ordained by God (Adah 18-19). No wonder St. Paul further posits that, the whole of creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal his son from the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has proceeding groaning one with great act of giving birth, and not only creation, but all of us who possess the first fruits of the spirit, we too groaned inwardly as we wait for our time be set free (Rom. 8: 19-23). The above excerpt decry incessantly how nature is being destroyed on daily basis due to man's reckless, unfriendly and unabated activities (Asante 291).

For instance, among traditional Africans, nature is considered sacred, and certain religious prohibition are put in place in order to curtailed reckless ecological mismanagement by man, which remained unabated today. It is part and parcel of the African ontological view to care for the environment which permeates basic aspect and emphasis of religion for people to adhere, but reverse is the case today, where sacredness of nature is disrupted (Adah 16). Thus, environmental devastation is on going as Avonapu laments that, "man's persistent recklessness towards nature kept growing and worsening the ecological crises day by day" (Oral Interview).

Since man cannot do without religion, he has been said to be a symbolic being beyond the chemical instrument that control the universe (Mondin 207), whose role is that of care of the environment. Hence, he has today no reverence to self-order of the cosmos; because he is the champion destruction and competitive attitude towards nature (Abdulraman, Oral Interview). In like view also, it is very glaring to see how man allowed nature to be destroyed recklessly whereby nature kept going to disarray for lack of show of relevance to its existence, preservation or judicious use today (Anyanwu 87). No doubt the regard for nature has vividly shows that there is an inseparable interacting entity that man is at its centre of control as divinely mandated for him to carry it (Barbour 7).

African's cosmologies highlight the existence of Supreme Being as responsible for creating other spirits. Nature granted existence to all created things, but man has failed to conserve it religiously without mincing words, which remains worrisome (Adah14). In view of the above assertion, creation of the cosmos is greater a reality than the creation of mankind (as qtd in Gbenda, *African Religion and Christianity*18). It is not an exaggeration to say that, at present, man conducts himself with absolute impunity in relation to other things on earth making a free and testing world through where the invention of weapons is used to destroy the sacred and

friendly cosmos pronounced by creator (Otuibe 85). Hence, this vital force that animated and energized all things in the cosmos is on daily basis been destroyed by man without regards for its sustainability, and judicious use (Busia 290).

Comparative Responses of Some Adherents of African Religion, Christianity and Islam in Taraba State on the Ecological Degradation from 2014-2024

Below are some comparative responses of adherents of African, Christian and Islamic Religions in Taraba State on the ecological degradation from 2014-2024:

- i. Some adherents of the trio religions in Taraba State see nature as sacred creation of God, and God is seen as the sacred and focal object of worship, who has absolute control over man, and who placed man at centre of the universe to control it. It is sad to note also that, nature is not respected to ensure its preservation and judicious as a gift from God. the trio religions agreed, that environmental degradation posed risk to both living and non living. Thus, this calls for condemnation of man's impunity to the survival of the earth (Asante 293). However, some adherents of the trio religions in
- ii. Taraba, Nigeria condemned in totality man's reckless and destructive attitude to the ecosystem which has led to ecological degradation, thereby having dreadful affects on the survival of both human, animals and natural resources which God created to serve man's purpose (Kwamburu, Oral Interview).
- iii. Some adherents of the trio religions in Taraba State sees man as rational endowed creature whose brutal actions on the environment is totally condemnable against orderliness and creative work and beauty of nature. spect (Yahuza, Oral Interview).
- iv. Some adherents of the trio religions in Taraba State profess the belief in monotheistic God as the creator of the earth, and they served as antidote to environmental safety, protection and judicious use. This prompts them to become champion of preservation of nature in their teachings and observances (Alhamdu, Oral Interview).
- v. African, Christian and Islamic Religions see nature also as a sacred created entity of God with man as its caretaker, which should be preserved in the furtherance of ecotheology.
- vi. The trio religions are beneficiaries of nature, and nature is been regarded by them as work of the Supreme Creator which aid in creating a conducive environment for reflection of God's existence.

Conclusion

From 2014-2024, ecological degradation remains a nagging and worrisome phenomenon which has been lamented by some adherents of African Religion, Christianity and Islam in Taraba State, Nigeria. Thus, ecological degradation is the concerns of not the adherents of the trio religions in Taraba State, Nigeria but all and sundry. It is not a one person's affair when it comes to environmental conservation and its judicious use, rather it is a collective and clear freedom which must correspond with responsibility as gleaned from responses of some

adherents of the trio religions in Taraba, Nigeria on ecological degradation bedevilling the environment from 2014 -2024, which should serve as antidote and bounding responsibility placed on all and sundry to imbibe in love, preservation , appreciation and judicious use of nature for continuity now and in the future.

Recommendations

Amidst some unabated and degradational activities of man in the environment as contained in some responses of adherents of African Religion, Christianity and Islam in Taraba State, Nigeria from 2014-2024, the paper has the following recommendations:

- i. Government, traditional rulers as well as other relevant stake holders should team up and revived back the green of revolution and conservation policies of tree planting, prohibition of incessant poaching and illegal felling of trees, use of agro chemicals and illegal mining activities in order to preserve the original state of nature from total collapse (Nyame, Oral Interview).
- ii. Stringent punitive measures should be put in place by Government, traditional and other relevant bodies in order to serve as deterrent for those who might encourage environmental degradation by their unscrupulous activities (Mamud, Oral Interview).
- iii. Government should enact or re-invigorate environmental protection laws and agencies with adequate funding inorder to safeguard nature from wanton degradation at all times by man'impunity to nature.
- iv. Man's imperfection as seen by these three viral religions should not be a yardstick for him to alter the cause of events as it suits his whims and caprices. He should also strive to follow the blue print laid down rules at the outset of creation by protecting and judiciously making use of nature (Oguche 43).
- v. Religious leaders in the trio religions should inculcate in their followers the need for environmental love, protection and judicious use and promotion of nature in the furtherance of the study of eco-theology.

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List of Informants

S/N	Names	Age	Place	Occupation	Religion	Date
	Alhamdu, Isa Lauje	84	Garin Dogo, Lau L.G.A	Red. Civil Servant	Muslim	21/2/2024
	Kefas, Haniel Banti	68	Karim-Lamido	Farmer	Christian	17/3/2024
	Voro Zozo, Anah Riseh	55	Ussa L.G.A	Farmer	African Adherent	12/3/2024
	Adah, Peter Noel	69	Kurmi L.G.A	Business man	Christian	19/4/2024
	Ayau, Penni Noshui	40	Kungana, Bali L.G.A	Farmer	African Adherent	22/3/2024
	Dago, Mago Pajo	65	Mutum- Biyu, Gassol L.G.A	Herbalist	African Adherent	29/6/2024
	Ezra, Bange Tori	53	Lamma,Zing	Farmer	Christian	7/4/2024
	Noku, Shumen Swakkai	53	Ibi L.G.A	Farmer	Christian	11/2/2024
	Nyameh, Godong Bala	60	Gembu, Sardauna L.G.A	Farmer	African Adherent	15/7/2024
	Adamu, Galadima Donya	67	Jalingo L.G.A	Diviner	Christian	29/6/20214
	Kelvin, Major Isa	45	Yorro L.G.A	Farmer	Christian	3/6/2024
	Avonapu, Amos	52	Donga L.G.A	Fisherman	African adherent	25/5/2024
	Bem, Aondongu Chia	58	Bali L.G.A	Businessman	Christian	21/4/2024
	Angyu, Nasiru Kefas	60	L.G.A Lau	medicineman	African Adherent	21/4/2024
	Nyadali, Reeti D	95	Dong 'C', Zing L.G.A	Farmer	African Adherent	13/6/2024
	Musa, Ado Bala	54	Serti, Sardauna L.G.A	Farmer/ herbal medicine man	Muslim	22/5/2024
	Rimamtso, Tari Rimam	58	Rafin Kada, Wukari	Farmer	African Adherent	10/7/2024
	Hamza, Ado Ya'u	54	Kurmi L.G.A	Farmer	Muslim	17/5/2024
	Haladu, Ruqayat Idi	51	Mayo Reno, Ardo Kola L.G.A	Fisherman	Christian	19/3/2024
	Yahuza, Zainab Bawa	40	Mutum Biyu, Gassol L.G.A	House wife	Muslim	22/5/2024
	Jinzere, Kalako I.	48	Shavoh, Jalingo L.G.A	Medicine man	African Adherent	2/7/2024

	Joseph Ruth Zandi	40	Zandi, Zing L.G.A	House wife	Christian	30/6/2024
4	Kwamburu, Bakoji Maxwell	52	Nyaja, Yorro LG.A	farmer/hunter	African Adherent	19/6/2024
	Abdullahi, Auwal Adamu	56	Pupule, Yorro LG.A	Teacher	Muslim	22/6/2024
	Tukur, Aliyu Barde	70	Karim Lamido L.G.A	Preacher	Muslim	18/5/2024
	Yahuza, Zachary Arso	63	Bali L.G.A	Farmer	Muslim	16/2/2024
	Avonapu, Boroni Peni	65	Dong	Business woman	African adherent	23/2/2024
	Masho, Ahmed Bala	67	Kpanti Napu, Yorro L.G.A	Farmer	Christian	22/1/2024
	Abdulraman Saudat Barau	46	Jauro Yinu, Ardo Kola L.G.A	Farmer	Muslim	26/3/2024
	Muftawo, Dinatu Labaran	50	Wagbala, Yorro L.G.A	Business woman	Muslim	18/2/2024
	Nyadali, Wusa Sati	66	Mayo Dasa, Jalingo L.G.A	Food vendor	Christian	21/4/2024
	Ganjabu, Sule Gwadi	41	Donga L.G.A	Farmer	African Adherent	23/5/2024