

ADOPTING AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS STRATEGY TOWARDS FOREST CONSERVATION IN BOKI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF CROSS RIVER STATE

By

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Abstract

This article examines the role Africa Traditional Religion (ATR) plays in the management and conservation of forest resources in some selected communities in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State Nigeria. Methodology of the study involves the use of focal group discussion, personal interviews, observations and questionnaires. The findings revealed that African Traditional Religion (ATR) contributes significantly in the conservation and management of forest resources leading to mitigation of climate hence reduction of green house gas emission. The protection of forest and ecosystem habitat such as forest grooves, sacred rivers/ponds and the protection of certain forest which are considered as abode for the gods and goddesses are means of conservation and management of forest resources. The authors recommended a synergy between Africa Traditional Religious strategy in the conservation and management of forest resources and modern method of conservation amongst others.

KEY WORDS; Tradition, African, Religion, Sacred, Forest, conservation, Management

Introduction

The local people have developed a variety of consistent forest conservation and management strategies in tropical Africa Asia and South Africa (Apia-Opoku, 2007). Traditionally Africa society also observed environmental ethics that helps in regulating the interaction with the natural environment. For example, it is observed that African traditional religion (ATR) is a religion with environmental characteristics features and symbolism, but the proponents and propagators of Christianity saw the African Traditional Religious belief system, worship and practices as rather obstacle to the growth, unity, peace and cohesion of our communities, whereas this is exactly what ATR stands for in every society or community. The introduction of western religion and formal education eroded the rich cultural values and religious diversities of Africans and also shaped their belief and worship system (Smith & Wishnie, 2000).

The conservation of natural resources is the wise use of the earths' resources by mankind. It is the management of valuable natural resource such as timber; fish, topsoil, pastoral and natural forest wild life, parklands, wilderness and water shed areas. There are several definitions of the conservation; some scholars see conservation from the anthropologist point of view while others see conservation from the economic view point. Usher defined conservation as the maintenance of genetic species and ecosystem diversity in the natural abundance in which they occur. The conservation can also be seen as the sacrifice of immediate reward for the delayed once (Thomas 2003). Smith and Wishnie (2000) defined conservation as any action that investigates or prevent the loss of biodiversity and are designed to do so.

Modern methods in the conservation of forest resources has not done as expected, hence the application of Africa traditional religion approach in the conservation of forest resources. One of sure approaches is the use of traditional methods that have helped to regulate them. The use traditional beliefs in the conservation of large number of elements of local diversity regardless of their use value dates back to the creation (Berkes et al, 2000, Tuner et al 2000; Shastri et al 2002). Traditional conservation ethics are capable of protecting biodiversity species in a particular environment as long as the local country has a stake in it.

The traditional ecological knowledge in conservation fused with modern models in achieving optimum conservation objectives. However in spite of the considerable attention directed towards documentation of these systems and approaches to conservation there is still limited understanding on how to fused the traditional African religious strategies with modern models of conservation of forest resources.

Chacon (2012) opined that the existence of traditional beliefs and taboos does not guarantee sustainable harvest of natural forest resource. International Institute of Forest Environment and Development (IIFED2012), reveals that the traditional African religion (ATR) and cultural practices as done in most part of African communities are environmental friendly, thus contributes much to natural resource conservation sustainability.

In Africa and Nigeria to be particular, it is beliefs that object called gods and goddesses /hold supernatural powers. Many African tradition beliefs that the gods is located in that object in the streams, rocks, ponds, trees, land or anywhere they desires to live in within the community. The gods choose their messenger and chief priests who sends message from the gods. Shastri et al (2002), observed that in some African tradition the gods puts his anger on whoever commits or omits any law for which their presence forbids, hence esteem all the precepts of the laws of the gods are kept. This research work therefore on the Traditional

African religion strategy towards forest resource conservation, attempt to harmonize the traditional strategies and modern method for optimum conservation of forest resources.

Justification for the Research

Tropical and sub-tropical forests are known to store a huge amount of carbon dioxide estimated at 247 Gtc in above and below grown biomes (Mba, 2019). When a forest is degraded and overtaken by farmland, particularly through burning, a large proportion of carbon stored in above ground vegetation is immediately released into tile atmosphere as carbon dioxides (and other green house gasses), or through decomposition of the debris, and when high erosion and flooding cause soil loss (Richey Richey, Melack, Aufdenkampe, Ballester, and Hess, 2020), and also when poor logging practices create large canopy openings and cause collateral damage to the remaining trees, sub-canopy vegetation and soil (Asner & Keller, 2019). Continuous loss of carbon to the atmosphere is also experienced through oxidation of wood products as the majority of the wood products retain carbon for less than 30 years (Pan & Hayes, 2019).

Conversion of forests to permanent agriculture and pasture results in almost total loss of original biodiversity with reduction in ecosystem functioning as well as release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (Gibson, Lee, & Sodhi, 2018). The large amounts of carbon dioxide and other green gas gasses released into the atmosphere since the industrial revolution has caused the Green House Effect (GHE) (What is the green house effect, 2019) and the concomitant global warming (Causes of Global warming, 2017), and all these phenomena are conspiring to cause climate change (IPCC, 2020), which scientists warn is a looming disaster for humanity. This explains why countries all over the world with tropical rainfall vegetation are encouraged to preserve their forests because forests act as carbon sinks which absorbs carbon dioxide in the process of photosynthesis. It is widely held that sustainable forestry may provide the solution to the threats of climate change.

Boki LGA lies within the tropical climatic zone (latitude 6° 4' and 6°29' North and longitude 9° and 9°27' East). The LGA therefore displays distinct tropical rain forest or tropical high forest characteristics. Tropical high forest is known for its rich biodiversity and houses over 60% of the country's plants and animal species (Tooze, 2014). Cross River rain forest (which Boki Local Government Area is a part of) is classified as the only evergreen rain forest in West Africa (Tooze, 2014). The rain forest also houses over a thousand species of birds and amphibians, and is believed to accommodate more butterflies than anywhere else in the continent. As a result of the rich biodiversity in the Cross River State (CRS) forest, and particularly in Boki LGA, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Afi River Forest Reserve in Boki; which also houses Okwangwo National Park and wildlife sanctuary, where chimpanzees and drill monkeys are kept in electric wired enclosures as special areas of focus.

The Cross River National Park is held to be one of the richest tropical rain forests in West Africa. It is an integral part of the Cross River State rain forest conservation area, located in Boki LGA; it spans from Kanyang to the foot of Obudu plateau with a total land area of 720 km² of rugged mountain scenery and rolling hills (Get Amazing Wildlife Experience at Cross River National Park, 2012). The Okwangwo National Park is adjudged the 25th United Nations biodiversity hot spot in the world (CRS Budget Speech, 2013).

Afi River Forest Reserve (ARFR) is one of the fourteen gazette lands held by the CRS government (CRSFC, 2018) for purposes of conservation, protection, and sustainable management of forest resources. It covers a total of 14.5% of total land placed under reserved

list by the CRS government (CRSFC, 2018). Boki LGA lands are suffering from intense degradation as a result of population pressure as more and new lands are converted to agriculture and settlement (Bebia, 2016). An examination of the Boki land use map released by the CRS Forestry Commission shows that in 1991, the total forest cover in the state was 183,570 km². By 2000, the total land cover had receded to 154,517.92 km² showing a forest loss of minus 29,052 km². This means that within ten years (1991-2000), intact forest land suffered a loss of minus of 29,052.08 km², implying an annual forest - to - cropland loss of minus 2,905.2 km² (CRS Land Use Map, 2010). This represents 3.44% of total forest loss within ten years; and further translates to about minus 0.34% annual forest loss to agriculture, settlement and other agents. Little wonder that in 2015, the United Nations raised an alarm at the high rate of deforestation in Cross River State, which was at about 6% annually and which Boki is part of. The foregoing analysis reveals that by mid century, the total tropical rain forest in Boki may be gone if adequate and pragmatic mitigation strategies are not put in place to halt the wave of deforestation in the State.

As an effort to conserve the rich biodiversity in Boki forest and remove any ambiguity on the ownership of the forests in the state, the Federal Government, in conjunction with CRS government created three forest typology, namely, The National Parks in Okwangwo and Boshi in Boki LGA which are supposed to be protected by law, the entire flora and fauna within the park enclosure; the CRS forest reserves were also created to include Afi Mountain forest and Mbe forest reserves also in Boki. The rest of the forests were left as community forests to be used by the communities in and around the area. Until 2010, when the Cross River State Forestry Law (CRSFL) was enacted, the CRS Forestry Commission operated under the forestry laws of the Federal Government of Nigeria (Cross River State Forestry Commission Law, 2010). Under this epoch, offenders of forestry laws were prosecuted according to the penal codes of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

When the foregoing measures to mitigate the indiscriminate and wanton exploitation of the CRS forests were not producing positive results, in 2009, the CRS government imposed an anti-logging moratorium, which was extended for another two years in 2011, and which was to be implemented by a special forestry taskforce (Anti- Logging Taskforce) in the state. This policy was to reduce to zero, the rate of forest exploitation in the state. But rather than achieve this objective, according to the United State Forest Service (2012), members of the taskforce and officials of the CRS forestry commission compromised, and the illegal trade went aground with greater intensity, as only poor farmers were arrested and prosecuted (USFS, 2012), while non- indigenous wood merchants flourished in the illegal trade.

On assumption of office in 2015, and upon realization of the colossal failure to secure the state forest resources, the government disbanded the anti- deforestation taskforce and arrested some members (Cross River Watch Admin, 2015); and went ahead to inaugurate the Green Police force which is charged with the responsibility of overall protection, monitoring, generating of forest and biodiversity data and reforestation program of the state (Cross River State Sets Up Green Police, 2015).

One major impetus behind some of the policies aimed at mitigating deforestation and thus secure the CRS forest is to see that CRS is adjudged qualified for the benefits of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and environmental Degradation (REDD) which is a United Nations global initiative to promote forest conservation and the concomitant environmental sustainability particularly in forests endowed nations (REDD Safeguards, 2012). It is hoped that the financial benefits accruable to the state through proper implementation of REDD's programme could trickle down to the communities and thus stimulate an enthusiastic interest

to protest the forest and the environment. A corollary to the REED initiative by the UN is the Carbon Credit Mechanism (CCM) and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) which are global strategies to enable states and nations sell carbon credits in carbon credit markets, as well as draw compensation for effective forest conservation efforts, based on the UN paradigms, which Cross River State government is expected to make huge earning from (Laide 2017). The disbanding of the antideforestatb0n taskforce and the inauguration of the CRS Green Police Outfit (GPO) is yet to translate to beneficial outcomes that will see the steady decline in forest exploitation in the state in general and Boki LGA in particular.

Many social commentators aver that the problem of environmental degradation particularly deforestation has come about as a result of the break down in traditional values. Nigeria is said to face a crises of values. It is the crises of values that have precipitated much of the social, economic and political crises exemplified in drug abuse, premarital sex and pregnancies, armed robbery and kidnapping, high level corruption, electoral and general insecurity that Nigeria is currently facing. Since from remote history, religion, their institutions and networks have been looked up to as custodians of values, morals and indeed culture as a whole. In one *way* or another, almost all institutions work to it111 values; beginning from the family, the political organizations, firms, military units, and even prisons, hut none is as adroit and dedicated to this enterprise as religions (Etzioni2017). Religion is devoted to the interpretation of virtually every behaviour and attitudes in terms of moral imperatives; from individual's rest, dress, grooming diets, to sexual conducts, procreation, and family life and indeed all attitude and behaviours that govern and regulate life, including attitude towards the environment. Religion foists and obtains compliance in a myriad of ways. Right from the outset of the child's life, parents start the process of character building by providing a solid moral foundation for the child and this continues until the individual forms attitude that underpins his character.

In African Traditional Religion, this solid moral foundation took the form of initiation ceremonies and the concomitant rites of passage which period, the initiates are taught all the cultural practices of the community or tribe (Awolalu 2016). The young stars are introduced to the religious traditions of the tribe or community, including the deities, ancestors, their cults, shrines and so forth (Mbiti 2017), and the sacred and the profane and the taboo system that form the bedrock of the people's culture. It is within this cultural matrix that the young stars are introduced into the dualism of man and nature orientation. In African religion and culture, this dualism appeared coherent in many dimensions. In pristine African traditional cosmology, every stream, every tree, every hill, indeed every abode had its own guardian spirit, its genius loci. These spirits, though unlike men centaurs, fauns, and mermaids, were accessible to men, but they were ambivalent. Before any one fell a tree, mined a mountain, or dammed a river or stream, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that domain, and to keep it placated (Bebia 2016). Before stumping a tree, it was requires to notify the spirit indwelling in the tree by tying the fresh young yellow palm leaves (which was a symbol of ownership) within a specified period to allow the spirit indwelling to either migrate to another tree or be chopped off.

This practice was held very strong because of the belief that spirits inhabit different aspects of nature including trees, rocks, rivers and so forth. African Traditional Religion has a rich eccentric orientation. The traditional religion believes strongly on the phenomenon of reincarnation, whose status is bestowed only on those who led lives of undiluted obedience to the traditional ethos of the religion. It is held by the traditional religion that it is only through reincarnation that the dead can attain the realm of immortality, where they, the dead can reincarnate as many times they wished (Ilogu 2016). On the other hand, those who led lives

of inconsistency, and desecrated the traditional values were denied the privilege of reincarnation. The strong belief in spiritual immortality and reincarnation and the fear of being denied of this privilege provided the necessary personal and social motivation and encouragement to subordinate one's moral life to the ethical discipline and public morality, which often came under divine sanctions. Thus, whatever laws or taboos that were imposed, whether environmental taboos or any other taboos, they were observed with religious passion (Ahiajoku Lecture 2009). It is these rich cultural attitudes of the African Traditional Religion that we hope could be harnessed and adopted for the fight against deforestation and environmental degradation in Boki LGA.

The Evolution of African Traditional Religion

The word is a Latin word which means both the earnest observance of final obligations and an inward spirit of reverence (Paden, 2009). In contemporary times religion has an ambiguous meaning that reflects the enormous variety of ways the term can be interpreted. Extreme position some recognized tradition is religion understanding expressions such as a sacred engagement with what is taken to be a spiritual reality, religion is not an object with a simple or fixed meaning or even a zone with their boundaries. It is an aspect of human experience just may interest, incorporate or transcend other aspects of life and society. Such definition avoids the drawback of humans the investigations of religion to western or biblical categories such as monotheism (belief in one and only god) or to church structure which are not universal. For instance in Buddhism gods are not as central as the idea of a Buddha (fully alighted human being). In many traditional cultures, the idea of a sacred cosmic order is the most prominent religions belief because of this variety some scholars prefer to use a general term such as the sacred to designate the common foundation of religious life in all cultures, human beings make a practice of interacting with what is taken to be spiritual powers.

These powers may be in the form gods spirit ancestors or any kind of sacred reality with which humans belief themselves to be commented. Sometimes a spiritual power is understood broadly as an all-embracing reality and sometimes it is approached through its manifestation in special symbols. It may be regarded as the external to the self, internal or both people interact with such presence in a sacred manner that is with reference and carry. Religion is the term most commonly used to designate this complex and diverse real of human experience (Paden 2019). Just like Africa have grown of the years so also is all African traditional religion (ATR). ATR began as a set of code of conducts and ethics finding the activities of man in his society. The attempt to enforce the precepts of this new ethics and code of conduct they community members charged with the enforcement of these rules, code and ethical behavior formed themselves into an association where their rules code of conduct and membership was widely experimented, so as a chief priest is always elected by a serving priests who teaches. Communicating with the ancestors became experiment as a chief priests is always elected by a serving chief priests who teaches the convert the way of the gods and also make incantation and appease the gods they would sacred this was how the ATR come about.

African Traditional Religion (ATR) as practiced by most African countries and environmentally friendly and sustainably thus was contributing so much to natural resource conservation and sustainability. African countries and particularly Nigeria, holds the strength on the ascription of psychic supernatural powers to objects called gods and goddess. The major African traditional religion and belief system lies in the belief that they abode of the gods and goddess can be within the community.

In the bible God gave man dominion over the earth *Genesis 1:26*. Wilson (2017) observed that by implication of this word dominion has both dominations over natural stewardship apparatus. From the donation perspective humans they said to have domination over natural environment in ways that empowers us to treat nature the way it pleases us, but man in his domination must understand that environment has 'life' and must not 'die' through the dominion of man. These perspectives see natural environment as having been nearly instrumental or having extrinsic value and provide justification for human exploitation of natural resources. This is the premise on the fact that it is our right as superior creation, heir apparent and controlling Gods creation on earth this is the beginning of environmental and controlling woes and conflicts (McCammon, 2013, Henshey, 2011, Singh 2012). In Africa for instance, things like the sacred stone found in Ghana and other West African countries are very practical systems of indigenous strategies for the management and conservation of our natural environment with the rural communities is this.

In the African traditional religion (ATR), both men and women represent the gods and goddess but most often it is the men that are initiated into these communities cults or sects which are often enshrined in religious or cultural beliefs and superstitions and entranced by taboos the taboos and belief have legal backing in the rules and institutions of the communities which are strong enough in the past to make people obey the religious and cultural regulations (Venkataraman, 2016 & Smith, 2017). Just like the bible, the holy Quran on conservations, some key chapters and verses support the conservation of natural resources. These portions identified specifically the role of man in resources conservation. In Sumatra, some management policies support the introduction of religion doctrines into land management policies, these area are Al-mawat, land regeneration plan, Harrin for water resources protection, Harrin for sustaining resources management (Henshey; 2011 & Johnson et al, 2001).

In the African countries there is no clear separation between what is secular and what is sacred. Everything and every act are looked upon in a religious and customary perspective. Africans view themselves as part of the environment (Mkenda, 2010; Taylor, 2002). Henshay (2011) posited that in traditional African societies like Nigeria, Ghana and many others many people believed that rocks, trees, streams, pounds and forest are the manifestation of the power of the (supernatural) Supreme Being. Henshay saw these things as ideal places to meet their Supreme Being or gods. African did not just attach much importance to trees and herbs just for spiritual purposes but also because trees herbs and plants in general were useful in enhancing human life. Tree leaves, trunks, roots and grasses provided herbal medicines to human beings and to wild and domestic animals; trees were also seen as being symbols of god's presence among people (Tilman, 2000). Thompson et al (2002) also found out that rocks, ponds, land, streams and other parts of the earth were also the abodes of their gods so shrines, temples and sacred grooves were all meant for the worship, consultation and appeasement of the gods. This was also supported by Eneji et al (2009).

Belief System

In Africa, every traditional African community has what they reverence or hold sacred either as the presence of their gods or there is a very important symbolic reason attached to such objects in the course of their existence. In almost every country in Africa and cross river state in particular, there is hardly any place that exist without a sacred groove, evil forest, sacred pond, evil stream or forbidden forest where some part of the forest is for the worship of the gods (Eneji et al 2009).

A community in Bekwarra called (Gakem) has a bird called the “road runner” (Anyiribon) is not killed nor eaten by the people of the community. Ancient story has it that during the war the birds follows the trail of Gakem people and wipes their foot prints so that their enemies cannot trace them hence prevented from tracing the destruction and facing consequent attack. Also, In Etung Local Government Area of Cross River State, the gods of “ogbogoro” is believed to be the god of fruitfulness and the gift of children. When there is poor harvest in Ejagham-land, the god is consulted (Enejiet al2009).

It is a taboo for anyone to fish in the pond on his/her own; it is completely forbidden and detrimental to any trespasser to gain entrance into the pond. In Etung /Akamkpa, the people make is sacrifices this god. When a woman fight after marriage cannot have children the god of ogobogoro is appeased with a sacrifice, thereby making request for children from such gods. The ogohobi pond in Bekwarra located at Adihe village in Otukpuru ward in Bekwarra L.G.A is a mysterious pond harvested by the entire Bekwarra kingdom once every seven year in Obudu Ubang Community has a cult society where no woman or any non-member of the cult group does not see nor eat their evil forest. This community is the country where the man and woman speak different language. This phenomenon is not ordinary but has ancient origin to this kind of situation. In Beten, Bekwarra LGA, there is another rock called “UkaOchiifu” the rock here is believed to be the bond of those killed during the first Bekwarra inter-trisal war with the Tivs of Benue state. This rock also is believed to be the place where Nigeria and Biafra soldiers killed during the civil war were burned; nobody does anything within the rock zone. Bewo in the Bekwarra L.G.A, there is a forest and a stream where there is human hand print.

Ancestral legend had it that when Odama Ashide had a problem with his brother, he migrated away from Obanliku and as they got to this small stream in Bekwarra, Odama being full of age had to put his hand on the rock by the shore of the stream to enable him cross the stream, his hand remained imprinted there till date. In this forest and stream, fishing and other activities are not allowed within the areas. In Etung, there is a sacred pond called salt take (Ejaham lake), harvesting of fish here is strictly prohibited but when fish leaves this lake to another stream, harvesting can be done there in the stream. There is also the traditional Ekpe cult in most Ejaham and Efik communities. In Obudu community, Ikwong guards the conduct of men in the community. There is an evil forest where bad people in the community are sent die. If you are a witch or wizard and have caused havoc in the community or one die in an accident such as auto crash or fall from palm tree such a corpse is taken to the evil forest.

Methodology of the Study

The study population includes Boki people of age 25 years and above, spread across four communities with forest randomly selected from the entire population. Seven (7) percent sampling intensity was used to decide the number of questionnaires to be administered to these communities as shown below.

S/N	Name of Community	Estimated Population	Sample Size
1	Kanyang	870	61
2	Anape	216	15
3	Butatong	1566	110
4	Busi	783	55

The respondents sampled include farmers, students, civil servants and community leaders.

Questionnaires were used as a research instrument for data collection. The questionnaires consist of a list of questions that were administered to respondents to get information on the role of traditional African religion in the conservation of forest in Boki Local Government Area of Cross River State. This includes literature review and information gathered from existing works related to the study. The researchers made useful personal observation and records of non-governmental organization involvement in the conservation of forest in Boki Local Government Area. The level of impact of the study area also served as a useful data for the study.

The number used in the focused group discussion in this research was 10. This is to achieve a wide range of opinion. The group discussion was used to achieve the set objectives of the study. The data collected from the field was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics that was used includes mean, percentages and frequency distribution to achieve the stated objective while the hypotheses of the study was tested using chi-square to test the relationship between the variables.

Discussion of Findings

This is done based on the general results gotten the study revealed that they are more male (64.4%) than female (35.6%) in Boki LGA as recorded by the respondents in table two, majority of the people there have ages between 29-35 years making up 53.4% as against those b/w ages less than 25 years making up 35.1% of the respondents (table 3) meaning that majority of the people here are able bodied men and women who will be very sure for illegal forest exploitation most people here are farmers (69.2%) as seen in table 6 and almost all the respondents (table 7) meaning that the people of Boki local forest extent will have to rely on the forest for survival hence even though 85.1% of the respondents (table 17) 54.32 respondents table (12) believe that conservation does not help their communities and 56.2% respondents table (10) still maintained that the forest will never finish the matter what is being taken this assertion was also supported by the village clan head of the various communities to be précised chief Kekong Obi who said “fore-fathers depend on the forest for everything, why will the forest finish In our time?

Paul (2007) recorded that life is the most fundamental human right and all of the movements within the movement are dedicated to creating the conditions for life include livelihood food security peace a stable environment and freedom from external tyranny this simply shows that if government and African traditional religion are out to conserve forest resources they should provide necessary and sustainable conditions for these people rely so much on forest resources for everything but this is not so as 66.8% (table 19) respondents maintained that government are not helping them at all as fan as their alternative livelihood is concluded because the knowledge they have for survival is resided skill 65.9% respondents (table 9) strongly disagree that government have not developed their varieties in any way this simply means as fan as illegal harvesting of forest resources is concerned this illegally will never stop.

According to the limited conference of environment and development (UWCED, 1992), environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned most communities at relevant levels. This views point is further refereed by the Johannesburg declaration that also vest ties the need for broad based participation in policy formulation and decision making and implementation at all levels (UNITED NATIONS 2002) this means that support zones communities and stakeholders should be involved in forest conservation as well as policy formulation and decision making for conservation. 59.1% of the respondents in table (1) shows that they are not involved in forest conservation and the need for traditional rulers, clan heads, and chiefs need to fuss the traditional strategy of forest conservation with

that of government and non- governmental organization will go a long way in effective forest conservation and management. The rate at which forest timber are being harvested is frightening all the forest along Obudu, Wula, Betriko - Ikom road axis have been deforested as a result of the intensive cutting of tree in these areas government policy has failed to yield any good result and the forest is at the mercy of anti-deforestation committee who has turned it into a money-spirit ventures.

Straitens (1997) said that the non- governmental organizations have a role to play in the reduction of human suffering and the development of poor countries. Consequently since government strategy is not yielding the desired result in forest conservation there is need to adopt the African traditional religion approach or better still the synergy of government and African traditional approach to forest conservation considering the poor constitution of government to forest conservation the synergy between the two would be the best approach to forest conservation.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research work, the African Traditional Religion has played an important role in the conservation of forest resources. Findings show that African Traditional Religion (ATR) has contributed significantly in the conservation of forest resources through objects, rocks, stream/ pounds, trees, forest land etc. The supreme powers and the belief and respect for the gods of the land make it possible to obey rules and regulations set by gods and goddesses of the land.

Based on the findings of this research work; the following conclusion have been drawn to achieve optimal conservation of forest resources based on the objectives and purpose and the craving for effective management of forest resources, have need for a radical awaking of our social system. Conservation of our forest reserve is a task that must be done. This task must not be left in the hands of government officials and non-governmental organization alone. African Traditional Religion has shown considerable effort in the conservation of forest resources and should be part of government programmes in the conservation of forest as shown in the findings above. Stakeholders as well as support zone communities too are not left out in the pursuant of forest conservation; therefore, all hands must be on deck.

On social system, needs must be adequately informed to induce positive perception to forest based conservation activities and African traditional religion needs to create a synergy with other government officials, non-governmental organization for effective forest conservation. The African Traditional Religion must partner with government to achieve conservation of forest resources. The time to slander and sit on the fence is over. The world must understand that forest has “life” and must not be allowed to die because there are grave consequences.

This is why Christianity is to blame for the laxity in forest conservation. A number of sacred groves have been destroyed except some few as results of Christianity infiltration and urban infrastructural development into the hinterland. Today, forest that were held sacred as a taboo are now seen as every other forest with material value attached or as it what once was. An African traditional man sees him and the environment as inseparable and closely knit together, hence the religious and cultural beliefs on conservation of forest resources.

5.3 Recommendations

The need for government and non-governmental organization to resist some of the African traditional religion belief system and cultural practice that encourage forest conservation for sustainable development in Cross River State and Nigeria as a whole, this research suggest

that this area would be beneficial to the traditional African societies, conservation expert and rural communities should synergies where this practice are carried out for effective forest conservation.

Government should fund more research on forest conservation. Conservation expert and modern communities should put this practice and systems that encourage conservation of forest resources. By so doing, the rural communities within whose domain these resources are located would willingly and voluntarily participate in forest conservation and management within their communities and also benefit from such conservation and management activities. An effective forest conservation committee needs to be established and strengthened in these communities. Members of the communities should be members of the committee to enhance effective grassroots-community mobilization against wanton destruction/and exploitation of forest resources.

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