Abstract
Religious diversity has its own detrimental impact on the Environment. Religious practices have caused land, water and air pollution lots of place around the world and Nigeria in particular. This pepper x-rayed some of the negative effects of these multi-religious practices on the environment, and suggested that proper law and effective implementation of the laws will go a long way in reducing the impacts of these religious on the environment.

Keywords: Multi-religious, Environmental Protection, Sustainable, Nigeria

1. Introduction
Multi-religious stance of Nigeria stems from the singular fact that the nature of our Constitution recognizes the existence of religious bodies provided it does not infringe on the right of existence of other religions. Section 10 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) provides that the government of the Federation or of a state shall not adopt any religion as state religion. This simply means that citizens of the nation are at the liberty to have and practice a form of religion. The exploration of the potential religion possesses, leads to explosions of faith by the practitioners and adherents of different religions. The Constitution of Nigeria guaranteed all Nigerian the right to freedom to practice their religion, thus it stated that:

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion including freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom (either alone or in community with others and in public or private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

Nigeria houses multi-religion with Christianity and Islam nearly equally divided though the exact ratio is uncertain. There is also a growing population of other religious Nigerians who adhere to traditional religion and accounted for the remaining percent. Nigeria has always been a pluralistic state with very diverse ethnics, religious, cultural, linguistic, economic, and social characteristics. In spite of these diversities, Nigeria have tried to live more or less in harmony tolerating each other’s religious beliefs until now. The phenomenon of religious crisis are recent developments which obviously have been developed by self seeking individuals and groups to further their selfish interest, with most of the so-called religious crisis are indeed not religious in origin but have ethnic and political undertone. As many as these religious bodies are, so are their practices and observances. Examination of these practices and how healthy these are to the environment is the focus of this paper.

* C.I.N. EMELIE, PhD, Lecturer, Faculty of Law, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus, Anambra State. Phone: 0803-768-3043, 0802-332-0179. E. mail:reachmeifeyinwa@yahoo.com.

1 Section 38 (1) of The Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended)
3 ibid
2. Conceptual Framework

Religion
Religion is the set of beliefs, feelings dogmas and practice that define the relation between human being and sacred or divinity. It is the belief in the worship of a super human controlling power especially a personal God or god\(^4\). Religion also means belief in the existence of a supernatural ruling power, the controller of the universe, who has given to man a spiritual nature which continues to exist after the death of the body. In fact it is the belief in the existence of a god or gods, and the activities that are connected with the worship of them\(^5\). It is unlike science, a matter of the mind not of the head and because it rules the mind it is often described as the opium of the masses\(^6\).

Sustainable Environment
This means the maintenance of the factors and practices that contribute to the quality of environment on a long-term basis. It is a state in which the demand placed on the environment can be met without reducing its capacity to allow people to live well, now and in the future\(^7\). Evidence is strong that we are exceeding and eroding the earth’s carrying capacity, that there are limits to growth on a finite planet. It helps to ensure that the needs of today’s population are met without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Environmental Protection
Environmental protection is the third pillar and to many, the primary concern of the future of humanity. It defines how we should study and protect ecosystems, air quality, integrity and sustainability of our resources and focusing on the elements that place stress on the environment. It also concerns how technology will drive our greener future. It means protecting the environment from potential damage that technological advances could potentially bring\(^8\).

3. Religious Practices that Harm the Environment
Religion as earlier stated refers to approaches to human spirituality which usually encompasses a set of narratives, symbols, beliefs and practices often with a supernatural or transcendent quality, which gives meaning to the practitioner’s experience of life. As much as the message of Christianity and Islam have taken over major part of the country, there is also the indigenous traditional religion, this indigenous religions are simply the worship of inanimate objects, the worship of rocks, trees or some mysterious animals like lion or a huge Python which they believe to be their source of strength or spiritual guide\(^9\). Religious practices have caused land, water and air pollution in lots of

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places around the world Nigeria in particular. For example, festivals\textsuperscript{10}, apart from causing air pollution by bonfires, throwing abundant quantities of colored powders and liquid at each other is also a problem. These colors are said to contain chemicals like lead oxide and aluminum bromide, these chemicals of course end up in rivers, lakes and other water bodies that are already suffering from a great deal of industrial, municipal and agricultural pollution. According to a group of scientists, the discharge of toxic colors in the soil and water has a deleterious effect on the water resources, soil fertility, micro-organism living in these habitats and the ecosystem integrity on the whole. These colors are not readily degradable under natural conditions and are typically not removed from waste water/stream by conventional waste water treatment\textsuperscript{11}.

Also, in Mumbai, Hindus carried their twenty-foot-tall plaster of Paris idols of the elephant god Ganesh into the sea and left them on the ocean floor to symbolize the impermanence of life, further polluting the scarce water resources of Western India. In Hong Kong and Singapore, Taoists burn paper money to appease ‘hungry ghosts’ filling the air with smoke and dangerous toxins\textsuperscript{12}. Close to this is the practice at the holy city of Varanasi, where thousands of Hindus are cremated every year so that their remains can be scattered in the river. The cremation rituals take place on the Ghats or steps that leads down to the rivers, often, the cremation ceremony does not completely burn the dead bodies (and at other times, people who are too poor to pay for cremation simply have their corpses left in the river) so that section of the city or river is littered with floating corpses and partial corpses. The unfortunate thing is that people and communities around this river still depend on the river as their source of water supply for domestic activities\textsuperscript{13}.

In Nigeria, the story is not different, considering the frequency, exuberances and number of participants in religious celebrations in Nigeria, the events of which are bound to cause at least some degree of environmental pollution. For example, the traditional religious bodies revered Rivers, many of the traditionalists believes that the river is the home of the goddess (in Igbo land referred to as ‘Eze Nwanyi’). A gift from the gods or the earthly incarnation of the gods and that bathing, drinking or having items thrown or placed by the side of the river (which will definitely find its way into the river) will wash away their sins and problems, and give them freedom from their earthly challenges. A visit to the Idemili river at Obosi in Idemili North L.G.A and Mmili John river at Ojoto in Idemili South L.G.A all in Anambra state, will show how polluted these rivers are, among other things. The rivers are filled with garbage, assorted items both animal and human as the items placed near the rivers eventually also found themselves in the river. These rivers are not even clean enough for agricultural use, much less for drinking or swimming. This continuous

\textsuperscript{10} ‘Holi’ is the ancient Hindu festival of colors and love. It marks the arrival of spring and it is celebrated in India, Nepal and many parts of South Asia.


religious practice particularly at the mnmili John river has caused the people living and making use of the river to cry out to the town authority to come to their aid by helping them find solution to these religious practices that have turned their only source of water to a ritual ground\(^{14}\).

Another religious practice is the massive amount of ritual bathing particularly performed by the white garment religious sect. Every year during a particular religious festival, over hundred thousand of people are gathered to bath in one portion of the river. A research shows that the biological oxygen demand level of the river, which is an indication of the organic pollution present, rose to twice the recommended level on just the very first day at the site of mass bathing. This particular religious festival is expected to last for about seven days\(^ {15}\). There is also the Christian practice of embalming of the dead with all those toxic chemicals and other stuff, these chemicals causes air pollution as witnessed by this writer during her visit to the mortuary to deposit the corpse of her late mother. These chemicals apart from polluting the air, will in one way or the other find themselves on the land and eventually in our water streams.

Another Christian religious practice which cause harm to the environment is the practice of burning candle, incense and the use of other religious scents which no matter how holy one may think they are, alters the physical, chemical and biological components of the air, thereby resulting in the pollution of the air. There is also the use of powerful public address system, mounting of amplifiers and using amplifiers to call devotees to Salah during religious programs and activities contributes to noise pollution. These religious bodies are not concerned with the dictates of their religion and the neighborhood principle\(^ {16}\). Their activities no doubt cause disturbances and inconveniences for those living in the vicinity of these religious bodies. These disturbances are normally referred to as neighborhood noise which is one of the sources of noise pollution. Noise pollution is known as to cause hearing impairment, sleeplessness, high blood pressure among others.

Finally, the Muslim religious festivals which involve ram or other animal sacrifice have their own one or two pollution problem either on the land, air and water, especially in the urban areas. As many as the religions are, so are their different practices that cause harm to the environment. The love for these religious practices has led Long\(^ {17}\) to express as follows:

\[\text{I do not understand the love of tradition...especially when it cannot be questioned or examined because it is our religion. I have seen many of the actions of various religions and traditions and very few are worth anything positive and most are very negative to the people and environment...Islam loves killing thousands of animals so often- why? Hindus will dip their sick bodies into one of the most polluted rivers in the world – why? Thousands of Christians travel far and near for healing (that does not work) leaving piles of garbage behind.}\]

\(^{14}\) C.I.N Emelie is from Ojoto and had personally witnessed the religious practice in mnmili John River in Ojoto.


3. Strategies for Effective Balancing of Religious Practices with Environmental Protection

- a) In collaboration with religious leaders the government should create artificial rivers for the traditional religious bodies so that they do not pollute the actual water bodies.
- b) The government must be sensitive to the nature of the religious rituals and its effects on the environment, before it can address the problem. There is need for more scientific research.
- c) Research should be carried out on the effects of these religious practices because the more we know about the practices, the more we find the best ways to deal with environmental problems created by the practices.
- d) There should be large-scale efforts to increase public awareness regarding the health hazards of these harmful practices and make suggestions for a safer alternatives which will go a long way in enhancing an environmental conscious practice.
- e) The law as an agent of change should play an active role in controlling the activities of these religious bodies. Although there are laws in place to address these forms of pollution from the practices of these religious bodies, these laws are not enforced. Government regulations are capable of taking away the vitality and vibrancy of these religious practices.
- f) There should be conscious desire by the religious bodies for more societal activism and support with regard to protecting the environment.
- g) There should be a religious-environmental framework to guide government policy to create both multi religious social cohesion as well as environmental protection. This will contribute to upholding the fundamental pillars of religion and national harmony.

4. Conclusion

Religious diversity has a more detrimental impact on the environment than ethnic diversity. These differences are capable of lowering collective action and reduce public spending on environmental protection and performance. Religious practices contribute greatly to the low level of concern about the environment\(^1\). Different religious bodies have diverse values towards the environment, while some Christian believes that man should subdue the environment, others believes that the environment should be cared for. Still others encourage individuals to welcome the growing environmental problems as positive signs of the second coming of Christ. Islam on its part seeks to link creation with divine revelation and seeing the environment as testimony to Allah’s all encompassing presence. In all, the religious bodies acknowledges the vital place of un degraded environment in the affairs of man, however their various religious practices has covered their eyes and senses and has distanced them from according the same environment the protection it requires.