

Regulating the Sacred: Religious Environmental Degradation and Legal Reform in Nigeria

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Abstract

Apart from Nigeria's worrisome economic situation, environmental degradation is also an alarming issue across the country. Religious institutions in Nigeria play a pivotal yet underexplored role, from deforestation for church and mosque constructions to indiscriminate waste disposal by large congregations. This paper examines the role of religious institutions in environmental degradation in Nigeria and explores how religious practices align with environmental sustainability. While religion plays a dominant role in Nigerian society, religious institutions contribute to environmental challenges through large-scale land acquisition, deforestation, indiscriminate waste disposal and management, and noise pollution. Using the doctrinal method of legal research, this paper further examines relevant constitutional and statutory provisions, analyses judicial authorities, and draws comparative lessons from other jurisdictions, including Saudi Arabia and India. The paper concludes that the impact of religious institutions in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized in ensuring a healthy environment. It recommended integrating eco-theology into religious teachings and called for stronger enforcement of environmental laws in Nigeria.

Keywords: Environmentalism, Religious institutions, Nigeria, Eco-theology, Legal Framework, Sustainability.

I. Introduction

Environmental degradation is an existential global threat that undermines biodiversity and the general welfare of citizens. In Nigeria, it manifests via soil erosion, deforestation, pollution, and indiscriminate waste disposal and management.¹ While urbanization, industrialization, and governmental projects have received considerable scholarly and regulatory attention for their contributions to environmental degradation, the environmental implications of religious practices and institutional expansion remain underappreciated. There was a correlation between religions, especially Christianity and Islam, and resource conservation.² Accordingly, this confirms that God opposes recklessness and the waste of natural resources, as well as indulging in any act that could jeopardize sustainability and cause environmental degradation, which can harm natural endowments.

¹ Ogunbode, Timothy Oyebamiji, and Funke Elizabeth Oyekan. 2023. "Religious Practices and Its Impacts on a Sustainable Urban Environment in Nigeria: The Way Forward." *The Scientific World JOURNAL* 2023 (November): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/8080235>.

² Wachukwu, Chikodi Josiah, and Pius Barinaadaa Kii. 2025. "The Influence of Traditional Religious Beliefs on Public Attitudes Toward Environmental Conservation in Rivers State, Nigeria." *NIU Journal of Humanities*. 10 (2). <https://doi.org/10.58709/niujhu.v10i2.2226>.

Nigeria is well recognized as a deeply religious society, with an estimated 98% of its population adhering to one of Islam, Christianity, or African Traditional Religion (ATR).³ Thus, religious institutions in Nigeria command substantial socio-political and economic influence. Nevertheless, this influence is often accompanied by unchecked environmental practices, including deforestation to erect places of worship, indiscriminate waste disposal and management during mass events, and noise pollution from worship centers (all in the name of religious worship and faith nurture).⁴ Awoniyi argues that religious institutions have inadvertently contributed to environmental degradation by failing to incorporate environmental consciousness into faith-based practices.⁵

Legal frameworks exist at all levels in Nigeria to protect the environment. For instance, Section 20 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), imposes a duty on the State to protect and improve the environment and safeguard its biodiversity resources.⁶ However, this provision of the law, as contained in S20 of the Constitution, falls within Chapter II, rendering it non-justiciable.⁷ The effect of the non-justiciability is that rights which fall under Chapter II of the Constitution cannot be enforced in any court of law by virtue of S 6 (6) (c) of the Constitution. Despite this limitation, courts have adopted innovative interpretations. In *Gani Fawehinmi v Federal Republic of Nigeria*,⁸ the Supreme Court held that obligations under Chapter II can become enforceable through legislative intervention by anchoring the plea in fundamental human rights under Chapter IV or international statutes, including the Banjul Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in Africa.

Environmental protection statutes such as the Environmental Impact Assessment Act (EIA)⁹ and the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) Act¹⁰, 2007, provide mechanisms for regulating activities that are likely to adversely impact the environment—such as command-and-control (C&C) regulations, market-based instruments (MBIs), and voluntary/information-based approaches. However, these are rarely applied to religious-based developments due to weak law enforcement. In the same vein, the judiciary in *Oronto Douglas v Shell Petroleum Development Co Ltd*¹¹ recognized the importance of public participation in environmental decisions (i.e., environmental democracy). However, religious institutions have generally been distanced from such participation, thereby weakening environmentalism due to weak enforcement mechanisms.

Against the foregoing background, this paper examines the impact of religious institutions on environmental degradation in Nigeria. It advocates holding religious institutions to the same environmental accountability standards as other social actors. Moreover, it advocates adopting environmental principles and strengthening legal frameworks to curb degradation within religious doctrines and practices in Nigeria.

³ "Technical Difficulties." n.d. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/NIGERIA-2021-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.

⁴ "Technical Difficulties." n.d. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/NIGERIA-2021-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.

⁵ Awoniyi, S. 2015. "Religious Ethics and the Environment: A Quest for Sustainable Development in the Modern World." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5 (6). http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_5_No_6_June_2015/26.pdf.

⁶ Chapter II 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Cap C 23 LFN 2004

⁷ Section 6(6)(c) (ibid)

⁸ *Gani Fawehinmi v Federal Republic of Nigeria* (2003) 9 NWLR (Pt 825) 1.

⁹ Environmental Impact Assessment Act Cap E12 LFN 2004.

¹⁰ National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act 2007Cap 301LFN 2010

¹¹ *Oronto Douglas v Shell Petroleum Development Co Ltd* (1999) 2 NWLR (Pt 591) 466.

Prior to this study, some scholars have researched this topic, but the research conducted has not addressed the situation as expected. The researchers could not conduct a field study to gather people's perspectives on the country's uncontrolled situation. This research addresses this aspect by conducting interviews with relevant stakeholders. This paper identifies religious institutional activities as major causes of environmental degradation in Nigeria. This research is particularly apt at this time, as it treats religious institutions not just as moral guides but also as legal entities whose physical operations must be regulated under environmental law.

This research employs a doctrinal and non-doctrinal legal research methodology, which is supported by content and comparative analysis. The primary sources of information include statutory instruments, judicial decisions, and the Constitution, while the secondary sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, religious texts (e.g., the Qur'an and the Bible), and environmental reports. In this vein, a comparative approach will draw insights from Saudi Arabia and India to adopt the global best practices. More so, theological analysis is employed to examine religious doctrines that support environmental stewardship for sustainability. For emphasis, when carefully integrated, the content and theological analysis transform doctrinal legal research from a purely descriptive exercise into a normatively rich, analytically rigorous inquiry, particularly valuable in areas where law, religion, and ethics intersect. Regarding the non-doctrinal research method, interviews were conducted with religious leaders, worshippers, and residents of nearby places of worship across various parts of Nigeria, spanning the two main religions, Islam and Christianity, to engage them on the subject. The article defines key terms such as "environment" and "environmentalism," examines the current environmental law frameworks in Nigeria and a few other chosen jurisdictions, learns from them through comparative analysis, and concludes with suggestions for incorporating eco-theology and more stringent policy enforcement.

II. Conceptual Framework

To understand the key concepts underlying religious institutions' contribution to environmental degradation in Nigeria, the following terms will be discussed: environment, environmental degradation, and environmentalism.

1. Environment

The Black's Law Dictionary ¹² defines environment as:

"The totality of physical, economic, cultural, aesthetic, and social circumstances and factors that surround and affect the desirability and value of property, and which also affect the quality of people's lives."

According to Kehinde et al. ¹³ it encompasses both natural and human-made elements, including wetlands, coastal and marine areas, biodiversity, and even genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Accordingly, the environment comprises air, water, land, and the intricate interrelationships among them (including human beings, animals, plants, micro-organisms, and property). Thus, the term'

¹² Henry Campbell Black, and West Publishing Company. 1933. Black's Law Dictionary : Containing Definitions of the Terms and Phrases of American and English Jurisprudence, Ancient and Modern, and Including the Principal Terms of International, Constitutional, Ecclesiastical and Commercial Law, and Medical Jurisprudence, with a Collection of Legal Maxims, Numerous Select Titles from the Roman, Modern Civil, Scotch, French, Spanish, and Mexican Law, and Other Foreign Systems, and a Table of Abbreviations. St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co.

¹³ Kehinde, Adeola, Bolade Awosusi, Sunday Iyaniwura, and Yahaya Ganiyu. 2023. "Plastic Pollution in Nigeria: The Need for Legislation to Tackle the Menace." *Krytyka Prawa* 15 (1). <https://doi.org/10.7206/kp.2080-1084.575>.

environment’, despite its complexity and dynamic nature, generally refers to the surroundings of objects and organisms.

Section 37 of the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) Act¹⁴ defines the environment to include water, air, land, and all plants and human beings or animals living therein, and the interrelationship that exists among these or any of them. In the same vein, the Environmental Impact Assessment Act¹⁵ adopts a broad view of the environment encompassing not just physical and biological resources but also socio-cultural values. In addition, the concept is recognized under jurisprudence as both a public good and a human right, which justifies legal intervention to prevent its abuse by any individual, group, or religious institution.¹⁶ Moreover, the environment should be protected for both present and future generations in line with the Rio Declaration.¹⁷ The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the ‘Earth Summit’, was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 3-14 June 1992. The Rio de Janeiro conference highlighted how different social, economic, and environmental factors are interdependent and evolve together, and how success in one sector requires action in others to be sustained over time. The primary objective of the Rio ‘Earth Summit’ was to produce a broad agenda and a new blueprint for international action on environmental and development issues to guide international cooperation and development policy in the twenty-first century. The ‘Earth Summit’ concluded that everyone on the planet, at the local, national, regional, or global level, could achieve sustainable development.¹⁸

2. Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation is the deterioration of the environment through the depletion of resources such as air, water, and soil, the destruction of ecosystems, and the extinction of wildlife. It is defined as any change or disturbance to the environment that is perceived as deleterious or undesirable.¹⁹ Environmental degradation means the destruction or deterioration of the environment through the depletion of natural resources such as water, air, and soil.²⁰

From a scholarly perspective, degradation may take the form of deforestation, pollution, natural disasters, indiscriminate waste disposal, and destruction of biodiversity.²¹ In other words, environmental degradation is a process by which resources, such as air, water, and soil/land, become depleted as their quality and originality decline.²² Hence, this affects the general health of human beings and the biodiversity of the environment.²³

¹⁴ National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act 2007Cap 301LFN 2010

¹⁵ Cap E12 LFN 2004, s. 1.

¹⁶ Amokaye, Oludayo. 2014. *Environmental Law and Practice in Nigeria*. 7th ed. MIJ Professional Publishers Ltd. 7th ed. MIJ Professional Publishers Ltd.

¹⁷ Rio Declaration, 1992, principle 3.

¹⁸ United Nations. n.d. “United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992 | United Nations.” <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992>.

¹⁹ Abbas, Hadeel Mohsen. 2024. “ENVIRONMENT DEGRADATION AND DISASTERS.” In *Zenodo (CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research)*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14957891>.

²⁰ Shukla Ambulance Service. n.d. “About Us| Shukla Ambulance Service.” <https://shuklaambulanceservice.com/blog/environmental-degradation-and-pollution>.

²¹ Mafiana, C. F, O. A. Jayeola, and E. O. Iduseri. 2022. “Impact of Environmental Degradation on Biodiversity Conservation in Nigeria.” *Zoologist (The)* 20 (1): 41–50. <https://doi.org/10.4314/tzool.v20i1.6>.

²² Kayode Asaju, and Samuel Arome. 2015. “Environmental Degradation and Sustainability in Nigeria: The Need for Environmental Education.” *American Journal of Social Sciences* 3 (3): 56.

²³ Centre for Oil Pollution Watch v NNPC (2019) 5 NWLR (PT. 1666) 518

In Nigeria, as in other jurisdictions, such acts may be punishable under various laws, including the NESREA Act, the EIA Act, and other relevant regulations that address noise, air pollution, and hazardous waste. Similarly, the Constitution mandates the Nigerian State to protect, improve, and safeguard the water, air, land, forest, and wildlife of Nigeria's environment. This is, however, non-justiciable.²⁴ However, the judiciary has gradually interpreted this obligation. For instance, in *Center for Oil Pollution Watch v NNPC*,²⁵ the Supreme Court acknowledged the public interest in environmental protection, thereby reinforcing citizens' rights to challenge environmental abuse.

Thus, environmental degradation is the deterioration of the natural environment due to improper human intervention or natural disasters, such as acts of God.

3. Environmentalism

Environmentalism is a comprehensive social, political, and ethical movement that aims to prevent human activity from degrading the natural environment. It promotes environmentally friendly behaviors, biodiversity preservation, and laws that reduce pollution to safeguard the environment, often focusing on issues such as climate change and species conservation. Thus, it is an ideology or belief system that attempts to minimize the harmful impacts of human activities on the environment.²⁶

Examining the concept from a legal and policy perspective, environmentalism drives advocacy for sustainable development, climate justice, pollution control, and ecosystem conservation.²⁷ This definition of environmentalism underscores the Rio principle of sustainability and the Net-Zero within the framework of the Polluter Pays Principle (PPP).²⁸ In all, environmentalism refers to the collective ideology and practice aimed at protecting the natural environment.

It is necessary to mention some of the laws enacted in Nigeria to regulate and ensure environmental protection. These laws will be briefly examined.

III. Key Legal Framework For Environmental Protection In Nigeria

In keeping with the growing global concern for the environment, Nigeria has several key environmental protection laws. These include:

- i. Harmful Wastes Act:²⁹ This criminalization Act controls the disposition of hazardous waste substances in the inland or coastal waters of Nigeria. The aforementioned Act defines dangerous waste as any injurious, poisonous, toxic, or noxious substance that can subject any person to the risk of death, fatal injury, or irreversible impairment of physical and mental health.³⁰

²⁴ S 6(6)(c). 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria Cap C 23 LFN 2004

²⁵ Centre for Oil Pollution Watch v NNPC (2019) 5 NWLR (PT. 1666) 518

²⁶ *Environmentalism definition, Origin & Examples | study.com*. Available at: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/environmentalism-overview-movements.html> (Accessed: 24 April 2026).

²⁷ Mafiana, C. F., O. A. Jayeola, and E. O. Iduseri. 2022. "Impact of Environmental Degradation on Biodiversity Conservation in Nigeria." *Zoologist (The)* 20 (1): 41–50. <https://doi.org/10.4314/tzool.v20i1.6>.

²⁸ Convention on Biological Diversity. (2011). *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*. Cbd.int. <https://www.cbd.int/doc/ref/rio-declaration.shtml>

²⁹ The Harmful Waste (Special Criminal Provisions, etc) Act Cap H1 Laws Federation of Nigeria, 2004

³⁰ Oguniran, Blessing Ifeoluwa. 2018. "Harmful Effects and Management of Indiscriminate Solid Waste Disposal on Human and Its Environment in Nigeria: A Review." *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research* 6 (4): 1427–31.

- ii. The Environmental Impact Assessment Act:³¹ The rationale behind this Act is the principles of preventive environmental law. The Act stipulates that the consequences of any industrial process should first be weighed against environmental protection. Where such industrial action will pose a great harm to the environment, the said Act should be suspended.³² The Act requires an environmental assessment for certain development activities.
- iii. Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Act:³³ The Act also covers any development that makes drastic changes to land or buildings, the result of which adversely distorts the environment.³⁴ This comprises activities carried out on, alongside, or in the building or land in question, but that do not interfere with the building's or land's physical characteristics.³⁵
- iv. National Environmental Standard Regulation and Enforcement Agency Act (NESREA ACT):³⁶ This legislation came into existence following the Repeal of the FEPA (Federal Environment Protection Agency Decree 1988).³⁷ The objective of this regulatory body is essentially to protect the environment in Nigeria. The Act gave birth to NESREA, which is a legal person under Nigerian corporate law, with the ability to institute legal actions, exist in perpetuity, and possess a common seal. The duty of this Agency is enshrined in section 7 of the Act, which includes enforcement, coordination, management, monitoring, funding, licensing, and educating the Nigerian citizenry on the importance of preserving and securing the environment. Domestic waste management remains a challenge in most Nigerian states, making a mockery of the NESREA Act and of Efforts to Address Air pollution from agricultural activities.

IV. Religious Doctrines and Environmental Protection in Nigeria

1. Islam

Under the Islamic Law (Sharia), Islam strongly prohibits environmental degradation but promotes balance (*mīzān*) in creation. This is anchored on the key foundations that form the bedrock of Islamic environmental jurisprudence. Thus:

- a. Qur'an: The Holy Qur'an by virtue of Qur'an 7:31 Allah (SWT) says:

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ

“O children of Adam! Take your adornment to every masjid, and eat and drink, but do not be wasteful. Indeed, He does not like the wasteful. (Quran 7:31, Sahih International)”³⁸

This verse forms the basis of Sharia for environmental moderation, especially in the aspects of consumption and the use of natural resources. Hence, wastefulness (*isrāf*) is condemned, whether

³¹ Environmental Impact Assessment Act, CAP E12, Laws of Federation Nigeria, 2004

³² Environmental Impact Assessment Act, CAP E12, Laws of Federation Nigeria, 2004

³³ The Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Act, CAP N138, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004

³⁴ Tunde Agbola, and E.O. Agbola. 1997. “The Development of Urban and Regional Planning Legislation and Their Impact on the Morphology of Nigerian Cities.” *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies* 39 (1): 123–44.

³⁵ Tunde Agbola, and E.O. Agbola. 1997. “The Development of Urban and Regional Planning Legislation and Their Impact on the Morphology of Nigerian Cities.” *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies* 39 (1): 123–44.

³⁶ National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act 2007Cap 301LFN 2010

³⁷ Ogbodo, S. Gozie. n.d. “Environmental Protection in Nigeria: Two Decades After the Koko Incident.” *GGU Law Digital Commons*. <https://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/annlsurvey/vol15/iss1/2>.

³⁸ Itani, Talal. n.d. “Quran in English - Clear and Easy to Read.” *Quran in English*. <https://clearquran.com/002.html>.

in energy, water, food, or any material resources, as far as it could degrade the environment.³⁹ Thus, Qur'an 17:27 states that:

إِنَّ الْمُبَذِّرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيَاطِينِ وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِرَبِّهِ كَفُورًا

"Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful."⁴⁰

In addition, Qur'an 3:112 says that:

حَبْلٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ

"Except for a rope from Allah and a rope from the people..."⁴¹

This provision of the Holy Qur'an underscores the relationship between God and humanity. It also emphasizes the moral obligation to protect the environment as a means of navigating it with social and divine obligations. In the same vein, the environment, according to Islamic teachings, is a responsibility entrusted to humans by Allah. This is observed through the doctrine of stewardship (Khilafah), Muslims are enjoined to be stewards of the earth and to protect the environment.⁴² The Qur'an says:⁴³

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

"And when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority (steward)."

Al-Ghazali⁴⁴ emphasized that extravagance is a moral vice and a form of injustice, as it deprives future generations of resources. Al-Qaradawi⁴⁵, in his *Fiqh al-Bi'ah*, stresses the connection between piety (taqwa) and environmental discipline, asserting that preserving the environment is a religious obligation before it is a legal one. Moreover, Khalid⁴⁶, an Islamic ecologist interprets this verse as a universal command to adopt sustainability in all spheres of life.

b. Hadith: According to Sunan Ibn Mājah and Sahih Muslim, the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) says:⁴⁷

لَا ضَرَرَ وَلَا ضِرَارَ

"Do not cause harm or reciprocate harm."⁴⁸

The Hadith establishes a general legal maxim in the Sharia (qā'idah fihiyyah) that forms the bedrock of environmental responsibility. The likes of al-Zarqa argue that this Hadith serves as a cornerstone for prohibiting harmful acts such as pollution, excessive noise, and deforestation.⁴⁹

³⁹ Lestari, Ayu, and Alfiyatul Azizah. 2025. "The Prohibition of Israf in QS. Al-A'raf Verse 31 and Its Relevance to Environmental Conservation." 2025. <https://proceedings.ums.ac.id/iseth/article/view/6886>.

⁴⁰ Itani, Talal. n.d. "Quran in English - Clear and Easy to Read." Quran in English. <https://clearquran.com/002.html>.

⁴¹ Itani, Talal. n.d. "Quran in English - Clear and Easy to Read." Quran in English. <https://clearquran.com/002.html>.

⁴² Surah Al-An'am (Qura' n 6:141), Surah Al-Baqarah (Qura' n 2:30)

⁴³ Surah Al-Baqarah (Qura'n 2:30)

⁴⁴ al-Ghazali, A. H. (2005). *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* [Revival of the Religious Sciences]. Cairo: Dār al-Minhāj.

⁴⁵ al-Qaradawi, Y. (2001). *Fiqh al-Bi'ah fī Daw' al-Qur'an wa al-Sunnah* [Environmental Jurisprudence in the Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah]. Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah.

⁴⁶ Khalid, Fazlun. 2010. "Islam and the Environment – Ethics and Practice an Assessment." *Religion Compass* 4 (11): 707–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2010.00249.x>.

⁴⁷ Sunan Ibn Mājah, Hadith No. 2340; Sahih Muslim (Book 32, Hadith 6251).

⁴⁸ Itani, Talal. n.d. "Quran in English - Clear and Easy to Read." Quran in English. <https://clearquran.com/002.html>.

⁴⁹ Zakariyah, Luqman. 2015. *Legal Maxims in Islamic Criminal Law: Theory and Applications*. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004304871>.

- c. Ijma: This includes Ijma sukuti and Ijma sarih. This presents the unanimous scholarly opinion on the issue following the death of the Prophet (pbuh). Ijma is binding on Muslim faithful.⁵⁰ Ijma takes its source from several Hadith, including reported Hadith by Ibn Mājah and others:

لَا تَجْتَمِعُ أُمَّتِي عَلَى ضَلَالَةٍ

My Ummah will never agree upon an error.

Ijma (scholarly consensus) serves as a flexible legal tool in Islam, enabling religious scholars to issue obligatory rulings (fatwas) on modern ecological crises that are not expressly stated in the Qur'an or Sunnah. It transforms fundamental Islamic principles of environmental stewardship into enforceable, modern environmental law. Islamic law is predicated on the idea that people are God's trustees (khalifah) on Earth, charged with upholding the natural world's equilibrium (mīzān) and guarding against corruption (fasād). While foundational writings outline conservation ethics, such as prohibiting crop destruction, promoting tree planting, and preserving water, ijma converts these universal ethics into practical, contemporary frameworks.⁵¹

However, despite Islamic doctrine's emphasis on protecting the environment, adherence to these teachings is inadequate in Nigeria. For instance, the use of firewood and charcoal for cooking during religious gatherings/events in Nigeria contributes to deforestation and air pollution.⁵² This rests on the fact that over 20 million households still rely on firewood and charcoal for cooking, and there is no doubt that this demand increases during communal activities, such as religious festivals and large public gatherings, where bulk cooking is done using open fires and biomass fuels. This has been linked to accelerated deforestation and high levels of particulate air pollution across communities.⁵³ This common practice continues to destroy natural resources and degrade the environment without care for sustainability⁵⁴, as advocated by the Rio Declaration.⁵⁵ Also, the use of sophisticated amplified sound systems during sermons, celebrations, and religious events can cause noise pollution unless they operate in an enclosed or soundproofed environment.⁵⁶ Oral interviews conducted revealed that noise pollution from religious houses adversely affects people. Some residents in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, report that microphones used by churches and mosques during prayers and sermons negatively affect them. Johnson Kayode noted that the loud microphones used by Muslim worshippers to call for prayers early in the morning are usually so loud and wake people up as early as 5:am in the morning, and this affects his sleep and some other residents within his premises, thereby forcing them sometimes to lock their windows in order to reduce the level of noise that comes into their apartments.⁵⁷ Another resident in Ilorin complained

⁵⁰ "Usul-Al-Fiqh Made Easy (Part 7) - Sources of HUKM (Quran, Sunnah, Ijmaa and Ijtihaad) — Arriqaaq." 2024. May 22, 2024. <https://www.arriqaaq.com/sources-of-al-hukm-quran-sunnah-ijmaa-and-ijtihaad-usul-al-fiqh-made-easy-part-7/>.

⁵¹ Idllalène, Samira. 2021. "What Is 'Islamic Environmental Law?'" In *Cambridge University Press eBooks*, 31–53. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108772082.004>.

⁵² "Federal Ministry of Environment – Environment Is Your Life, Keep It Safe." n.d. <https://environment.gov.ng/>.

⁵³ Jeremiah, Kingsley. 2025. "Cooking Gas: Over 20m Households Stick to Firewood, Charcoal Over Affordability." *The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News*, December 31, 2025. <https://guardian.ng/news/cooking-gas-over-20m-households-stick-to-firewood-charcoal-over-affordability/>.

⁵⁴ Nmah, Pe. 2011. "Spiritual Dimension of Land Identity Crisis in Igboland of Nigeria: An Ethical Reflection." *UJAH Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 12 (2). <https://doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v12i2.6>.

⁵⁵ Article 3 Rio Declaration 1992

⁵⁶ Oluwasegun, Akintola John, Toyin Afolabi Majekodunmi, Benjami Abayomi Sogunle, and Ololade Adegoke Olaturu – Olagbegi. 2026. "NOISE POLLUTION BY RELIGIOUS WORSHIP CENTRES IN NIGERIA: AN INFRINGEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS." *Oluwasegun | ANAOCHA BAR JOURNAL*. March 15, 2026. <https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/index.php/ABJ/article/view/3725/3846>.

⁵⁷ The interview was conducted on 20th April, 2026 at No 23, Atiku Road Adewole Estate, Ilorin Kwara State

about the church built directly opposite her house, which negatively affects her, especially due to noise pollution during their worship and vigils. She noted that the noise, which has affected her sleep, has led her to visit hospitals several times.⁵⁸ Several other oral interviews conducted show that noise from these religious houses is detrimental to their well-being.

These combined acts negatively impact surrounding communities and the environment. In addition, though not a primary driver, acquiring a large expanse of land for the expansion of prayer grounds contributes to deforestation, especially when there is no replacement.⁵⁹ Waste like sachets of “pure water”, plastic and packaging waste, disposable plastic plates/cups/cutlery, PET water bottles, food wraps, food waste, etc., are always left over due to inadequate waste management facilities or insufficient coordination in clean-up efforts,⁶⁰ as against the doctrines of Islam for environmental protection.⁶¹

2. Christianity

Genesis 2:15 states that “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” This verse of the Bible indicates that work is an essential part of human existence.⁶² This verse of the Bible challenges the notion that work is negative, burdensome, or a result of sin. The Hebrew words ‘work’ (avod) and ‘take care or tend’ (shamar) imply a sense of service, labor, and preservation. The role of Adam, the first man in the Bible, is not only to cultivate and harvest, but also to protect and preserve the land and its resources. Proverbs 6:6⁶³ states that “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest”. This verse also supports tilling the land and preserving the environment. It is therefore safe to say that the Bible encourages the preservation of the environment because human activities on the soil and the earth’s surface will improve, not degrade, the environment.

However,⁶⁴ activities of religious people on the environment, from littering the ground during large gatherings to imbibing the negative notion that when you work, tend, or cultivate the ground, you are either reaping from your sinful nature or from a generational curse, have all negatively impacted the environment. Likewise, many churches use powerful loudspeakers and other musical instruments during night vigils, open-air crusade services, Sunday services, and other events, causing disturbances and inconvenience for those living in the vicinity of these churches.⁶⁵ This has forced some people, especially tenants, to abandon their homes and relocate to quieter areas. This has led to environmental degradation.⁶⁶

⁵⁸ Gloria Adejuwon, resident at No 5 Obangede Road, Adewole Estate Ilorin Kwara State

⁵⁹ Oluwajuwon, Tomiwa. 2021. “Global and Nigerian Deforestation Trends, Drivers and Implications: An Overview.” *Academia Letters*, August. <https://doi.org/10.20935/al3241>.

⁶⁰ Oluwajuwon, Tomiwa. 2021. “Global and Nigerian Deforestation Trends, Drivers and Implications: An Overview.” *Academia Letters*, August. <https://doi.org/10.20935/al3241>.

⁶¹ Dumbili, Emeka, and Lesley Henderson. 2020. “The Challenge of Plastic Pollution in Nigeria.” In *Elsevier eBooks*, 569–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-817880-5.00022-0>.

⁶² Genesis 2:15, King James Version Bible

⁶³ Proverbs 6:6, King James Version Bible

⁶⁴ Ogunbode, Timothy Oyebamiji, and Funke Elizabeth Oyekan. 2023. “Religious Practices and Its Impacts on a Sustainable Urban Environment in Nigeria: The Way Forward.” *The Scientific World JOURNAL* 2023 (November): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2023/8080235>.

⁶⁵ Gloria Adejuwon, resident at No 5 Obangede Road, Adewole Estate Ilorin Kwara State

⁶⁶ Gloria Adejuwon, resident at No 5 Obangede Road, Adewole Estate Ilorin Kwara State

3. Traditional Religion

Indigenous religious systems among the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa in Nigeria employ sacred groves, taboos, and proverbs to conserve the environment.⁶⁷ These formed the customary practices that have long regulated human behavior, fostered sustainable land use (even prior to the Rio Declaration's principles of sustainability), and protected biodiversity across Nigeria.⁶⁸ These mechanisms are spiritual, unwritten, and cultural codes that regulate human interaction with the natural environment. As mentioned earlier, Nigerian indigenous belief systems incorporate spirituality and ecology in profound ways. For the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa, protecting the environment is not just a secular policy but also a religious obligation controlled by ecological taboos, cultural proverbs, and ancestral customs that require care for the land, water, and animals. Sacred groves are designated woodland sections protected by religious prohibitions. Among the Yoruba people in Nigeria, the world-famous UNESCO Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove in Osun State is dedicated to the river deity. It is a hotspot for biodiversity, protecting hundreds of plant species and prohibiting farming, hunting, and logging.

Among the Igbo, southeastern villages have sacred groves (ohia nsüge) that serve as clean havens for watersheds, medicinal plants, and endangered wildlife. Among Hausas, certain designated green areas and woodland sections associated with old shrines or notable trees are protected from deforestation and uncontrolled exploitation through Islamic and traditional practices.⁶⁹

Taboos are community-enforced rules that prevent excessive use of natural resources. Likewise, proverbs transmit moral and ethical guidelines for sustainable living and serve as oral archives of traditional ecological knowledge.⁷⁰

V. Environmental Impact of Religious Activities in Nigeria

The impact of activities from religious houses and camps in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. There have been several negative impacts of these houses and camps in Nigeria, as will be examined below:

1. Deforestation

The manner in which religious houses in Nigeria are constructed is alarming. In effect, the need to build religious houses has led to deforestation in major parts of Nigeria, which, in turn, has caused various environmental hazards.⁷¹ Deforestation occurs when forest land is intentionally cleared. The amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere may increase due to deforestation. This is because carbon dioxide is chemically bound in trees' wood and is taken up

⁶⁷ Osemeobo, Gbadebo Jonathan, Gbadebo. 2014. "Back to Tradition: Taboos in Bioconservation in Nigeria." *International Journal of Agricultural Sciences* 3 (1).

⁶⁸ Osemeobo, Gbadebo Jonathan, Gbadebo. 2014. "Back to Tradition: Taboos in Bioconservation in Nigeria." *International Journal of Agricultural Sciences* 3 (1).

⁶⁹ Nwafor, Felix Ifeanyi, Ebere Ugwunwa Njoku, Perpetua Chikodili Okuh-Ikeme, Chibugo Chinedu Amadi, Chinenye Benita Ozokolie, Anthony Ejiofor Nweze, and Chidera Oloto. 2026. "Totems and Sacred Groves in Southeast Nigeria: Indigenous Nature-based Solutions for Climate Change Mitigation and Biodiversity Conservation." *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* 14 (April). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fevo.2026.1732469>.

⁷⁰ Nwafor, Felix Ifeanyi, Ebere Ugwunwa Njoku, Perpetua Chikodili Okuh-Ikeme, Chibugo Chinedu Amadi, Chinenye Benita Ozokolie, Anthony Ejiofor Nweze, and Chidera Oloto. 2026. "Totems and Sacred Groves in Southeast Nigeria: Indigenous Nature-based Solutions for Climate Change Mitigation and Biodiversity Conservation." *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* 14 (April). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fevo.2026.1732469>.

⁷¹ Foluoyefeso. 2024. "Nigeria's Deforestation Crisis: Understanding the Urgent Need for Change." *FoluOyefeso* (blog). April 6, 2024. <https://www.foluoyefeso.com/post/nigeria-s-deforestation-crisis-understanding-the-urgent-need-for-change>.

by trees for photosynthesis. The world's biodiversity is also in danger due to deforestation, as a wide variety of plant and animal species can be found in tropical forests. Soil might become more vulnerable to erosion when trees are removed from a forest.⁷²

2. Waste Disposal

The collection, processing, recycling, or depositing of human society's waste materials is known as waste disposal. It is the process of managing, treating, and getting rid of waste products in a way that is safe for the environment and human health.⁷³ It has been noted that religious houses in Nigeria do not properly dispose of their wastes, especially during large gatherings. Events such as crusades and pilgrimages generate large volumes of plastic and organic waste that are often improperly disposed of, leading to environmental degradation.⁷⁴

3. Noise and Air Pollution

This is one of the most fundamental environmental issues Nigeria is currently battling with. Amplified sounds from loudspeakers during vigils and other programs contribute to nationwide noise pollution. Regrettably, the Nigerian government has failed to address this worrisome issue, acting as though nothing harmful is occurring, despite the noise these worship centers generate and the consequences they entail.⁷⁵ Also, burning of incense during religious rites leads to air pollution.⁷⁶

VI. Comparative Analysis With Other Jurisdictions

As mentioned earlier, this study will engage in comparative analysis with other jurisdictions to understand what is available in those jurisdictions and how Nigeria can learn from them.

1. Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia does not have a constitutional legal system. Instead, environmental policies are established through royal decrees, ministerial regulations, and national strategic frameworks.⁷⁷ For instance, the Vision 2030 initiatives aim at enhancing environmental sustainability, water conservation, and land restoration. Thus, environmental protection enforcement is driven by regulatory bodies under the Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, and by the mandates

⁷² Foluoyefeso. 2024. "Nigeria's Deforestation Crisis: Understanding the Urgent Need for Change." *Foluoyefeso* (blog). April 6, 2024. <https://www.foluoyefeso.com/post/nigeria-s-deforestation-crisis-understanding-the-urgent-need-for-change>.

⁷³ Vedantu, and Vedantu. n.d. "Solid Waste Management in NEET Biology." VEDANTU. <https://www.vedantu.com/biology/solid-waste-management>.

⁷⁴ Achi, Chibueze, and Akinwale Coker. 2025. "CHAPTER 14: WASTE MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES AT a RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION: A STUDY FROM THE SOUTH-WEST OF NIGERIA." *Ui-Edu-Ng*, October. https://www.academia.edu/27546868/CHAPTER_14_WASTE_MANAGEMENT_CHALLENGES_AT_A_RELIGIOUS_CONGREGATION_A_STUDY_FROM_THE_SOUTH_WEST_OF_NIGERIA.

⁷⁵ Kehinde, Adeola Olufunke. 2021. "ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA: POLLUTION IN FOCUS." *Economics & Law* 3 (2): 9–19. <https://doi.org/10.37708/el.swu.v3i2.2>.

⁷⁶ Yadav, Virendra Kumar, Parth Malik, Vineet Tirth, Samreen Heena Khan, Krishna Kumar Yadav, Saiful Islam, Nisha Choudhary, et al. 2022. "Health and Environmental Risks of Incense Smoke: Mechanistic Insights and Cumulative Evidence." *Journal of Inflammation Research* Volume 15 (April): 2665–93. <https://doi.org/10.2147/jir.s347489>.

⁷⁷ "An Overview of the Saudi Arabian Legal System." n.d. GlobaLex | Foreign and International Law Research. https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Saudi_Arabia1.html.

of local royal reserves. It is consequential to note that no judicial forum exists to enforce environmental policy directives.⁷⁸

Examining the status of Islamic teachings towards the prevention of environmental degradation in Saudi Arabia is key to this study. Saudi Arabia, the spiritual center of Islam, specifically Mecca and Medina, hosts millions of pilgrims annually for Hajj and the lesser Hajj – Umrah. Managing the environmental impact of these religious gatherings and activities has necessitated the development of sophisticated environmentalists.⁷⁹ No doubt that Mecca and Medina annually host approximately 2–3 million pilgrims for Hajj and Umrah.⁸⁰ Therefore, to manage the associated environmental strain, ranging from waste and water use to pollution, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has implemented programs such as Green Hajj, the Prepared Meal Project, an Environmental Charter, and advanced waste-management systems under Vision 2030 and Mawan.⁸¹ This environmental culture complies with the Islamic environmental ethics as laid down in the Qur'an and Hadith (sunnah).⁸² These provisions in the books advocate physical cleanliness in worship and avoidance of arrogance, wastefulness, and excess, as they are spiritually destructive.

The Kingdom's institutional and regulatory measures include Saudi Vision 2030 (a national transformation plan that incorporates the Sustainable Development Goals, with an emphasis on environmental sustainability in urban and religious infrastructure).⁸³ In this vein, the General Presidency for the Affairs of the two holy mosques has implemented eco-friendly initiatives such as solar-powered facilities and energy-efficient cooling systems in Masjid al-Haram (the Grand Mosque of Mecca),⁸⁴ recyclable Zamzam water bottles, water conservation systems,³ and advanced waste segregation systems during Hajj to manage millions of tons of waste generated thereof.⁸⁵

In addition to the institutional and regulatory measures, the Kingdom mitigated environmental harm and threats during the Hajj season through real-time monitoring of air quality and water use, and through smart crowd control via transportation systems that reduce carbon emissions from fossil-fuel buses. This was done by replacing conventional buses with electric shuttles. More significant is the Haramain High-Speed Railway, introduced to connect the holy sites to reduce road traffic pollution.⁸⁶

⁷⁸ "An Overview of the Saudi Arabian Legal System." n.d. GlobaLex | Foreign and International Law Research. https://www.nyulawglobal.org/globalex/Saudi_Arabia1.html

⁷⁹ Osra, Faisal Abdulrhman, Jaber S. Alzahrani, Mohammad S. Alsoufi, Oumr Adnan Osra, and Agha Zeeshan Mirza. 2021. "Environmental and Economic Sustainability in the Hajj System." *Arabian Journal of Geosciences* 14 (20). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12517-021-08533-x>.

⁸⁰ Osra, Faisal Abdulrhman, Jaber S. Alzahrani, Mohammad S. Alsoufi, Oumr Adnan Osra, and Agha Zeeshan Mirza. 2021. "Environmental and Economic Sustainability in the Hajj System." *Arabian Journal of Geosciences* 14 (20). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12517-021-08533-x>.

⁸¹ "Saudi Green Initiative Day: Promoting a Culture of Environmental Stewardship." n.d. SaudiPressAgency. <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/N2289322>.

⁸² Qur'an 7:31; Muslim, I. (n.d.). *Sahih Muslim*, Book 32, Hadith 6251; see also Ibn Mājah, Hadith No. 2340.

⁸³ "Saudi Green Initiative Day: Promoting a Culture of Environmental Stewardship." n.d. SaudiPressAgency. <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/N2289322>.

⁸⁴ "Saudi Green Initiative Day: Promoting a Culture of Environmental Stewardship." n.d. SaudiPressAgency. <https://www.spa.gov.sa/en/N2289322>.⁸⁴

⁸⁵ Osra, Faisal Abdulrhman, Jaber S. Alzahrani, Mohammad S. Alsoufi, Oumr Adnan Osra, and Agha Zeeshan Mirza. 2021. "Environmental and Economic Sustainability in the Hajj System." *Arabian Journal of Geosciences* 14 (20). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12517-021-08533-x>.

⁸⁶ Osra, Faisal Abdulrhman, Jaber S. Alzahrani, Mohammad S. Alsoufi, Oumr Adnan Osra, and Agha Zeeshan Mirza. 2021. "Environmental and Economic Sustainability in the Hajj System." *Arabian Journal of Geosciences* 14 (20). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12517-021-08533-x>.

2. India

India is a constitution-based jurisdiction that enshrines adequate provisions for environmental protection. Article 48A of the Indian Constitution (the key DPSP) mandates that the State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and safeguard forests and wildlife. Article 51A(g) also provides that the fundamental duty of citizens includes protecting and improving the natural environment and having compassion for living creatures. In addition, Article 21 (right to life) has been expansively interpreted by courts to include the right to a clean and healthy environment, encapsulating protections against pollution and climate harm. Other relevant constitutional provisions include, but are not limited to, Article 253 (Parliament's power re-treaties), Article 246 (concurrent legislative list empowering Union and States to legislate on water, forests, wildlife, mines, etc.), Article 47 (public health and living standard), and Article 19(1)(g) (trade/business subject to public interest/environment).

Moreover, India has a key statutory framework, namely the Environment (Protection) Act (1986), which serves as umbrella legislation enacted under Article 253 following the Stockholm Conference (1972). Other laws include the Water Act (1974), the Air Act (1981), the Forest Conservation Act (1980), the Biological Diversity Act (2002), and many others. To expedite the trial and resolution of environmental cases and enforce citizens' environmental rights (grounded in Article 21), the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010, established a dedicated tribunal (NGT). In the same vein, the doctrines of international treaties, such as the precautionary principle, polluter-pays, and sustainable development, have become part of Indian environmental jurisprudence. Some notable areas of innovative and legally driven strategies include:

i. Green Temples & Floral Waste Management

Across India, many temples have adopted "green temple" initiatives to manage floral waste, as failure to do so contaminates water bodies and landfills.⁸⁷ Consequently, there are temple trusts, in their numbers, across the country that collaborate with NGOs and local authorities with primary mandates of composting, recycling, or upcycling devotional flowers into non-toxic products (including incense and natural dyes).⁸⁸ As an illustration of this practice and initiative, the Mahakaleshwar Temple in Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh) is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas scattered across India. For emphasis, the name Mahakal is derived from two Sanskrit words: 'Maha', meaning 'great', and 'Kaal', meaning 'time and death'. Lord Shiva, revered as Mahakaleshwar, is believed to reside here. This temple has successfully converted 5–6 tons of daily flower waste into compost and eco-friendly products, supporting women-led self-help groups.⁸⁹ Uttarakhand (Sivananda Ashram), Ambaji Temple in Gujarat, and the Golden Temple in Amritsar (Sikh) have worked hard to improve waste management at their temples.⁹⁰

ii. Kalakad-Mundanthurai and Corbett Tiger Reserves

⁸⁷ Shivangi, and S Choudhary. 2021. "REVIEW PAPER ON -ECOFRIENDLY PRACTICE IN TEMPLE TO MAKE SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TOWARD SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENT." *International Journal of Technical Research & Science* 6 (VI): 12–16. <https://doi.org/10.30780/ijtrs.v06.i06.002>.

⁸⁸ Shivangi, and S Choudhary. 2021. "REVIEW PAPER ON -ECOFRIENDLY PRACTICE IN TEMPLE TO MAKE SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TOWARD SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENT." *International Journal of Technical Research & Science* 6 (VI): 12–16. <https://doi.org/10.30780/ijtrs.v06.i06.002>.

⁸⁹ "India's Circular Economy to Generate a Market Value of Over \$2 Trillion and Create Close to 10 Million Jobs by 2050 – Union Minister Shri Bhupender Yadav." n.d. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2108152>.

⁹⁰ Shivangi, and S Choudhary. 2021. "REVIEW PAPER ON -ECOFRIENDLY PRACTICE IN TEMPLE TO MAKE SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TOWARD SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENT." *International Journal of Technical Research & Science* 6 (VI): 12–16. <https://doi.org/10.30780/ijtrs.v06.i06.002>.

In India, pilgrims flow through protected forest buffers, leading to soil erosion, litter, and wildlife disturbances.⁹¹ In response, tiger reserves are established in the Southwestern Ghats montane rain forests in Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts, and in the scenic Himalayan foothills, respectively. The establishment of the duo is part of community initiatives and legally driven strategies to protect religious tourism within ecologically sensitive zones (which pose significant risks). India's solution employs multi-stakeholder stewardship in accordance with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) guidelines.⁹² In addition, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), ATREE, ARC, and WWF launched a "Green Pilgrimage Management" initiative with the mandates of waste segregation, biodegradable alternatives, pilgrim education, and community co-management plans.⁹³

iii. Public Interest Litigation & the National Green Tribunal

As a part of initiatives and strategies, Indian courts have long held religious and spiritual activities to environmental scrutiny. In *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India* (Taj Trapezium Case of 1997), a landmark Supreme Court judgment was delivered, establishing an air-quality-protected zone around the Taj Mahal to promote environmental safety and justice.⁹⁴ The Supreme Court also underscored in *Church of God (Full Gospel) in India v K.K.R. Majestic Colony Welfare Association* that religious freedom does not extend to acts that infringe on public health and environmental rights.⁹⁵ Similarly, for environmental degradation caused during the Art of Living World Culture Festival in Yamuna (2016), the NGT imposed a fine of ₹5 crore and mandated environmental safeguards for large events held on river floodplains.⁹⁶ Furthermore, the State Human Rights Commission ordered testing of well water and compliance with sewage norms after contamination linked to a post-Sewage Treatment Plant (Post-STP) located near Thiruvairanikulam Temple in 2025.⁹⁷

VII. Lessons for Nigeria

This section discusses the lessons Nigeria can learn from India and Saudi Arabia. In India, it was noted that courts take environmental protection cases seriously, as established in *M.C. Mehta v. Union of India* (Taj Trapezium Case, 1997). Cases relating to environmental protection should be handled with the utmost seriousness and urgency by the judiciary, as is the practice in India. Laws should be properly enforced, and those found guilty of violating them should be dealt with in accordance with the law.

⁹¹ Tandon, Aditi. 2023. "Green Pilgrimage Model Balances Faith and Conservation." Mongabay-India. September 5, 2023. <https://india.mongabay.com/2023/09/green-pilgrimage-model-balances-faith-and-conservation/>.

⁹² Tandon, Aditi. 2023. "Green Pilgrimage Model Balances Faith and Conservation." Mongabay-India. September 5, 2023. <https://india.mongabay.com/2023/09/green-pilgrimage-model-balances-faith-and-conservation/>.

⁹³ Tandon, Aditi. 2023. "Green Pilgrimage Model Balances Faith and Conservation." Mongabay-India. September 5, 2023. <https://india.mongabay.com/2023/09/green-pilgrimage-model-balances-faith-and-conservation/>.

⁹⁴ *M. C. Mehta v. Union of India*, AIR 1997 SC 734.

⁹⁵ *Church of God (Full Gospel) in India v. K.K.R. Majestic Colony Welfare Association* (2000) 7 SCC 282; AIR 2000 SC 2773 (SC).

⁹⁶ Agencies, Tnn &, and Times Of India. 2016. "Don't Politicize World Culture Festival, Sri Sri Appeals to Political Parties." *The Times of India*, March 9, 2016. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/dont-politicize-world-culture-festival-sri-sri-appeals-to-political-parties/articleshow/51324804.cms>.

⁹⁷ Agencies, Tnn &, and Times Of India. 2016. "Don't Politicize World Culture Festival, Sri Sri Appeals to Political Parties." *The Times of India*, March 9, 2016. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/dont-politicize-world-culture-festival-sri-sri-appeals-to-political-parties/articleshow/51324804.cms>.

In Saudi Arabia, even though there is always a high pilgrim turnout, the way environmental safety is addressed should be adopted in Nigeria, as discussed above, covering waste disposal, vehicle emissions, and more. The laws put in place in these jurisdictions are well enforced.

VIII. Conclusion

Environmental protection is non-negotiable for any serious government. Nations across the globe should take the issue seriously, especially developing nations, and particularly Nigeria. Corruption and other factors mentioned earlier should not serve as impediments to the enforcement of environmental laws. This paper examines the activities of religious houses in Nigeria and how they have degraded the environment. Though serving God in different capacities by citizens should be encouraged, the activities must be monitored by the government and other relevant stakeholders to ensure sustainable development. It was noted that religious houses in Nigeria contribute to all forms of pollution, deforestation, and many other issues. The enforcement mechanism for environmental protection in Nigeria is weak, which has adversely affected the environment. The study further compares religious activities in Nigeria with those in other jurisdictions. It was noted that these countries managed religious activities without adversely affecting the environment.

Considering the lessons Nigeria should learn from the selected jurisdictions and for Nigeria to key into environmentalism adequately, the following are hereby recommended:

- i. Incorporate religious organizations into environmental governance: Nigeria should formally recognize churches and mosques as important stakeholders in regulatory bodies like NESREA and enlist religious leaders to promote environmentalism by integrating it into their teachings to influence the community.
- ii. Make the legal boundaries of religious practices clear: Nigeria should build on Indian jurisprudence, especially the Supreme Court of India's rulings, holding that the constitutional right to freedom of religion does not extend to practices that harm the environment or people's health.
- iii. Enhance judicial review and litigation for the common good: the courts in Nigeria, and the Supreme Court of Nigeria in particular, must take a more assertive role in environmental matters, extending access to justice and increasing accountability for wrongdoers, including those in religious institutions.
- iv. Create specific environmental policies: Regulatory authorities must provide policies that address noise pollution, waste disposal, and land use by religious institutions, with context-specific yet enforceable policies.
- v. Environmental Safety awareness: Nigeria should adopt Saudi Arabia's experience and incorporate environmental ethics into religious doctrine, making ecological protection compulsory law and a moral responsibility.

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