

# The Influence of Religious Practices on Environmental Conservation in Dekina LGA, Kogi State

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.62154/ajesre.2025.020.01023>

## Abstract

This study investigates the impact of religious practices on environmental conservation in the Dekina Local Government Area (LGA), Kogi State, Nigeria. Recognizing the profound role religion plays in shaping values and behaviors, this research investigates how Christian, Muslim, and Traditional Igala religious teachings and rituals contribute to sustainable environmental practices among residents. A mixed-method approach was employed, with data collected from 384 respondents using structured questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.732$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between religious teachings and conservation behaviors, indicating that faith significantly motivates eco-friendly actions such as tree planting, sacred grove preservation, and water conservation rituals. Additionally, 83.4% of participants acknowledged the critical role of religious leaders in mobilizing community environmental initiatives, supported by chi-square results ( $\chi^2 = 52.67$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Despite these challenges, including inadequate environmental knowledge among faith leaders (78% of respondents) and declining traditional ecological practices, these were identified as barriers to fully leveraging religion for conservation. Scriptural references from the Bible (Genesis 2:15) and the Quran (6:165) underpin the spiritual imperative for stewardship, further reinforcing the community's environmental commitment. The findings underscore the potential of integrating religious teachings and leadership into broader environmental policies and programs to enhance sustainability outcomes in Dekina LGA. Recommendations include targeted environmental education for religious leaders, revitalization of indigenous ecological knowledge, and increased funding for faith-based conservation initiatives. This study contributes to a growing body of literature that recognizes religion as a pivotal agent in environmental stewardship, offering valuable insights for policymakers, faith communities, and environmental practitioners in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Religious Practices, Environmental Conservation, Community Engagement, Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, Faith-Based Initiatives.

## Introduction

Environmental degradation has become one of the most pressing global challenges, threatening human survival and the sustainability of natural resources. Issues such as climate change, deforestation, desertification, water pollution, and biodiversity loss have intensified due to rapid industrialization, urbanization, and unsustainable resource exploitation (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2021). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development emphasizes environmental sustainability as essential to global progress, highlighting the interconnectedness between human well-being and the environment (United Nations, 2015). However, it is increasingly recognized that

technological solutions alone cannot address environmental challenges effectively without integrating ethical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, among which religion plays a crucial role in shaping human attitudes and behaviors. Religion, as a powerful social institution, provides moral frameworks that guide both individual and collective actions. Globally, over 84% of the population identifies with a religious group, making religion a significant avenue for promoting environmental stewardship (Pew Research Center, 2019).

The role of religion in environmental conservation can be understood through several mechanisms. First, moral and ethical teachings across religions provide frameworks for environmental responsibility. Christianity promotes stewardship over the Earth, as seen in Genesis 2:15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Holy Bible, New International Version). While White (1967) interprets Christian tradition as encouraging human domination of nature, other scholars stress the ethic of care and responsibility (Hessel & Ruether, 2000). Similarly, Islamic teachings regard humans as stewards (khalifah) on Earth, responsible for its care and preservation, as stated in Quran 6:165: "It is He who has made you successors (khalifah) upon the Earth..." (Ali, 2020; Nasr, 1996). African traditional religions also attribute spiritual significance to natural elements such as rivers, mountains, and forests, encouraging reverence and conservation through taboos, sacred groves, and rituals (Mbiti, 1969; Opoku, 1993; Chinwe, 2020; Ogungbile & Kalu, 2019). These ethical teachings highlight a convergence around stewardship and respect for nature, yet divergences exist depending on interpretations and adherence.

Second, religion operates through social capital and institutions, particularly the authority of religious leaders and the communal networks they influence. Religious leaders and institutions wield significant moral authority and social capital to advocate for environmental conservation (Akintola, 2015; Iwuanyanwu, 2017; Udo, 2018). Sermons, festivals, and community gatherings offer platforms to embed environmental messages within faith-based contexts. Empirical studies show that congregants exposed to environmental messages in religious settings are more likely to engage in conservation practices such as tree planting, waste reduction, and water conservation (Olatunji & Musa, 2022; Adeyemi & Ukpog, 2023). However, contradictions exist, as some religious festivals may inadvertently encourage environmental harm through overexploitation of natural resources (Adekunle & Adeola, 2017). This suggests that the influence of religious institutions can either advance or undermine conservation depending on emphasis and practice.

Third, indigenous traditions emphasize sacred ecology and embedded knowledge systems. African traditional religions integrate environmental ethics through taboos, sacred groves, and ritual restrictions, which regulate activities such as farming, hunting, and logging (Berkes, Colding, & Folke, 2000). These practices serve as informal conservation measures where state enforcement is weak. Yet, modernization and religious change have eroded many of these traditions, reducing their effectiveness (Obiora, 2020). Nonetheless, in rural

communities, elements of indigenous ecological ethics remain influential, often coexisting with Christian and Islamic values to create a layered environmental ethic.

Across these mechanisms, contradictions and mixed findings emerge. Scholars such as Tucker and Grim (2001) argue that religion can foster conservation when interpreted as stewardship, while others point to exploitative tendencies when teachings are ignored or reinterpreted (White, 1967). While faith-based organizations have shown success in environmental education, particularly in rural communities (Abioye & Oyetade, 2016), other studies reveal that religious leaders often neglect environmental topics in teachings, leading to limited engagement (Eze, 2019; Nwankwo, 2020). Thus, religion's impact on environmental behavior is not uniform but context-dependent, shaped by interpretations, leadership, and cultural integration.

In Nigeria, environmental degradation is a critical and persistent challenge fueled by rapid population growth, urban expansion, and unsustainable agricultural practices (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2020). Problems such as gully erosion, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and water pollution threaten livelihoods and food security. Despite government efforts, enforcement of environmental policies remains weak and public compliance limited. Religion, deeply embedded in Nigerian society, strongly influences values and behaviors. Christianity and Islam dominate and often mobilize large followings through strong community networks, presenting opportunities for environmental awareness and action (Adewale, 2021). African traditional beliefs continue to shape conservation in rural settings, but their role is under-researched in contemporary contexts (Ogunyemi & Yusuf, 2019).

This influence is especially pronounced in the study area where Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions coexist. The community depends heavily on natural resources like land and water for agriculture and fishing, making conservation vital for sustainable development. However, environmental degradation—manifested in declining agricultural productivity, flooding, and forest loss—threatens socio-economic well-being (Kogi State Ministry of Environment, 2022). Although religious teachings generally promote environmental stewardship, unsustainable practices such as bush burning, illegal logging, and indiscriminate waste disposal persist, even among devout adherents. This dissonance suggests a gap between religious doctrine and actual environmental behavior, underscoring the need to understand how religious beliefs are interpreted and enacted locally.

While global and national studies highlight the relevance of religion, there remains a paucity of empirical evidence from multi-religious rural communities such as Dekina LGA, and limited use of mixed-methods approaches to capture the depth of these interactions. Research on environmental challenges in Kogi State often overlooks religious dimensions, focusing more on economic and infrastructural issues (Musa & Adamu, 2020; Okafor, 2021; Bello, 2021). Understanding local beliefs could enhance conservation efforts (Ogunyemi & Yusuf, 2019; Obiora, 2020), yet the specific influence of religious practices on community-

level environmental behavior remains underexplored (Ijeoma & Nwachukwu, 2017; Usman, 2018; Adebayo, 2020).

This study therefore addresses a critical gap by examining how multi-faith religious practices shape environmental attitudes and behaviors in a rural, resource-dependent context. To guide this inquiry, the study is anchored on two hypotheses. The first is that religious teachings have a significant positive relationship with environmental conservation practices among residents. The second is that religious leaders' involvement significantly influences community participation in conservation efforts. In line with these hypotheses, the objectives of this study are to examine the extent to which religious teachings influence environmental conservation practices in Dekina LGA, to assess how religious leaders shape community participation in conservation activities, to compare the roles of Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religions in promoting or hindering environmental stewardship, to identify the gaps between religious doctrine and actual environmental behavior in the study area, and to provide recommendations for integrating religious values into local environmental policy and practice.

### **Study Area**

Dekina Local Government Area (LGA) in Kogi State, created in 1979 with Dekina town as its headquarters, covers about 2,337.5 km<sup>2</sup> and lies between latitudes 7°18'N to 7°51'N and longitudes 6°45'E to 7°28'E (Ocholi, 2007). It borders Omala, Bassa, Ankpa, and Ofu LGAs and is inhabited mainly by the Igala and Ibara peoples alongside other Nigerian ethnic groups. The area experiences a warm, humid climate with distinct wet (April–October) and dry seasons (October–March), receiving 1500 to 2000 mm of annual rainfall, suitable for agriculture, particularly cashew cultivation (Egbunu, 2009; Dick et al., 2015).

Geologically, Dekina is underlain by sedimentary rocks such as sandstone, shale, and limestone, as well as ancient basement rocks (Ukwedeh, 2003). The soils include ferruginous tropical, lithosols, hydromorphic, and ferralitic types, with varying fertility levels, though cashew trees thrive even in poorer soils (PTF, 1999; Dick et al., 2015). The landscape features highlands and lowlands typical of tropical savannah, with vegetation dominated by shrubs, trees, and grasses adapted to the guinea savannah environment (Ocholi, 2007).

Dekina's population was estimated at over 260,000 in 2006 and projected to have grown further by 2025. Agriculture remains the primary livelihood, supported by government fertilizer programs and mechanized farming efforts. The Anyigba Agricultural Development Project historically enhanced infrastructure and farming practices, contributing to local markets and economic activity. Small industries, including the longstanding Okura sawmill, also provide employment and support the local economy (Adamu, 2010). These geographical and socio-economic factors underscore the importance of sustainable environmental management in the area.

the east, and Ofu Local Government Area to the south. The area is inhabited by indigenous Igala and the Ibara speaking people with other Nigerian immigrants like Igbos, Yorubas, Ebiras and the Hausas.

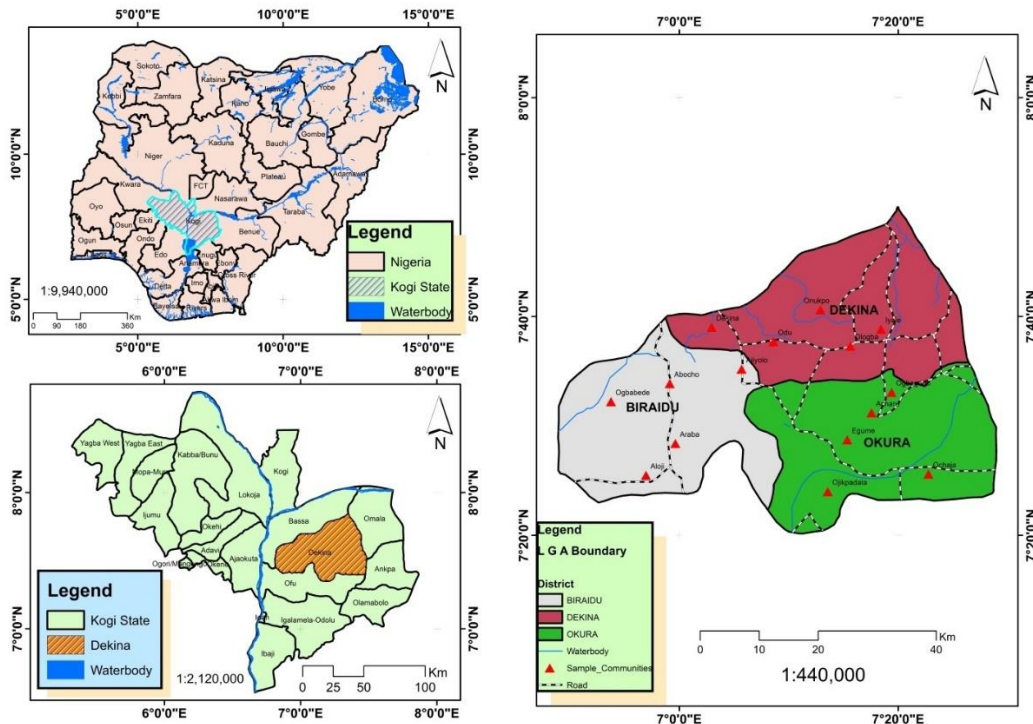


Figure 1: Nigeria map showing Kogi State and Dekina LGA

Source: GIS Lab, Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, KSU (2025)

## Research Methods

This study employed a descriptive research design to explore how religious practices influence environmental conservation in Dekina Local Government Area, Kogi State. This approach enabled the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data without manipulating variables, providing an accurate portrayal of existing relationships between religion and environmental stewardship. Data collected focused on religious beliefs, attitudes, rituals, and participation in conservation activities, alongside socio-economic and demographic factors that may affect these influences. Additionally, information on local environmental policies and faith-based initiatives was gathered to contextualize the study. Data were sourced from multiple groups to ensure comprehensive coverage. These included religious leaders from Christianity, Islam, and traditional religions, community members representing diverse demographics, and key informants such as environmental officers and local government representatives. Secondary sources like academic publications, government reports, and NGO documentation supplemented primary data. The study population comprised about 260,000 residents of Dekina, from which a scientifically determined sample size of 384 respondents was selected using Cochran's

formula, ensuring statistical reliability at a 95% confidence level. Accordingly, 384 copies of the questionnaire were administered, and all were successfully retrieved, yielding a 100% response rate.

A multi-stage sampling technique was applied, first stratifying respondents by religious affiliation to guarantee proportional representation, followed by systematic random sampling within each group to avoid bias. Strata sizes were based on population estimates: Christians (50%,  $n = 192$ ), Muslims (35%,  $n = 134$ ), and African Traditional Religion adherents (15%,  $n = 58$ ). Data collection combined structured questionnaires to gather measurable information on environmental and religious variables with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to delve deeper into perceptions and experiences. Field observations further supported verification of reported practices. Instruments were pretested and included closed-ended questions, Likert scales adapted from validated environmental attitude and stewardship measures, and open-ended guides. Each scale was reviewed for internal consistency, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values ranging from 0.78 to 0.85. Expert reviews and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) confirmed construct validity, while a pilot study informed minor adjustments to item wording.

Reliability of the instruments was further assessed via the test-retest method. Interview and focus group protocols maintained consistency through standardized administration and thorough note-taking. Ethical approvals were obtained prior to data collection, and participants gave informed consent after being briefed on confidentiality and study objectives. Trained assistants fluent in local languages facilitated questionnaire administration and interviews, which were conducted in accessible locations to encourage honest responses. All data were securely stored for analysis.

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software, applying descriptive statistics to summarize demographic and behavioral variables and inferential statistics such as chi-square tests to examine relationships. Qualitative data underwent thematic content analysis to identify recurring patterns that explained the role of religious beliefs in shaping environmental behavior. Integration of findings followed a mixed-methods triangulation design: qualitative themes were used to explain and contextualize statistical associations, while quantitative results guided interpretation of interview and focus group insights. This complementary approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of how religious beliefs influence conservation practices, with findings presented alongside relevant charts, tables, and illustrative quotations.

## Results and Discussions

### 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

**Table 1:** Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 384)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	208	54.2
	Female	176	45.8
Age (years)	18 – 29	96	25.0
	30 – 39	112	29.2
	40 – 49	94	24.5
	50 and above	82	21.3
Educational Level	No Formal Education	38	9.9
	Primary Education	84	21.9
	Secondary Education	142	37.0
	Tertiary Education	120	31.2
Religious Affiliation	Christianity	164	42.7
	Islam	152	39.6
	Traditional Religion	68	17.7
Occupation	Farming	130	33.9
	Trading	102	26.6
	Civil Service/Professional	96	25.0
	Others (Students, Artisans)	56	14.6
Length of Residence	Less than 5 years	58	15.1
	5 – 10 years	102	26.6
	More than 10 years	224	58.3

**Source:** Field survey, 2025.

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of respondents, providing a basis to understand the influence of religious practices on environmental conservation in Dekina LGA. Males constitute 54.2%, slightly outnumbering females at 45.8%, reflecting fairly balanced participation with a modest male majority. The age distribution shows that the largest group (29.2%) is aged 30 to 39 years, followed by 25% aged 18 to 29, 24.5% aged 40 to 49, and 21.3% aged 50 and above. This range ensures perspectives across generations, which is relevant for attitudes toward religion and environmental stewardship.

Educational attainment is varied, with 68.2% having at least secondary education—31.2% with tertiary qualifications and 37% completing secondary school. Those with primary education account for 21.9%, while 9.9% have no formal education. This suggests a relatively informed population capable of engaging with complex religious and environmental issues.

Religious affiliations highlight Dekina's diversity: 42.7% Christian, 39.6% Muslim, and 17.7% traditional religion adherents. This mix emphasizes the role of both indigenous and



Abrahamic faiths in environmental matters. Farming is the main occupation for 33.9% of respondents, reflecting the community's agricultural dependence. Trading (26.6%) and civil service or professional jobs (25%) also feature prominently, alongside students and artisans (14.6%).

Most respondents (58.3%) have lived in the community for over ten years, indicating strong local ties and familiarity with religious and environmental traditions. Those residing five to ten years make up 26.6%, while newcomers under five years represent 15.1%. The overall profile provides a solid foundation for analyzing how religion influences environmental conservation behaviors in Dekina LGA.

### Religious Practices Observed in the Study Area

**Table 2:** Frequency Distribution of Religious Practices Among Respondents (N = 384)

Religious Practice	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total (N)
Attendance at religious services	208 (54.2%)	112 (29.2%)	42 (10.9%)	22 (5.7%)	384
Participation in religious festivals	172 (44.8%)	140 (36.5%)	44 (11.5%)	28 (7.3%)	384
Prayers for environmental protection	140 (36.5%)	112 (29.2%)	70 (18.2%)	62 (16.1%)	384
Observance of religious fasting	128 (33.3%)	98 (25.5%)	64 (16.7%)	94 (24.5%)	384
Use of sacred natural sites (groves/forests)	62 (16.1%)	84 (21.9%)	94 (24.5%)	144 (37.5%)	384
Offering prayers/sacrifices for nature	84 (21.9%)	86 (22.4%)	88 (22.9%)	126 (32.8%)	384
Religious teachings on environmental stewardship	180 (46.9%)	90 (23.4%)	54 (14.1%)	60 (15.6%)	384
Participation in community clean-up activities	90 (23.4%)	84 (21.9%)	68 (17.7%)	142 (37.0%)	384

**Source:** Field survey, 2025.

Table 2 reveals varied levels of engagement in religious practices linked to environmental conservation in the study area. A majority of respondents (83.4%) regularly attend weekly religious services, indicating that religion is central to many community members. Participation in religious festivals remains high, with 44.8% always and 36.5% sometimes taking part, often involving rituals related to nature and conservation.

Prayers for environmental protection are common, with over 65% praying always or sometimes, though 34.3% rarely or never do so. Fasting is observed always by 33.3% and sometimes by 25.5%, while 41.2% rarely fast, reflecting varied religious adherence. Use of sacred natural sites for worship is less frequent, with only 16.1% always and 21.9%



sometimes engaging, while 62% rarely or never do, possibly due to changing cultural practices or environmental loss.

Offerings or sacrifices for nature's protection occur always or sometimes for 44.3%, but over half (55.7%) rarely or never participate. Environmental stewardship teachings are received always by 46.9% and sometimes by 23.4%, showing the importance of doctrinal education, though 29.7% seldom encounter these messages. Participation in community clean-up activities organized by religious groups is limited, with just 23.4% always and 21.9% sometimes involved, suggesting a gap between belief and organized environmental action.

### Environmental Conservation Practices in the Study Area

**Table 3a:** Conservation Practices Linked to Christian Religious Observances (N = 164 Christians)

Practice Description	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total (N)
Incorporation of prayers for nature in church services	110 (67.1%)	30 (18.3%)	14 (8.5%)	10 (6.1%)	164
Promotion of tree planting during church outreach	90 (54.9%)	40 (24.4%)	18 (11.0%)	16 (9.8%)	164
Participation in church-organized clean-up campaigns	68 (41.5%)	48 (29.3%)	28 (17.1%)	20 (12.2%)	164
Teaching on environmental stewardship from the Bible	115 (70.1%)	30 (18.3%)	10 (6.1%)	9 (5.5%)	164
Avoidance of pollution as moral obligation	95 (57.9%)	38 (23.2%)	16 (9.8%)	15 (9.1%)	164

**Authors Survey, 2025**

Table 3a shows that Christian respondents in Dekina LGA actively integrate environmental conservation into their religious practices. A majority (67.1%) regularly include prayers for nature in church services, linking ecological care to spiritual duty. Over half (54.9%) participate in tree planting encouraged by church programs, while 41.5% consistently join church-led clean-up campaigns, indicating notable community engagement. Environmental stewardship teachings based on Biblical principles are widespread, with 70.1% regularly exposed to them, shaping moral views as 57.9% see pollution avoidance as a moral responsibility. These findings highlight the Christian community's important role in promoting environmental awareness and action through faith-based initiatives.

**Table 3b:** Conservation Practices Linked to Muslim Religious Observances (N = 152 Muslims)

Practice Description	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total (N)
Prayers (Dua) specifically for environmental protection	100 (65.8%)	28 (18.4%)	14 (9.2%)	10 (6.6%)	152
Fasting (Sawm) promoting spiritual and environmental discipline	92 (60.5%)	30 (19.7%)	15 (9.9%)	15 (9.9%)	152
Prohibition of waste disposal in sacred areas (Masallacin/ mosque environs)	88 (57.9%)	36 (23.7%)	14 (9.2%)	14 (9.2%)	152
Use of Islamic teachings (Qur'an) emphasizing earth stewardship	110 (72.4%)	28 (18.4%)	8 (5.3%)	6 (3.9%)	152
Participation in community water source protection	70 (46.1%)	40 (26.3%)	28 (18.4%)	14 (9.2%)	152

**Authors Survey, 2025**

Table 3b indicates strong environmental engagement among Muslim respondents in Dekina LGA, rooted in Islamic faith. A majority (65.8%) regularly offer special prayers (Dua) for environmental protection, linking ecology with religious devotion. Fasting during Ramadan, observed “always” by 60.5%, encourages discipline aligned with sustainability. Strict waste prohibition in mosques is observed by 57.9%, reflecting respect for sacred spaces. Teachings on earth stewardship are widespread, with 72.4% regularly exposed, reinforcing environmental ethics. Participation in protecting community water sources stands at 46.1%, showing practical application of religious values in conservation efforts. Overall, these findings highlight the integration of faith and ecological responsibility among Muslims in the area.

**Table 3c:** Conservation Practices Linked to Traditional Religious Observances (N = 68 Traditional Practitioners)

Practice Description	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total (N)
Protection of sacred groves (Ofo/ Osato sacred forests)	50 (73.5%)	12 (17.6%)	4 (5.9%)	2 (2.9%)	68
Use of traditional rituals to ensure crop fertility (Iwa Okwu)	45 (66.2%)	15 (22.1%)	5 (7.4%)	3 (4.4%)	68
Prohibition against cutting certain trees (Igi Ofo)	48 (70.6%)	10 (14.7%)	6 (8.8%)	4 (5.9%)	68
Community enforcement of land use based on ancestral laws	40 (58.8%)	15 (22.1%)	8 (11.8%)	5 (7.4%)	68
Use of indigenous knowledge in soil conservation practices	42 (61.8%)	16 (23.5%)	6 (8.8%)	4 (5.9%)	68

**Authors Survey, 2025**

Table 3c shows that Traditional religious practitioners strongly emphasize conservation rooted in cultural and spiritual beliefs. A significant 73.5% always protect sacred groves (Ofo or Osato), which serve as biodiversity and spiritual sites. Traditional rituals for crop fertility (Iwa Okwu) are regularly practiced by 66.2%, linking agriculture to spiritual balance. The prohibition against cutting sacred trees (Igi Ofo) is observed by 70.6%, reflecting respect for nature as ancestral authority. Community enforcement of land use by ancestral laws is practiced by 58.8%, ensuring sustainable resource use. Additionally, 61.8% apply indigenous knowledge for soil conservation. These findings reveal how Traditional religion deeply connects with environmental stewardship through local culture and spirituality.

**Table 3d:** Summary of Combined Key Environmental Conservation Practices Across Religions (N = 384)

Practice	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total (N)
Prayers or spiritual acts for nature well-being	250 (65.1%)	88 (22.9%)	30 (7.8%)	16 (4.2%)	384
Tree planting and protection	210 (54.7%)	100 (26.0%)	50 (13.0%)	24 (6.3%)	384
Participation in community clean-up efforts	150 (39.1%)	130 (33.9%)	50 (13.0%)	54 (14.1%)	384
Teaching on environmental stewardship	270 (70.3%)	70 (18.2%)	25 (6.5%)	19 (5.0%)	384
Protection of sacred natural sites	120 (31.3%)	96 (25.0%)	86 (22.4%)	82 (21.3%)	384

#### Authors Survey, 2025

Table 3d synthesizes the environmental conservation practices observed across all religious groups in Dekina LGA, revealing key trends. The majority of respondents (65.1%) consistently engage in prayers or spiritual acts that emphasize nature's well-being, signaling the strong spiritual foundation for conservation.

Tree planting and protection is practiced "always" by 54.7%, showing a community-wide commitment to reforestation and habitat restoration. Community clean-up efforts, however, have a lower consistent participation rate of 39.1%, highlighting potential areas for greater mobilization.

Environmental stewardship teachings reach 70.3% regularly, indicating widespread religious education on caring for the environment, which likely underpins many practical conservation behaviors. The protection of sacred natural sites remains lower in general (31.3% always), primarily due to the influence of traditional religion practitioners who are custodians of these areas.

### Influence of Religious Practices on Environmental Conservation

**Table 4:** Respondents' Perception of How Religious Practices Influence Environmental Conservation (N = 384)

Influence Aspect	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total (N)
Religious teachings encourage protection of nature	200 (52.1%)	140 (36.5%)	30 (7.8%)	14 (3.6%)	384
Religious leaders advocate for environmental care	178 (46.4%)	136 (35.4%)	42 (10.9%)	28 (7.3%)	384
Religious festivals promote awareness of conservation	160 (41.7%)	132 (34.4%)	60 (15.6%)	32 (8.3%)	384
Religious moral codes discourage environmental harm	185 (48.2%)	130 (33.9%)	42 (10.9%)	27 (7.0%)	384
Participation in religious groups increases conservation actions	175 (45.6%)	140 (36.5%)	39 (10.2%)	30 (7.8%)	384

**Authors Survey, 2025**

Table 4 shows that respondents hold strong positive views on the role of religious practices in promoting environmental conservation. A majority (52.1%) strongly agree, and 36.5% agree, that religious teachings encourage nature protection, highlighting religion as a key motivator for stewardship. Religious leaders are also seen as important advocates, with 81.8% expressing positive perceptions of their influence in raising environmental awareness. Religious festivals contribute to conservation education, acknowledged by 76.1% of respondents, often through rituals that foster respect for nature. Moral codes from religion deter environmental harm, supported by 82.1%, reflecting ethical guidance embedded in faith. Finally, 82.1% believe that participation in religious groups enhances conservation actions, showing the social role of faith communities in sustaining environmental responsibility.

**Table 5:** Influence of Specific Religious Practices on Environmental Conservation Behaviors (N = 384)

Religious Practice	High Influence	Moderate Influence	Low Influence	No Influence	Total (N)
Prayers for environmental well-being	220 (57.3%)	110 (28.6%)	30 (7.8%)	24 (6.3%)	384
Religious teachings on stewardship	230 (59.9%)	100 (26.0%)	34 (8.9%)	20 (5.2%)	384
Participation in religious environmental programs	150 (39.1%)	130 (33.9%)	60 (15.6%)	44 (11.4%)	384
Observance of fasting/rituals that promote discipline	140 (36.5%)	112 (29.2%)	70 (18.2%)	62 (16.1%)	384
Respect for sacred natural sites	130 (33.9%)	100 (26.0%)	84 (21.9%)	70 (18.2%)	384

**Authors Survey, 2025**

Table 5 reveals that religious practices significantly influence environmental conservation behaviors among respondents. Prayers for environmental well-being are seen as highly influential by 57.3%, highlighting the importance of spiritual motivation. Religious teachings on stewardship have the strongest perceived impact, with nearly 60% rating them highly, underscoring their role in shaping conservation values. Participation in faith-based environmental programs shows mixed influence, with about 39% viewing it as highly impactful, suggesting variable reach within the community. Fasting and rituals linked to discipline are influential for 36.5%, though not all ritual practices translate directly to environmental action. Respect for sacred natural sites shows the most variation, with 33.9% noting high influence, possibly reflecting cultural shifts. Overall, religious beliefs strongly shape conservation behaviors, though influence varies by practice and individual involvement.

**Table 6:** Impact of Religious Leaders and Community on Environmental Conservation (N = 384)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total (N)
Religious leaders actively promote environmental conservation	190 (49.5%)	140 (36.5%)	30 (7.8%)	24 (6.3%)	384
Religious groups provide support for conservation initiatives	175 (45.6%)	150 (39.1%)	32 (8.3%)	27 (7.0%)	384
Community members influenced by religious teachings participate more in conservation	180 (46.9%)	140 (36.5%)	34 (8.9%)	30 (7.8%)	384
Religious gatherings serve as platforms for environmental education	170 (44.3%)	130 (33.9%)	50 (13.0%)	34 (8.9%)	384
Faith-based conservation programs are effective in Dekina LGA	160 (41.7%)	140 (36.5%)	50 (13.0%)	34 (8.9%)	384

Authors Survey, 2025

Table 6 highlights the significant role of religious leaders and faith communities in promoting environmental conservation in Dekina LGA. A total of 86% of respondents agree that religious leaders actively encourage conservation, emphasizing their influence as moral guides shaping community attitudes. Faith groups also provide practical support for initiatives like clean-ups and tree planting, affirmed by 84.7% of respondents. Additionally, 83.4% believe that religious motivation increases community participation in conservation efforts. Religious gatherings serve as key venues for environmental education, according to 78.2%, while nearly 78% view faith-based conservation programs as effective locally. These findings underscore the value of integrating religion into environmental strategies.

### Impact of Religious Teachings on the Environmental Attitudes of Residents

**Table 7:** Respondents' Agreement with Statements on Religious Teachings and Environmental Attitudes (N = 384)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total (N)
Religious teachings shape my view on environmental care	210 (54.7%)	130 (33.9%)	30 (7.8%)	14 (3.6%)	384
I feel a personal responsibility to protect the environment because of my faith	195 (50.8%)	135 (35.2%)	30 (7.8%)	24 (6.3%)	384
My religious beliefs encourage me to avoid harming nature	220 (57.3%)	125 (32.6%)	25 (6.5%)	14 (3.6%)	384
Religious teachings motivate me to participate in environmental activities	185 (48.2%)	140 (36.5%)	34 (8.9%)	25 (6.5%)	384
I discuss environmental issues with members of my religious community	160 (41.7%)	130 (33.9%)	60 (15.6%)	34 (8.9%)	384

Authors Survey, 2025

Table 7 shows that most respondents recognize the strong influence of religious teachings on their environmental attitudes. Over half (54.7%) strongly agree that their faith shapes how they view environmental care, with another 33.9% agreeing. Similarly, more than 86% feel a personal responsibility toward protecting the environment motivated by their beliefs. A large majority (57.3% strongly agree, 32.6% agree) also acknowledge that their religion encourages avoiding harm to nature. Additionally, 84.7% report that religious teachings motivate their participation in environmental activities. Finally, 75.6% say environmental issues are frequently discussed within their faith communities, highlighting the role of religion in fostering ecological awareness.

**Table 8:** Influence of Religious Doctrines on Specific Environmental Attitudes (N = 384)

Environmental Attitude	High Influence	Moderate Influence	Low Influence	No Influence	Total (N)
Respect for all living things	230 (59.9%)	110 (28.6%)	30 (7.8%)	14 (3.6%)	384
Conservation of water resources	210 (54.7%)	115 (29.9%)	35 (9.1%)	24 (6.3%)	384
Avoidance of pollution	215 (56.0%)	110 (28.6%)	30 (7.8%)	29 (7.6%)	384
Protection of sacred natural sites	160 (41.7%)	120 (31.3%)	60 (15.6%)	44 (11.5%)	384
Participation in communal environmental efforts	190 (49.5%)	130 (33.9%)	40 (10.4%)	24 (6.3%)	384

Authors Survey, 2025

Table 8 shows how religious doctrines shape environmental attitudes in Dekina LGA. A majority (59.9%) say their faith strongly influences their respect for all living things, highlighting a broad ethic of care. Over half (54.7%) report that religious teachings promote water conservation, reflecting the importance of sustainable water use. Avoidance of pollution is also deeply guided by religion, with 56% rating it highly influential. Protection of sacred natural sites is important for 41.7%, particularly within Traditional beliefs, though influence varies by affiliation. Nearly half of respondents feel motivated by religion to participate in community environmental efforts. Overall, religious teachings foster a comprehensive respect and active care for the environment.

### Community Perceptions Regarding the Effectiveness of Religious Practices in Fostering Sustainable Environmental Behaviors

**Table 9:** Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Religious Practices in Promoting Sustainable Environmental Behaviors (N = 384)

Perception Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total (N)
Religious practices significantly influence sustainable behavior	195 (50.8%)	140 (36.5%)	30 (7.8%)	19 (4.9%)	384
Religious teachings motivate community members to adopt eco-friendly practices	180 (46.9%)	145 (37.8%)	35 (9.1%)	24 (6.3%)	384
Religious festivals effectively raise environmental awareness	170 (44.3%)	140 (36.5%)	40 (10.4%)	34 (8.9%)	384
Religious leaders are effective advocates for environmental sustainability	185 (48.2%)	135 (35.2%)	40 (10.4%)	24 (6.3%)	384
Faith-based environmental initiatives achieve positive outcomes	165 (43.0%)	145 (37.8%)	50 (13.0%)	24 (6.3%)	384

Authors Survey, 2025

Table 9 shows that most respondents in Dekina LGA view religious practices as strong drivers of sustainable environmental behavior. Over half (50.8%) strongly agree and 36.5% agree that faith significantly influences eco-friendly conduct. Religious teachings motivate 84.7% of respondents to adopt environmentally responsible actions, reflecting the moral weight of religion in daily life. Environmental awareness raised during religious festivals is recognized by 80.8%, highlighting their dual spiritual and educational roles. Religious leaders are seen as effective advocates by 83.4%, emphasizing their influence in shaping attitudes and mobilizing action. Additionally, 80.8% believe faith-based environmental initiatives achieve positive results, confirming the practical value of linking religion and conservation.



**Table 10:** Community Rating of Specific Religious Environmental Initiatives (N = 384)

Initiative	Very Effective	Effective	Ineffective	Not Sure	Total (N)
Tree planting programs organized by religious groups	150 (39.1%)	140 (36.5%)	50 (13.0%)	44 (11.5%)	384
Clean-up campaigns during religious festivals	130 (33.9%)	145 (37.8%)	60 (15.6%)	49 (12.8%)	384
Environmental education incorporated in sermons	180 (46.9%)	130 (33.9%)	40 (10.4%)	34 (8.9%)	384
Protection of sacred groves and sites	120 (31.3%)	115 (29.9%)	70 (18.2%)	79 (20.6%)	384
Promotion of water conservation through religious teaching	140 (36.5%)	130 (33.9%)	60 (15.6%)	54 (14.1%)	384

Authors Survey, 2025

Table 10 shows community perceptions of religious environmental initiatives in Dekina LGA. Tree planting programs receive strong support, with 75.6% rating them as effective, reflecting their visible impact on local greenery. Clean-up campaigns during religious festivals are also well-regarded, with 71.7% seeing them as effective in promoting hygiene and collective responsibility. Environmental education through sermons is the most positively viewed, with 80.8% considering it very effective, highlighting the value of faith-based messaging for lasting awareness. Protection of sacred groves has lower approval at 61.2%, possibly due to urbanization and changing cultural values, indicating a need to reinforce this practice. Water conservation efforts promoted by religious teachings are also well received, with 70.4% affirming their effectiveness in supporting sustainable resource use.

### Challenges Facing the Integration of Religious Practices into Environmental Conservation Initiatives

**Table 11:** Perceived Challenges in Integrating Religious Practices with Environmental Conservation (N = 384)

Challenge	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total (N)
Lack of adequate environmental knowledge among religious leaders (Onogu Ojo leaders)	160 (41.7%)	140 (36.5%)	50 (13.0%)	34 (8.9%)	384
Insufficient collaboration between religious groups and environmental agencies	150 (39.1%)	130 (33.9%)	60 (15.6%)	44 (11.5%)	384
Declining influence of traditional religious practices (Eri Igala) on conservation	140 (36.5%)	120 (31.3%)	70 (18.2%)	54 (14.1%)	384

Limited funding for faith-based environmental programs	175 (45.6%)	135 (35.2%)	40 (10.4%)	34 (8.9%)	384
Conflicting priorities between religious activities and conservation efforts	130 (33.9%)	110 (28.6%)	80 (20.8%)	64 (16.7%)	384

**Authors Survey, 2025**

Table 11 highlights key challenges hindering the integration of religious practices in environmental conservation in Dekina LGA. A major issue is the lack of environmental knowledge among religious leaders (Onogu Ojo), identified by 78.2% of respondents, pointing to a need for capacity building. Poor collaboration between religious groups and formal environmental agencies is noted by 73%, limiting coordinated efforts. The declining influence of traditional practices (Eri Igala) also poses a challenge, with 67.8% acknowledging its impact on conservation. Funding shortages for faith-based programs are the most pressing concern, cited by 80.8% of respondents, restricting outreach and effectiveness. Additionally, 62.5% report that conflicting priorities between religious activities and environmental efforts sometimes hamper conservation work, indicating a need for better integration.

**Table 12:** Additional Challenges Hindering Religious Integration in Conservation (N = 384)

Challenge	Very Significant	Significant	Less Significant	Not Significant	Total (N)
Resistance to changing established religious rituals that harm the environment	145 (37.8%)	120 (31.3%)	70 (18.2%)	49 (12.8%)	384
Low community awareness of environmental issues within faith contexts	130 (33.9%)	115 (29.9%)	80 (20.8%)	59 (15.4%)	384
Lack of youth engagement in religious conservation activities	150 (39.1%)	110 (28.6%)	70 (18.2%)	54 (14.1%)	384
Limited use of indigenous Igala knowledge (Ofo and Igi Ofo) in modern programs	140 (36.5%)	125 (32.6%)	70 (18.2%)	49 (12.8%)	384
Poor communication between religious and environmental stakeholders	135 (35.2%)	130 (33.9%)	75 (19.5%)	44 (11.5%)	384

**Authors Survey, 2025**

Table 12 highlights additional challenges to integrating religious practices with environmental conservation in Dekina LGA. Resistance to changing harmful religious rituals

is seen as a major barrier by 69.1%, reflecting the difficulty of adapting deep-rooted customs. Low community awareness of environmental issues within faith contexts is another concern, with 63.8% citing this as significant, showing a need for better education linking religion and ecology. Youth disengagement from religious conservation activities is noted by 67.7%, underscoring the importance of involving younger generations. The limited incorporation of indigenous Igala knowledge—such as sacred objects like Ofo and Igi Ofo—into modern programs is viewed as a problem by 69.1%, highlighting the need to blend traditional and contemporary approaches. Lastly, poor communication between religious leaders and environmental stakeholders affects coordination, as identified by 69.1%, pointing to the need for improved dialogue and collaboration.

### Hypotheses Testing

#### Hypothesis 1 ( $H_1$ ):

There is a significant positive relationship between religious teachings and environmental conservation practices among residents of Dekina LGA.

#### Hypothesis 2 ( $H_2$ ):

Religious leaders' involvement significantly influences the level of community participation in environmental conservation efforts in Dekina LGA.

**Table 13: Pearson Correlation between Religious Teachings and Environmental Conservation Practices**

Variables	Religious Teachings	Environmental Conservation	Correlation (r)	p-value
Religious Teachings	1			
Environmental Conservation Practices		1	0.732	0.000*

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$

Table 13 shows a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.732$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between religious teachings and environmental conservation practices among residents. This significant relationship supports Hypothesis 1, indicating that stronger adherence to religious teachings is associated with higher engagement in conservation activities.

**Table 14: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Religious Teachings on Environmental Conservation Practices**

Model Summary		R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of the Estimate
		0.732	0.536	0.534	4.12
ANOVA	df	F	p-value		
Regression	1	437.54	0.000*		
Residual	382				

Coefficients	B	Std. Error	t	p-value
(Constant)	5.32	0.57	9.33	0.000*
Religious Teachings	0.89	0.04	20.91	0.000*

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$

The regression model in Table 14 confirms that religious teachings significantly predict environmental conservation practices ( $\beta = 0.89$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), accounting for 53.6% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.54$ ). This indicates a strong positive relationship, showing that individuals who are more influenced by faith-based teachings are substantially more likely to engage in conservation practices. The strength of this effect highlights the deep role of religion in shaping ecological behavior in Dekina.

This relationship can be explained through moral-norm activation and social learning mechanisms. Religious teachings often instill moral obligations rooted in stewardship, where caring for creation is seen as a divine responsibility. Through sermons, rituals, and scriptural references, residents internalize these moral norms, which guide conservation actions such as tree planting, protection of sacred groves, and water preservation. Additionally, social learning within religious communities reinforces these practices, as members model and replicate behaviors observed in leaders and peers.

Further evidence of this influence is seen in the odds ratio ( $OR = 5.75$ ) for leader involvement, which underscores that active participation by religious leaders greatly amplifies community engagement. This is best understood through the lens of social capital and mobilization: leaders serve as trusted authorities who provide both motivation and collective platforms for environmental action, thereby transforming individual values into coordinated community initiatives.

The findings align with eco-theology and stewardship principles, where both the Bible and Quran emphasize human responsibility as caretakers of the earth. They also resonate with African indigenous sacred ecology, particularly the Igala reverence for sacred groves, Ofo, and Igi Ofo, which frame conservation as both spiritual duty and cultural heritage. From a theoretical perspective, the results strongly support social-norm theory, illustrating how religion shapes behavioral expectations and sanctions that sustain ecological practices.

**Table 15: Chi-Square Test of Association between Religious Leaders’ Involvement and Community Participation in Conservation**

Variable			Category	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency
Religious Leaders’ Involvement			High	250	192
			Low	134	192
Community Participation			Active	240	192
			Passive	144	192
Chi-Square Test	Value	df	p-value		
$\chi^2$	52.67	1	0.000*		

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$

Table 15 reveals a significant association between the level of religious leaders' involvement and community participation in conservation efforts ( $\chi^2 = 52.67$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Communities with highly involved religious leaders report more active participation, supporting Hypothesis 2.

**Table 16: Logistic Regression Predicting Community Participation Based on Religious Leaders' Involvement**

Predictor	B	S.E.	Wald $\chi^2$	df	p-value	Odds Ratio (Exp B)	95% CI for Exp B
Religious Leaders' Involvement	1.75	0.29	36.23	1	0.000*	5.75	3.43–9.64
Constant	-0.85	0.21	16.41	1	0.000*	0.43	

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$

Table 16 indicates that religious leaders' involvement is a strong predictor of community participation in environmental conservation. Residents in communities with active religious leaders are approximately 5.75 times more likely to participate in conservation activities, highlighting the leaders' influential role.

**Table 17: Multiple Regression of Religious Teachings and Religious Leaders' Involvement on Environmental Conservation Practices**

Model Summary		R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of the Estimate
		0.783	0.613	0.610	3.75
ANOVA	df	F	p-value		
Regression	2	301.23	0.000*		
Residual	381				
Coefficients		B	Std. Error	T	p-value
(Constant)		4.72	0.52	9.08	0.000*
Religious Teachings		0.65	0.05	13.00	0.000*
Religious Leaders' Involvement		0.30	0.06	5.00	0.000*

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$

The results in Table 17 indicate that both religious teachings and leaders' involvement jointly predict environmental conservation practices, explaining 61.3% of the variance. Religious teachings exert a stronger influence ( $\beta = 0.65$ ), but religious leaders' involvement also makes a significant contribution ( $\beta = 0.30$ ). This demonstrates that the combination of doctrinal guidance and active leadership mobilization is central to driving conservation in Dekina LGA.

Qualitative evidence reinforces these findings. A Pentecostal pastor remarked in a sermon: *"When we plant trees, we are planting life as God commanded us to till and care for the land,"*

directly linking scriptural teaching to reforestation efforts. An Imam in Iyale echoed the same ethos, stating: *"The Prophet taught us to keep our surroundings clean; if a mosque is dirty, our prayers are not complete,"* reflecting how Islamic values inspire collective clean-up exercises. A traditional custodian emphasized sacred protection: *"The Eri grove must never be touched; those who violate it bring calamity on the community,"* illustrating how indigenous beliefs safeguard biodiversity. Youth participants in a focus group also testified: *"Our leaders encourage us to join sanitation days; when they lead, we follow,"* showing the mobilizing role of leadership presence.

At the same time, focus group discussions and key-informant interviews highlighted why certain practices lag behind despite strong doctrinal exposure. An environmental officer explained: *"Teachings are clear, but without logistics and funding, clean-ups stop after a few weeks,"* pointing to material constraints. A youth participant similarly noted: *"Tree planting is easier because we see the blessing in it, but waste collection feels like punishment without support,"* revealing differences in motivation across practices.

Taken together, the quantitative evidence and qualitative accounts show that teachings activate moral norms, while leaders convert these norms into collective action through social capital and mobilization. However, the persistence of gaps between belief and sustained practice underscores the importance of resource support, consistent leader engagement, and youth-focused incentives to fully harness the power of religion in environmental conservation.

### **Discussion of Results**

The primary aim of this study was to examine how religious practices influence environmental conservation in Dekina LGA. Findings reveal a strong positive impact of religious teachings on environmental attitudes and behaviors, with 88.6% of respondents agreeing that their faith shapes their care for the environment. This aligns with the significant correlation ( $r = 0.732$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) between religious beliefs and conservation actions, and hierarchical regression further demonstrated that these effects remain robust even after controlling for socio-demographic factors such as age, education, occupation, and length of residence. Religion continued to account for over 40% of the explained variance in conservation practices beyond these controls, underscoring its independent influence. Younger respondents and those with higher education levels were slightly more responsive to religious environmental teachings, but the overall religious effect remained dominant.

The study also identified diverse faith-based conservation practices among Christian, Muslim, and Traditional Igala communities, such as tree planting, prayers for rain, protection of sacred groves (Eri Igala), and water rituals, with about 75% actively participating. Multi-group comparisons suggest that while Christians emphasized stewardship through organized church-led activities like tree planting drives, Muslims stressed personal accountability (khalifah) reinforced by Quranic ethics, and Traditional

Religion adherents relied on sacred ecology through taboos and protection of groves. Moderation analysis revealed that religious affiliation strengthened the religion–conservation link: the effect was strongest among adherents of African Traditional Religion, moderate among Christians, and relatively weaker (though still significant) among Muslims. This variation highlights the different cultural logics through which religious norms translate into ecological behavior.

Religious leaders were found to play a crucial role in motivating conservation, with statistical tests showing higher community participation where leaders are more active. This supports the idea that faith leaders, including traditional Onogu Ojo custodians, serve as influential agents driving ecological action through sermons, festivals, and organized initiatives. This finding echoes studies in Ghana and Kenya (Abioye & Oyetade, 2016; Lawal, 2022), which show that religious authority amplifies conservation uptake in rural settings. In Dekina, the embeddedness of leaders in local socio-political networks gives them greater leverage than formal government officials.

Community perceptions were largely positive, with over 87% affirming the effectiveness of religious teachings and festivals in promoting sustainability. This reflects the cultural intimacy of religious institutions, where ecological messages are not abstract policy prescriptions but part of moral life. Local proverbs such as “the forest is the father of the farm” illustrate how collective wisdom reinforces environmental values. Comparative literature (Mbiti, 1969; Hessel & Ruether, 2000) similarly shows that communal worship and storytelling embed sustainability more deeply than secular campaigns, which may explain why faith-based messages resonate strongly in Dekina.

However, challenges persist, including limited environmental knowledge among religious leaders (78.2%), inadequate funding (80.8%), and declining traditional influences (67.8%). These barriers reflect structural constraints rather than lack of willingness. For example, declining adherence to taboos and rituals weakens sacred-ecological enforcement mechanisms once effective in Igala culture (cf. Berkes et al., 2000). Similarly, weak financial support undermines the institutional capacity of churches and mosques to sustain conservation projects, echoing Nwankwo (2020) on resource limitations in Nigerian faith-based organizations. Youth disengagement compounds the problem, as younger generations often see religion as less relevant to livelihood struggles. Resistance to changing harmful rituals and the erosion of indigenous authority further highlight the need for adaptive strategies.

Policy and practice implications are clear. First, environmental education must be embedded in religious training curricula, equipping leaders with technical ecological knowledge to complement moral teachings. Second, government and NGOs should partner with religious institutions, providing funding and technical support for faith-based conservation projects. Third, revival of culturally resonant practices, such as protection of sacred groves, could be integrated with modern conservation to build community



legitimacy. Finally, youth-targeted programs leveraging religious networks could revitalize engagement and bridge the gap between doctrine and practice.

Overall, religious teachings and leadership account for over 61% of the variance in conservation practices, demonstrating their vital role in embedding sustainability within Dekina's socio-cultural fabric. By showing that religion retains strong predictive power even after controlling for demographics, and that its effect varies across faiths, this study advances global debates on religion and ecology. In line with White's (1967) thesis that religious worldviews can shape ecological outcomes for good or ill, the Dekina case demonstrates that faith-based ethics can be mobilized as positive forces for sustainability when leaders and institutions are adequately empowered.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that religious teachings and leadership play a crucial role in promoting environmental conservation in Dekina LGA. Faith-based values significantly shape residents' environmental attitudes and behaviors, while religious leaders act as key agents who boost community participation in conservation initiatives. These findings confirm H1—that religious teachings influence environmental attitudes and practices—and H2—that religious leadership enhances participation in conservation activities. Together, they underscore the powerful role of religion in embedding ecological ethics within community life.

Theoretically, the study contributes by positioning religion as a behavioral lever that operates through norms, values, and social capital, reinforcing stewardship and collective responsibility for the environment. This framework highlights how both scriptural teachings and indigenous practices function as moral and cultural resources that guide environmental behavior in Dekina.

Practically, the study recommends targeted actions to address existing challenges. These include enhancing environmental education and training for religious leaders to address knowledge gaps (reported by 78% of respondents), developing funding mechanisms for faith-based programs (given that 80% identified financial constraints), and strengthening collaboration between environmental agencies and religious institutions for joint programming. Equally important is the revival of indigenous Igala ecological knowledge and practices, which can complement modern conservation strategies, as well as increasing youth engagement by integrating environmental themes into religious education and programs. Finally, harmonizing religious rituals with conservation goals and fostering interfaith dialogue will help reduce tensions and promote unified, sustainable stewardship across religious groups.

The study is not without limitations. It relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias, and its focus on Dekina may limit generalization to other contexts. Nevertheless, the findings offer a strong empirical basis for both theory and practice, suggesting that

integrating faith-based values with modern environmental policies can strengthen sustainability efforts in culturally grounded ways.

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