



Impact of Religion on Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRAK

Pembangunan berkelanjutan selalu menjadi dambaan seluruh lapisan masyarakat dan komunitas. Tidak ada masyarakat atau komunitas di mana pun di dunia ini yang tidak mencita-citakan dan mengharapkan pembangunan yang berkelanjutan dan langgeng. Oleh karena itu, Nigeria sebagai negara selama bertahun-tahun mendambakan dan mengharapkan pembangunan berkelanjutan. Keinginan untuk melakukan pembangunan ini melintasi strata sosial masyarakat Nigeria mulai dari strata makanan, jalan, dan infrastruktur pedesaan hingga strata sosial ekonomi dan bahkan politik. Tulisan ini berpandangan bahwa agama dapat menjadi alat yang sangat ampuh untuk mencapai pembangunan berkelanjutan di Nigeria. Hal ini diyakini sebagai peran perkembangan agama dalam masyarakat mana pun. Jika agama (prinsip, sistem kepercayaan, dan praktiknya) diterapkan secara positif terhadap pembangunan di Nigeria, maka pembangunan berkelanjutan akan terwujud di Nigeria. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana nilai dan ajaran agama dapat mendorong atau menghambat upaya pelestarian lingkungan, kesejahteraan sosial, dan pertumbuhan ekonomi berkelanjutan. Subyek dalam penelitian ini adalah anggota kelompok masyarakat. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Penelitian ini menyiratkan bahwa agama memiliki potensi besar untuk mendorong praktik berkelanjutan, yang berarti bahwa pemerintah dan pemangku kepentingan lainnya perlu lebih aktif melibatkan organisasi keagamaan dalam inisiatif pembangunan.

ABSTRACT

Sustainable development has always been the dream of all levels of society and communities. There is no society or community anywhere in the world that does not aspire and hope for sustainable and lasting development. Therefore, Nigeria as a country has for many years yearned and hoped for sustainable development. This desire for development cuts across the social strata of Nigerian society from food strata, roads, and rural infrastructure to socioeconomic and even political strata. This paper is of the view that religion can be a very powerful tool for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. This is believed to be the developmental role of religion in any society. If religion (its principles, belief systems, and practices) are applied positively to development in Nigeria, then sustainable development will be realized in Nigeria. This research aims to identify how religious values and teachings can encourage or hinder environmental conservation efforts, social welfare, and sustainable economic growth. The subjects in this research were members of community groups. The research method used is descriptive qualitative. This research implies that religion has great potential to encourage sustainable practices, which means that governments and other stakeholders need to involve religious organizations in development initiatives more actively.

1. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of religion and sustainable development presents a dynamic landscape where diverse beliefs, practices, and institutions have a significant influence on global progress. Religion, a force that shapes cultural norms and values of societies around the world, plays a critical yet multifaceted role in sustainable development initiatives. The potential of religious teachings to instill ethical values, community cohesion, and a sense of responsibility for the environment (Al-Jayyousi & Abdel Gelil, 2012; Mubarok, 2018). Such teachings often advocate for the stewardship of natural resources and prioritize

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concern for marginalized groups, in line with core principles of sustainable development. Conversely, tensions and gaps in religious doctrine may hinder progress on sustainability goals. Conflicts arising from differing religious beliefs or extremist interpretations can hamper collective efforts, potentially divert resources, and undermine the social cohesion necessary for sustainable development on a global scale (Al-Jayyousi & Abdel Gelil, 2012; Redclift, 2016). The global discourse around the impact of religion on sustainable development highlights the complex interplay between faith-based values and efforts to achieve a sustainable future. Religious institutions, with their broad reach and moral authority, can act as catalysts for positive change, mobilizing communities and advocating for environmental stewardship and social justice. However, this influence is not without complexity. Differences in religious interpretations, coupled with the potential for conflict and fundamentalism, pose challenges to cohesive efforts to achieve sustainable development (Al-Jayyousi & Abdel Gelil, 2012; Redclift, 2016).

In the African context, the impact of religion on sustainable development is closely tied to the continent's cultural traditions, social norms, and religious diversity. Religious beliefs in Africa often emphasize communal values, respect for nature, and social cohesion, which are in line with sustainable development goals. Experts highlight that indigenous African religions often promote an ecological worldview, emphasizing the interconnectedness of humans and nature, fostering a stewardship ethos that is in line with sustainability goals. In addition, religious institutions in Africa, whether indigenous or introduced through colonialism, have historically played a significant role in community development, providing social support, education, and health services and contributing to sustainable practices and social cohesion (Mairi, 2015; Ona N.C. & Ugwu, 2017). Nigeria, as a country, has, in the past and present, used different means to achieve significant and sustainable levels of development. This is evident in the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MMSER), War on Indiscipline (WAI), National Orientation Agency (NOA), and many others. The development strategies that have been adopted and implemented by the Nigerian state over the years have all failed miserably. This is due to insincerity, lack of commitment, corruption, and/or poor implementation. Other research findings confirm that these development strategies have failed to cure Nigeria's ills (Ona N.C. & Ugwu, 2017). Corruption is a cause of the failure of development strategies in Nigeria (Achebe, 2018; Uche, 2010). Nigerian society is as follows: "An immoral society is also a sick society. By an immoral society, we mean a society that is full of corruption, dishonesty, fraud, selfish embezzlement of public funds, and other acts. Such a society is sick and cannot be in a healthy order. Its organs cannot function properly because they are in an unhealthy condition. Life in such a society becomes increasingly difficult, unsafe, and unhappy (Omoregbe, 2013).

Functionally, a society that has the above description could be healthier and wholesome. Since every human and societal problem has a beginning and the possibility of being cured, it can be assumed that the development problems in Nigeria must have solutions that cannot be ignored. This study states that since religion is one of the social institutions in society and is also given, religion can be a panacea for the sustainability of the development desires of Nigerian society. Religion, although a social institution, goes beyond the social realm. This is very reasonable and metaphysical. This relates to the reality of neumena. Through acts of worship and communication with God, religion makes the power of God come to help humans. Thus, through religious activities, neumena merges with the phenomenon that lowers the power of divinity and the highest reality for the benefit of mortal beings. Religious practices such as covenants, oath-taking, ex-communication, moral bonds, philanthropic obligations, and devotion add color to the functional perspective of sustainable development in Nigeria" (Achebe, 2018; Uche, 2011). To save Nigeria from social decay and lack of sustainable development despite past development strategies, the social functions and dynamics of religion are presented in this article as a means to promote sustainable development in Nigeria. This study aims to identify how religious values and teachings can promote or hinder environmental conservation efforts, social welfare, and sustainable economic growth. In addition, this study also aims to evaluate the contribution of religious organizations in development programs, as well as analyze community perspectives on the role of religion in sustainable development. By understanding these dynamics, this study hopes to provide valuable recommendations for policymakers, religious leaders, and other stakeholders in developing effective and inclusive strategies to advance sustainable development in Nigeria. This study also aims to explore the potential for cross-religious and sectoral collaboration in achieving sustainable development goals, as well as identify challenges and opportunities on the ground.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research method. The qualitative descriptive method is used because it can explore and understand in depth the experiences, perceptions, and views of

individuals or groups regarding sustainable development issues. This approach is very suitable for studying how cultural and religious values influence people's attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable development. With its flexibility, this method can be adjusted to the dynamics and changes that occur during the study, allowing researchers to capture complex nuances in unique social and cultural contexts. In addition, qualitative descriptive research can produce rich and detailed narratives about how individuals and communities experience and understand these issues, providing deeper insights compared to more structured quantitative data. This is especially important in sustainable development studies that involve interactions between various stakeholders, including government, non-governmental organizations, and local communities. The subjects in this study were members of community groups. The research procedure begins with a preparatory stage, where the researcher conducts a literature review to understand the theoretical and empirical context related to the topic. Next, the researcher designs a research framework and defines specific research questions and objectives of the study. Data collection is done through in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders, such as religious leaders, community members, and government officials, as well as through participant observation in various significant locations. The researcher may also use focus group discussions to gain more diverse perspectives. The collected data are then analyzed thematically by identifying patterns, themes, and categories that emerge from the interview transcripts and observation notes. This analysis involves an iterative and reflective coding process to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings. The researcher also triangulates the data by comparing information from various sources and methods to enhance the validity of the research results. Finally, the results of the analysis are compiled in the form of a research report that presents the findings descriptively, supplemented with direct quotes from participants to provide a more vivid and in-depth picture of the impact of religion on sustainable development in Nigeria. The researcher then recommends policy steps or interventions that can be taken based on the research findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Religion towards sustainable development in Nigeria shows that religion plays a significant role in various aspects of people's lives that influence sustainable development. Religious values often promote sustainable practices, such as environmental conservation and social solidarity. For example, many religious teachings encourage their followers to care for nature as part of their spiritual responsibility, which has a positive impact on the conservation and protection of natural resources. In addition, religious organizations in Nigeria are often involved in social and economic programs that support education, health, and poverty alleviation, which are important pillars of sustainable development. However, challenges, such as rigid interpretations of religious teachings and inter-religious conflicts, can hinder sustainable development efforts. Some communities reported that inter-religious conflicts disrupt social stability and hinder cooperation in development projects. Overall, these findings indicate that religion has great potential to support sustainable development in Nigeria if well managed. However, it also requires an inclusive approach and inter-religious dialogue to overcome the challenges. Religion is one of the social institutions in society. It is also understood as something that exists in any society. Therefore, it is understood as a given. Many scholars have attempted to define religion according to how they draw it. Religion can be seen as a set of beliefs and systems or forms of worship that aim to unite humans with God. In this sense, religion can be understood as the relationship between humans and divinity or the highest reality.

Discussion

Religion is truly a tool or vehicle for nation-building. This understanding will help us appreciate the impact of religion in enhancing sustainable development in Nigerian society. This is because, in Nigeria, religion explains social life and applies to all areas of life. The influence of religion on cultural, economic, socio-political, psychological, and spiritual activities in Nigerian society is very broad and strong. This is why it is undeniable that religious beliefs and practices are fundamental to nation-building because these beliefs and practices establish a kind of relationship or connection between the divine and the human, between the worldly and the spiritual, between the noumenal and the noumenal phenomena, between the temporary and the eternal, between the natural (material) and the spiritual (Kayode, 2014). To maintain this relationship or connection, several rules and regulations, norms and values, and treaties have been established to prevent rewards and punishments for humans and their society. Certain reasonable freedoms have been given to man by God so that he freely makes his choices in the events of life. This explains why in view (Redclift, 2016; Uche, 2019). God has always been in relationship and

communication with man since creation, and especially in Nigeria, God has always been in a relationship with His people since its emergence as a nation. Religion cannot be separated from the daily lives of African people and by implication, Nigerian people. The truth of Mbiti's statement is also supported by Mala's statement that in Africa, we see a lot of religious signs and congregational prayers on Fridays and Sundays. With the many churches, mosques, and other religious shrines in Nigeria, many religious functionaries help support the nation-building efforts. This is achieved through worship and sacrifice, crusade rituals and evangelical outreach, visitation, counseling, religious and secular education, and other socio-spiritual functions they render to the Nigerian people.

In Nigeria, missionaries evangelize the people through schools, hospitals, and church activities. Those who have moved the nation in the past and some in the present are products of mission schools (Ruhansih, 2017; Sitorus & Pasaribu, 2023). Moral education, which is a very important aspect of nation-building, is the goal of school missions. Currently, many countries have begun the process of handing back mission schools to the mission churches that own them ab-initio, and the main reason or argument for this action is "to restore morality to our morally decadent society." (Al-Jayyousi & Abdel Gelil, 2012; Kayode, 2014; Uche, 2011). Although religion has caused some harm to the social life of Nigerian society through undue competition, priest fraud, unjustified religious killings, and other fanatical traits, it has tried. It is still trying to uphold and display spiritual charisma in Nigeria. Religion has been a very active mobilizing agent in the complex social engagements in Nigeria. Religious mmamat restores peace and order between the visible and the invisible, between the spiritual and the mundane, between the noumenal and the phenomenal realities, settles disputes, presides over festivals and coronations (Elshifa et al., 2023; Uche, 2011). Previous research findings revealed that Religious functionaries are "...custodians of customs, traditions, taboos, and theology. Religious functionaries, within the context of religion, retain moral requirements and combine this with their role as mediators and, in this way, enhance their function as a social force in Nigeria." (Uche, 2011). An analytical survey of Nigerian society will reveal that we need leaders with esoteric power, knowledge, and religion that can help achieve this. When these leaders are in place, religion will help them provide explanations and solutions to the problem of the meaning of life and other mysteries associated with human existence in Nigeria. Research confirms that ignorance of the power and impact of religion has caused Nigeria to experience the developmental backwardness it is experiencing today. Obedience to the word of God and his prophets or imams brings progress, blessings, and other greatness (Achebe, 2018; Uche, 2019). In a complex, pluralistic society like Nigeria, human actions, behaviors, and conduct can have negative impacts on the wider society. The negative impacts they have on society can hinder growth and jeopardize sustainable development. Therefore, religions take steps to cohesively oppose such tendencies and encourage society to be morally responsible (Mustoip & Al-ghozali, 2022; Zulyanto, 2022).

Religion promotes social norms that keep society together and revisit social commitments to socially desirable behavior, which, in the long run, creates sustainable behavior in Nigeria. Religion also promotes sustainable development by sensitizing Nigerians to act according to their filial obligations (Ona N.C. & Ugwu, 2017; Redclift, 2016). This study adopts the theory of religious functionalism. Functionalism was formulated by the great sociologist Emile Durkheim, who argued that religion has a function, and that function is found in the reality of its work or what it does in society. By believing in Durkheim's view, Dzurghé asserted that the social function of religion includes increasing unity, harmony, solidarity, and integration among people in a particular society (Asdlori, 2023; Elshifa et al., 2023). Likewise, religion, as a system of worship and social institutions, provides an ethical system that regulates and governs human behavior, relationships, institutions, interactions, and individual actions. From a functionalist perspective, religion serves as an instrument of social control. In Nigeria, the truth of this statement is demonstrated through a careful study of religious symbols such as palm leaves, symbols of religious deities, and religious functionaries, especially the priesthood (Handoko et al., 2022; Hanyfah et al., 2022). The priesthood in religion functions as an instrument of social control through pastoral care programs, praying for members, counseling, pastoral visits, and other pastoral activities, such as reconciliation programs for resolving cases, and creating an environment that allows for peaceful coexistence among people, which in the long run, makes businesses thrive. Religion is also seen as a true instrument of social order. Through the use of religious traditions, religion imposes restrictions, prohibitions, and peace efforts (Hendrawan, 2020; Inayati & Mulyawisdawati, 2024). This is achieved through socio-religious sanctions and exclusion. In addition to the above, religion helps maintain law and order in Nigerian society and the maintenance of law and order is an essential ingredient for sustainable development. No country can thrive under tension, chaos, and disorder. By preaching peace and obedience to the laws of the land, religion promotes order, which is a favorable atmosphere for businesses to thrive. In this way, religion helps to bring about sustainable development in Nigeria. Religion provides social welfare for its members. The provision of schools, homes for orphans, care for widows and the poor, and construction of hospitals and old age

homes are all evidence of the contribution of religion to sustainable development in Nigeria (Al-Jayyousi & Abdel Gelil, 2012; Asdlori, 2023). Religion is known for preaching values that sustain society. In Nigeria, religion has established values that foster social harmony and solidarity. For example, Christianity has demonstrated its commitment to values such as forgiveness and tolerance, especially in the face of the Boko Haram insurgency, where churches were burned and lives and property were lost. Commitment to these values promotes sustainable development (Humaida et al., 2020; Mubarok, 2018). Add to that the fact that religion promotes truth, faith, and commitment among people. These moral values not only promote peaceful coexistence but also play a vital role in nation-building and sustainable development in Nigeria (Firdaus, 2024; Hendrawan, 2020).

The implications of the study suggest that religion has great potential to promote sustainable practices, which means that the government and other stakeholders need to involve religious organizations in development initiatives more actively. This involvement could take the form of collaboration in environmental conservation, education, health, and poverty alleviation programs based on religious values. In addition, the government should recognize and address the challenges posed by interfaith conflict by promoting interfaith dialogue and creating space for more inclusive cooperation. Policies that support training and outreach for religious leaders on sustainable development issues can also enhance their positive role in society. Another implication is the need for a culturally and religiously sensitive approach in designing and implementing development projects, to maximize community participation and the success of such programs. Thus, religion is not only seen as part of the problem but also as part of the solution to achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. One of the limitations of this study is the limited sample size, where the study may have only covered a few religious communities and organizations that still need to represent the religious and cultural diversity across Nigeria fully. In addition, respondent bias, where participants may have given answers that are considered most in line with the expectations of the researcher or the community, may have affected the accuracy of the findings. The study may also have underestimated the political and economic dynamics that interact with religious factors in influencing sustainable development. To address these limitations, it is recommended to conduct further research with a larger and more representative sample, covering different regions and religious denominations in Nigeria. A more diverse methodological approach, such as the use of quantitative surveys complemented by in-depth interviews, may provide a more comprehensive picture. Researchers are also advised to triangulate data by using secondary data sources and involving experts from various disciplines to enrich the analysis. In addition, involving stakeholders from various sectors, including government, non-governmental organizations, and local communities, in the research process and implementation of the findings can increase the relevance and impact of this study. Thus, future research can provide deeper insights and actionable recommendations for leveraging the role of religion in sustainable development in Nigeria.

4. CONCLUSION

Religion is a powerful force in Nigeria, serving identifiable social functions. The dysfunctional roles of some religious fanatics can undermine these functions. However, the functional role of religion in Nigerian society is so great that the negative tendencies of some misguided religious believers can be overlooked. As a force to be reckoned with, religion plays a role of social control, offers social services, and promotes social coexistence and integration. Since all these are elements of development, religion implicitly promotes sustainable development in Nigeria.

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