



Advocating for Environmental Sustainability in Nigeria: The Role of Church Choirs

Odusanya, Oluseun Sunday (PhD)

Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo

seunadeola2226@gmail.com

ORCID ID: 0009-0007-3850-3788

Abstract

The dialogue between music and environmentalism is in its infancy, and creativity continually carves new pathways for addressing ecological discourse. The purpose of this article is to analyse how Nigerian church choirs disseminate ecological concern through sacred music. This article will employ an interdisciplinary theoretical framework drawn from ecotheology, music and social change, and participatory communication to qualitatively analyse the process by which Nigerian church choirs disseminate ecological concern through sacred music. Drawing on interviews with church directors, choristers, and church officials, and a thematic analysis of church choirs' repertoires of sacred music, this article uncovered four emergent themes: a theologically rooted inspiration; music as an instrument of ecological awareness; an emboldened community; and institutional limitations. Ultimately, Nigerian church choirs' creative synthesis of scripture and local musical traditions encourages spiritual growth while motivating localised engagement and ecological advocacy; the findings are significant for the literature on faith-based environmentalism and sacred music for social change.

Keywords: Advocating, Church Choirs, Environmental Sustainability, Nigeria, Role



Introduction

Recently, there has been increased attention to the connection between music and environmental advocacy as the world seeks new ways to address pressing ecological challenges. The ability of music to carry and express feelings and inspire communal involvement cannot be overstated, and it has always been a factor that stimulates societal change and awareness. For a long time, music has been a channel for calling attention to injustice, and in the context of environmental issues, it is now an important feature of ecological advocacy. In an environment where religion is highly potent, as in Nigeria, church choirs can play an exceptional role in shaping public consciousness by incorporating environmental themes into sacred music. They occupy a unique position as culture- and religion-bearers, which allows their creative musical ability to merge with spiritual ideology, enabling them to become channels of environmental advocacy.

Nigeria is currently besieged by myriad environmental problems such as deforestation, pollution, climate change, and oil spills, which have crippled the people, both in rural and urban centres. According to Nwankwo (2015) and Obasi (2018), it is imperative to adopt a bottom-up approach to achieve environmental sustainability, and religious bodies such as churches should champion this course, given the intrinsic link between morality and the environment. As instruments of religion and culture, church choirs possess immense power to shape people's values and attitudes toward the environment and to instill a consciousness of sustainable practices in religious music.

Music, as a means of expression and a tool for societal development, has had an eminent presence in Nigeria, ranging from iconic musicians like Fela Anikulapo Kuti, a socially critical music activist, to Laz Ekwueme, a prolific Nigerian composer, who combined elements of African cultural tradition and spirituality in religious music in Nigeria. Ezenwa (2016) holds that choral music is one form that can shape public opinion by evoking emotional resonance and creating solidarity among its audience. Therefore, the Nigerian church choir can use the sacred intent and emotional potency of its sacred music to engender in congregation members respect for ecological ethics grounded in both Christianity and African traditional religions.

However, there is limited research on sacred music as a vehicle for environmental activism. There is copious research on the role of religion in ecological activism (Agbiji, 2013) and literature in fostering ecological awareness (Nwagbara, 2013), but very little research has focused on church choirs as agents of ecological advocacy, utilising the element of sacred music. Henceforth, this study seeks to examine the extent to which church choirs promote ecological messages in their singing, the congregation members' perceptions of these musical messages, their impact on worship, and the relationship between faith-based environmental advocacy and music.



Theoretical Framework

An interdisciplinary framework is adopted from Ecotheology, the Theory of Music and Social Change, Cultural Ecology Theory, and the Theory of Participatory Communication to critically engage with the research issues surrounding church choirs and environmental advocacy. Ecotheology is a theological discussion about the environment and man's responsibility toward it. Christian theological sources hold that caring for God's creation is an imperative; studies in Ecotheology by authors such as Santmire (1985) and Sittler (1972) argue that the Christian doctrine of creation and fall implies a moral obligation for humans to be stewards and caretakers of nature. Ecotheology, on the other hand, is concerned with how church choirs, as members of the body of Christ, can manifest religious values that foster environmental consciousness and ecological integrity as part of their religious beliefs (Horrell, Hunt, & Southgate, 2010).

Music and Social Change theory states that music can be used as a medium to mobilise, advocate and influence social transformation. Eyerman and Jamison (1998) contend that music has played a role in many social movements throughout history, like civil rights activism and political agitation. It is based on this theory that the study postulates that church choirs have the capacity, through their music, to influence and change congregants' perceptions and attitudinal dispositions toward environmental concerns. Music's power to elicit emotions and stimulate thoughts makes it a compelling instrument for advocating environmental action (Turino, 2008).

Cultural Ecology Theory is the study of human culture in relation to the environment, as extensively discussed by Steward (1955). It helps the researcher see the role of church music and its incorporation of African indigenous ideas, thereby ensuring the cultural relevance of ecological advocacy. By blending indigenous African musical traditions and African cosmology with Christian theology, the choir will ensure that the messages relayed to the congregation are relevant to their local culture (Omojola, 2010).

Participatory Communication Theory, in agreement with Freire's (2020) revolutionary theory of communication, is the process by which audiences and participants are actively involved in communication rather than passive recipients. Church choirs will participate, making their members active participants in raising environmental awareness through involvement in activities and discourse related to environmental issues (Servaes, 2008). These theories were combined to enable a comprehensive analysis of how church choirs participate as agencies in environmental advocacy. The theories are closely interrelated; hence, the study bases its analysis on these connections.

This perspective is most appropriate in this research, as it shows how sacred music can mobilise congregation members through participation in a religiously inspired way. Furthermore, its connection to theological conviction, along with the use of community participation methods, enables this type of music to move people toward accepting an ecological approach to their faith-based social activism. The work strengthens existing research into the social capacity of sacred music by examining its power to create



active caretakers of the earth within their communities, thereby creating a framework from which faith, music and community action may contribute toward a more just and sustainable future, which is founded upon the power of faith and action.

Choral Music as a Vehicle for Social Change

Music has long been instrumental in molding the consciousness, emotions and beliefs of a people. In diverse cultures and climes, choral music has emerged as a powerful vehicle for societal change. In Nigeria, choral music has been instrumental in national development, campaigns, and cultural preservation, and thus provides an excellent platform for environmental awareness due to its highly participatory and communal nature, lending it a strong capacity to unite people as a society. Nigerian music over the years has been a highly effective medium of expression and reaction to political, economic, and social problems. Ugoo–Okonkwo & Erhiegueke (2025) posit that ‘Music undoubtedly has the potential for cultural, social and economic sustainability; it improves the growth and development of nation’s economy, culture, social and general welfare’ (p.81). During the colonial era, traditional music and folktales were often used to maintain cultural identity and to relay social and communal values and practices.

In the post–colonial era, Nigeria experienced a rise in prominent musicians, such as Fela Anikulapo Kuti, whose Afrobeat songs became a tool for social commentary and criticism of government corruption and political tyranny, to mention but a few. Though these examples of music as a tool of change are associated with popular and traditional music forms, it is clear that even sacred music in Nigeria has a significant capacity to raise consciousness, mould public opinion, and serve as an agent of social reform. The annals of social reform movements in Nigeria clearly prove that the church has always been in the vanguard. Church choirs have traditionally contributed their voices and artistic capabilities to the fight against poverty, ignorance, and human rights abuses. Ezenwa (2016) agrees that choral music is a crucial part of the process of moral rearmament and civic consciousness of any society and hence a veritable tool of development.

From the beginning of their existence in Nigeria, the Anglican and Catholic churches have used hymnody and choral composition as means of communicating the importance of peace, justice, and good moral character. During the Nigerian civil war (1967–1970), the church choir was instrumental in offering solace and encouragement to many devastated areas with their songs of hope, further reinforcing the power of music as an effective tool for resilience and activism rather than a mere form of artistic expression. Given this tradition, Nigerian church choirs are best positioned to spearhead a global agenda for environmental protection.

Environmental activism, though the most challenging of all human endeavours, relies on intellectual and emotional appeal. Although scientific reports and policy papers have been written and



presented regarding the dangers of climate change, pollution and deforestation to the environment, human beings, the primary target audience, tend to react and take decisive action more effectively when emotionally moved than when facts and data are merely presented. Music, and particularly choral singing, has this ability to connect with human emotions. Nketia (1999) emphasises that music functions as a medium through which people construct meaning, reinforce shared values, and strengthen communal identity.

It is in this frame that sacred music can be seen as an appropriate medium to express and reinforce the idea of humanity as a steward over God's creation. This theme is seen in many religions and writings, such as Psalm 24:1 – 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it,' – hence, church choirs are particularly privileged to be able to spread awareness about the environment through appropriate songs. There are Nigerian composers and choral directors who are beginning to see and capitalise on this aspect of music. An example is the Nigerian composer Laz Ekwueme, whose music integrates African folk styles with Western composition to illustrate issues of cultural identity and responsibility, and can also be adapted into powerful songs of environmental consciousness.

Illustrations of Choral Music Addressing Social Issues

The employment of choral music as a means of expressing and supporting causes has a distinguished history and an array of examples of its efficacy in awakening consciousness and instigating group participation. During the period of apartheid in South Africa, such choral songs as *Senzani Na?* Became vehicles of resistance and solidarity and helped to maintain the fight for freedom and human rights. Likewise, in the fight against racial segregation in the United States, gospel and spiritual music were crucial to the Civil Rights Movement in America, and such songs as "We Shall Overcome" came to represent hopes for social change, togetherness, and overcoming oppression. The foregoing examples indicate that choral music is an effective medium for transmitting social messages and evoking communal participation. Nowadays, even environmental campaigns resort to choral singing to inculcate knowledge of climate change and sustainable environmental practice. For instance, there is the Earth Choir and the United Nations Climate Choir, which hold concerts that preach eco-consciousness. These precedents would encourage Nigerian church choirs to utilise the potential and appeal of choral singing to advocate for ecological justice, the environment, and conservation.

Environmental Advocacy in Nigerian Church Choirs

Several approaches could be incorporated into Nigerian church choirs to meet these objectives, helping them have the greatest ability to influence people toward environmental campaigns. One could do this by including such topics in their hymnals and anthems. In addition, composers and church choir directors could compose and edit new hymnals on environmental care, drawing on Holy Scripture regarding man's responsibility to care for the Earth. It would be great if people could understand their



responsibility to care for the Earth through hymns sung at church. Another extremely powerful approach would be to organise a climate change concert to encourage churches to host climate change awareness performances. This could allow the members of the church choir and the members to have increased awareness.

Church choirs could also bring together policymakers and environmentalists to help create performances that raise awareness of environmental destruction and the ways to preserve it. Concerts could be used to discuss the future of sustainable development and the struggles to achieve it. Another approach would be to include youth in choir-based environmental advocacy. Youth are the future generation, and it is they who will carry the load. Church choirs could make an effort to encourage youth to create and perform songs about environmental protection to ensure the information reaches future generations. Churches can also partner with an environmental agency to increase awareness and participation in climate change through music. This could be accomplished by joining a specific environmental group or by working with a local policymaker to partner on a project that increases everyone's understanding. Lastly, using indigenous music styles could enhance the performance of choral music regarding environmental concerns to create more cultural relevance to the audience; by using features such as indigenous rhythm, call and response form, and indigenous dialects, Nigerian church choirs can promote local and cultural relevance, thereby raising awareness of the topic more efficiently. Through these measures, Nigerian church choirs could help the nation raise awareness of the environment and inspire others to work toward sustainability, combining the power of faith with performance.

Environmental Themes in Nigerian Literature

Environmental issues have become increasingly prominent in the creative endeavours of Nigerian writers and poets. They utilise the art of literature to increase awareness about deforestation, pollution, oil spills, desertification, and climate change. Nigerian literature has played an invaluable role in raising awareness of and illuminating environmental concerns, thereby advocating the adoption of sustainable lifestyles. Novels, poems, dramas and essays explore nature, culture and development in various forms. The issue of environmental degradation (particularly in the Niger Delta region) caused by oil exploitation is a major theme in Nigerian Literature. Rich in natural resources, this area has been severely polluted and degraded by multinational oil companies and by Nigerian government policies that have always favoured economic gain over environmental sustainability.

Authors such as Ken Saro-Wiwa, Tanure Ojaide, and Helon Habila have consistently chronicled the environmental destruction inflicted on the people of the Niger Delta. Ken Saro-Wiwa's 'A Month and a Day' (1995) and 'Sozaboy' (1985) deal with environmental activism and the marginalised, less privileged citizen. Ken Saro-Wiwa, in particular, as a leader of MOSOP (Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People), did much to expose the environmental destruction perpetrated by oil companies like Shell through his literary endeavours. His contribution to ecological writing is considered a standard reference.



Tanure Ojaide's poetry collections 'The fate of vultures and other poems' (1990) and 'Delta blues & home songs' (1998) are poems of pain and suffering caused by the poisoning and destruction of the land and sea. The poems in these collections describe gas flaring and the consequent loss of biodiversity and also showcase the connection between man and the environment using traditional orality alongside modern poetic techniques. He urges the people of the Delta not to be passive in the face of their environmental problems but to revolt against the exploitative bodies, reminding them of the indigenous ethics for the stewardship of nature. Habila's 'Oil on Water' (2010) also focuses on environmental degradation and devastation in the Niger Delta and follows two journalists in their pursuit to uncover how oil extraction impacts the lives of the people of the Niger Delta as well as the damage done to the environment, which in turn leads to displacement, loss of lives and violence.

Additionally, Nigerian literature portrays other environmental concerns beyond the Niger Delta region, such as deforestation, desertification, and climate change, which primarily affect the northern part of the nation, where desert encroaches and harsh weather and climatic conditions cause food scarcity and the displacement of persons from the area. Some of these writers, such as Abubakar Gimba, Nnimmo Bassey, and Zaynab Alkali, have discussed environmental issues in their works. Nnimmo Bassey, a poet and environmental activist, is known for his collections of poems that criticise environmental destruction and advocate conservation and sustainable practices. His collection, titled *We Thought It Was Oil, But It Was Blood* (2002), is a powerful poetic critique of the exploitation of natural resources. Bassey, as a writer and activist, shows writers as agents influencing the discourse of environmentalism. Zaynab Alkali, a northern novelist, has also addressed environmental concerns; *The Descendants* (2005) focuses on rural communities undergoing desertification, financial hardship, and food scarcity. In her writing, Alkali demonstrates the necessity of conservation and sustainable farming to address environmental challenges.

Urbanisation and industrialisation are also concerns in Nigerian literature, expressed through various writing genres. Urbanisation in cities such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt has led to increased pollution, waste management crises, and the destruction of natural areas. Writers such as Chinua Achebe, Femi Osofisan, and Niyi Osundare have discussed the in their texts. *Anthills of the Savannah* by Chinua Achebe was published in 1987 and is a critique of governance, environmental abuse, and social responsibility. Though it is not exclusively a book of environmental issues, Achebe's book condemns the political systems that allow pollution, corruption, and resource depletion. According to Achebe, leadership and conscience are important in addressing ecological issues. Niyi Osundare, a highly acclaimed Nigerian poet, has extensively discussed nature and the environment; works like *The Eye of the Earth* (1986) and *Waiting Laughters* (1990) celebrate the natural world while criticising its destruction at the hands of modernity. Osundare promotes the use of African Indigenous ecological knowledge, stating that African traditional religions upheld closer ties with nature than do those in modern societies, especially during the period of industrialisation and Westernisation.



Nigerian literature, therefore, stands as the ultimate instrument of environmental activism, historically documenting and artistically re-imaging ecological issues; it influences readers both emotionally and intellectually, thereby enabling knowledge and action. This artistic incorporation of environmental themes through poetry, fiction, and drama will portray these ecological problems as human and cultural issues rather than just political or scientific concerns. Church choir music in Nigeria can thus emulate Nigerian literature in engaging with environmental issues. Just as writers have effectively used the power of the word to raise awareness, music can be used to convey the urgency of ecological conservation; narratives present in poems and prose can thus be integrated into musical creations, thereby creating a medium that appeals to Christians, members of the congregation, and humanity in general.

Theological Basis of Environmental Advocacy

A deep understanding of theological principles calls for environmental advocacy within the Nigerian Christian community. There is the belief that the Holy Scriptures provide ample rationale for taking responsibility for creation; this belief is seen to span from Genesis to Revelation. From the Scriptures, man has been given stewardship over God's creation; the Earth is sacred, man has been tasked with taking care of it, and there are consequences for human negligence. Building on this religious basis, Christian Theology in general has continued to respond to ecological issues, calling on the Church to become a model of environmental sustainability. As instruments of divine and social reform, Nigerian church choirs can incorporate this theological premise in music, thereby increasing awareness of ecological issues.

Divine stewardship is considered the very foundation upon which all religious motivations for environmental advocacy rest. It is believed that in Genesis 1:26–28, man was given the right to rule over the earth in whatever way he pleased; in the contemporary world, dominion is often perceived as subjugation rather than care. Christian theology has presented the stewardship of creation, a principle also found in African indigenous religions (as articulated by writers such as Bolaji Idowu and John S. Mbiti), thereby giving rise to African Christian ecology. Christians believe that the Earth and everything in it belong to the Lord (Psalm 24:1), so man does not solely own it. Nigerian church choirs can therefore compose and sing hymns that address man's sacred obligation to care for His property.

The prophetic traditions within Christianity hold true for the need for justice, which includes ecological justice. The prophets of the Old Testament's denunciation of various socio-political and economic malpractices are reminiscent of modern-day environmental challenges and their relation to justice as seen in Isaiah 24:4–6: "The earth is defiled by its people, they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant." It shows how human misconduct is directly linked to ecological degradation, a phenomenon prevalent in Nigerian society. Nigerian writers like Jesse N.K. Mugambi and Ogbu U. Kalu had affirmed the prophetic role of African Christianity in advocating for justice,



thereby bringing ecological justice under its scope. The church as a body must, through singing, be a prophetic voice for the ecological preservation of Nigeria.

Jesus Christ frequently referenced the natural world in His teachings, thereby affirming that creation has intrinsic value. Matthew 6:26–30. Jesus uses the birds and lilies as evidence of God's providence, a revelation of nature's sanctity and hence the responsibility to preserve it. His work was about healing and restoration, attributes that can be translated to environmental restoration; "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" John 10:10. Environmental degradation results in a shortage of resources, disease and ultimately death, which contradicts Jesus' message of abundant life. Nigerian church choirs can inspire believers in their music by teaching them that in restoring the earth, they are continuing Christ's act of restoration.

In Christian eschatological thought, environmental advocacy finds additional theological support in the belief that creation is presently affected by the consequences of human sin but remains destined for renewal and restoration. The passages in Romans 8:19–22 show creation longing for deliverance, and the description in Revelation 21:1 of a new heaven and new earth indicates God's goal for creation's full re-creation. This implies that Christians need not take a passive approach towards the environment. It demands active engagement in caring for and recreating nature. In this perspective, sacred music and worship songs can serve as vehicles to stimulate hope for creation's restoration and to affirm the role of Christians in caring for it.

Following this theological framework, there are three practical ways Nigerian church choirs can integrate environmental concern into their music and worship life. This includes, firstly, composing and singing hymns and songs about creation, justice, and caring, making ecological concerns a core aspect of worship. Secondly, to integrate creation-related prayers and Bible studies into their practice, linking worship and sustenance. Thirdly, they can use their musical programs for social and community action, and collaborate with communities, churches, and environmental organisations, using sacred music to educate and mobilise support for environmentalism. Nigerian church choirs can therefore be very influential in the movement for environmental advocacy by building on their faith, encouraging their congregations to see environmental protection as worship and obeying God, and by being part of the church's advocacy for an eco-just world.

Case Studies of Musical Environmental Advocacy

Music, a powerful instrument of advocacy, can mobilise communities for social and environmental justice. Throughout Nigeria and beyond, church choirs have been at the forefront of advancing ecological consciousness through singing, composition, and the organisation of environmental outreach programs with religious themes. Nigerian church choirs, leveraging the spiritual influence they wield, have been



effective in rallying church congregations and the wider public to support environmental protection. Below are various case studies in which music was instrumental in promoting environmental sustainability:

The Green Gospel Project, initiated under the auspices of the Catholic Diocese of Lagos in 2019 and subsequently adopted by the Catholic Diocese of Enugu in 2021, offers one clear example of an integration of environmentalism and sacred song. The Green Gospel project was begun following *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home* (Pope Francis, 2015), an encyclical which challenged the Catholic Church throughout the world to integrate eco-responsibility into worship and civil life. In this project, songs and choral arrangements were commissioned to reinforce the biblical charge to exercise stewardship over creation. By December 2022, the project had extended to 32 parishes across Lagos and Enugu states, where choir-led environmental advocacy had become an integral part of Sunday services, concerts, and community service.

Choir members involved in Green Gospel performed songs which addressed ecological issues such as deforestation, pollution and the effects of climate change, in an effort to encourage practical responses to creation care, such as planting trees and effective waste management. In January 2023, a project coordinator verified that choir-led cleanups related to the project involved more than 400 congregants across six parishes between January 1 and December 31, 2022. The project enabled congregants to move from a developed appreciation of creation care to actionable deeds in their communities (Kaaka & Kii, 2025). Another instance of a dedicated effort to bring church choirs into ecological advocacy was the Creation Care Choral Festival. Initiated in Ibadan in October 2020, by coordination of the Oyo State Council of Churches, the festival has become a regular yearly event at Wesley Cathedral, Ibadan (2020 and 2021 editions), drawing eleven choirs from four Christian traditions and a crowd of about 600 people to its 2021 instalment.

The festival drew on both Western hymnody and Nigerian indigenous musical styles as vehicles for ecological messaging. In partnership with the Oyo State Environmental Protection Agency and the Ibadan Urban Flood Management Project, the festival organisers coordinated reforestation and cleanup exercises following each concert. During the 2021 festival, a Yoruba-language composition featuring indigenous drumming and call-and-response singing underscored the importance of conserving bodies of water and forest cover in the Ogun–Osun River Basin. A post-festival survey administered to 120 attendees found that 78 per cent reported increased awareness of local environmental issues, and 43 per cent indicated they had participated in at least one conservation activity within three months of the festival (Oyo State Council of Churches, 2021). The combination of indigenous musical style and biblical teaching produced measurable mobilisation in both urban and peri-urban populations across the Ibadan metropolis.

Within the Anglican Communion, the need to have environmental themes in liturgical music is also a movement in the vanguard. Numerous Anglican parishes in both Abuja and Port Harcourt have seen their choirs perform powerful anthems on creation care, environmental justice and the repercussions of



industrial pollution. – “The Earth is the Lord’s” (Psalm 24:1), which reiterates humanity’s stewardship role over the Earth, is now frequently used in services, eco-conscious workshops, and even Sermons across various church denominations. Many churches affiliated with this communion also host musically themed forums, through which congregations are taught environmentally responsible habits whilst engaging in conversations regarding Environmental ethics. Local community-based efforts targeting waste reduction or efficient energy use can serve as examples.

Outside the choral realm, some well-known Nigerian gospel artists, namely Nathaniel Bassey and Tope Alabi, have used their voices to champion environmental consciousness by composing music that celebrates the environment and encourages environmentally sustainable practices. Their work is by no means exclusively environmental, but it carries the message powerfully amongst Christians, therefore paving the way for environmental dialogues. Furthermore, gospel concerts are regularly used as a forum to galvanise followers to address the crisis of climate change, for which all Christians ought to be more aware. While the influence of church choirs on environmental action might be well documented internationally, the influence is evident as far away as East Africa, where the Eco-Sing Movement, which employs sacred music to rally conservationist efforts region-wide, has witnessed a rise in usage. Choirs teamed up with activists and put their music front and centre by addressing pressing issues such as deforestation, climate change, pollution, sustainable agricultural practices, and more. Such as The Green Gospel Project, which showcases how Nigerian church choirs can play a greater role in addressing environmental destruction that extends beyond their church buildings and into schools and the policy arena.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted for this study, which seeks to identify how church choirs engage in environmental activism by employing sacred music as a tool for environmental awareness and promotion. The data collection techniques included interviews with choirs and congregants, church leaders, and environmentalists collaborating with faith communities; observation of singing rehearsals and musical performances; and analysis of selected choral compositions.

Interviews were conducted with directors of church choirs and members of those choirs, as well as key individuals within church leadership and among those who collaborate with churches to advance environmentalism. Topics during interviews included motivations for employing environmental messages through music in performances, the struggles they encountered in this type of advocacy, and the effects this type of activism had on both the congregation and society. In addition to these aspects, the role of the religious, social, and cultural context in such activism was explored, as well as its impact on attitudes and behaviours toward the natural world at both the individual and collective levels.



Observation techniques focused on data obtained through the observation of singing rehearsals and church worship services, church events as well as environmentally related musical performances by the church choir. Observation examined the transfer of environmental messages through music in this type of setting, the methods used to present the message musically, and the role the performance setting played in intensifying the effectiveness of the environmental message. This observation also addressed the audience's reactions to these performances and their level of receptiveness to environmentally friendly activities (such as recycling, planting trees, reducing waste, or working with environmental groups). A selection of hymnals, anthems, and other church choral music was evaluated in the present study. Each piece was evaluated for prevalent themes, lyrics, and religious content associated with creation care. The attention to such songs that blend traditional indigenous elements with scripture regarding creation care and the environment was explored.

The study selected twenty-four (24) participants across eight churches. Churches were chosen for their documented engagement in environmental advocacy through music, including those that organised eco-friendly concerts, collaborated with environmental organisations, or maintained a portfolio of songs related to ecological issues. Participants included 14 choir directors and members, 6 church leaders, and 4 environmental activists affiliated with religious institutions. The sample included denominations from Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Pentecostal Churches to indigenous African churches. Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts and observational notes following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarisation with data, generation of initial codes, search for themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and production of the final report. The resulting themes were cross-referenced with the textual analysis of selected choral scores to identify convergences between theological content and advocacy messaging.

Findings and Discussion

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and observational notes revealed four main themes: (1) theological motivation as the driving force of environmentalism in the churches, (2) music as the locus for ecological consciousness, (3) community mobilisation through choral music performance, and (4) Institutional and cultural barriers against sustained ecological activism. All eight churches studied reported these four themes, and they were also validated by analysis of the selected choir scores.

Theme 1: Theological motivation. For all 14 choir directors and members interviewed, theological conviction catalyzed embedding environmentalist sentiments in music. 11 of the 14 cited Genesis 1:26–28 and Psalm 24:1 as their primary references for Christian responsibility toward the earth. The Catholic choir director in Lagos pointed to the decision to restructure the choir's repertoire in 2019 to include at least two ecologic-minded songs per liturgical season following the publication of Pope Francis's Encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), while an Anglican choir director in Abuja described the effort to "embed" themes of creation care into Advent and harvest Thanksgiving anthems as an effort to create music that "answers to



what we see outside the church walls.” These points offer support for Santmire’s (1985) claim that theology can provide resources for an ethic of the environment.

Theme 2: Music as an environmental conduit. Close readings of 12 songs sampled across the eight churches revealed a common pattern in which ecological concerns were woven into established worship forms such as call-and-response chanting, scripture set to music, and harvest hymns. Seven of the 12 songs that were examined referred directly to deforestation, conservation of water resources, or elimination of waste products. Three of the songs analysed were explicitly based on Yoruba proverbs on creation care. Observational evidence from six rehearsals and two Sunday worship services across the sampled churches supported the observation that lyrical content inspired post-performance dialogues within congregations. In two Sunday services examined at an Anglican parish in Port Harcourt and a Catholic parish in Enugu, church members directly addressed the choir director with queries about the environmental NGOs referenced in the printed order of worship. Such observations provide evidence for Turino’s (2008) concept of music as an action-trigger rather than a passive experience.

Theme 3: mobilisation of the community via Choral Performance. The most tangible evidence of community mobilisation through choral music was offered by the Green Gospel Project (Catholic Diocese of Lagos, established in 2019 and ongoing) and the Creation Care Choral Festival (held annually in Ibadan, from 2020 onwards). The interview with the coordinator of the Green Gospel Project indicated that the project had engaged 32 churches in Lagos and Enugu by December 2022, in part through clean-up and tree planting activities following major concerts. Over 400 participants were registered across six churches for the 2022 version, a clear indicator of community participation through choral music. The festival in Ibadan, held in October 2021 at Wesley Cathedral, drew 11 choirs from four denominations and an audience of approximately 600. A survey administered to 120 of these attendees found that 78% reported greater awareness of local environmental issues and 43% stated they had engaged in at least one conservation activity in the three months following the festival. The data gathered suggest that performance through organised festivals transcends purely aesthetic value and becomes meaningful social engagement, corroborating Eyerman and Jamison’s (1998) theoretical framework, which positions music as a "mobilising tradition."

Theme 4: Barriers within the institution and culture. The leaders in six of the eight churches interviewed admitted that there had been internal opposition within their congregations to reframing worship music as a vehicle for advocating environmental causes. These barriers largely fell into two categories: that environmental issues were viewed as intrinsically secular or political and inappropriate for religious observance, or that such advocacy, particularly within Pentecostal contexts, was seen as a foreign imposition from the Western-based international NGOs that initiated many of these ecological campaigns. Interviewees involved in environmental activism in the sampled churches noted that choirs operating outside institutional hierarchies had considerably more autonomy in selecting repertoire. This reveals a



need to educate on the theological rationale, in addition to the artistic and practical ones, when integrating environmental concerns within a religious institutional context.

Conclusion

Nigerian church choirs are also well-positioned to serve as agents of environmental discourse. By blending their creative artistry in music with advocacy for ecological consciousness, church choirs are a culturally and religiously sensitive platform through which behaviour that improves the environment can be encouraged. Utilising Nigeria's strong literary, theological and musical heritage, church choirs can combine worship expression with ecological messages that build congregational consciousness and a spirit of stewardship. Combining scripture with native musical traditions will ensure the environmental message remains relevant, accessible, and impactful across different social strata.

From the case studies analysed above, choral music can be described as more than simply worship but a vehicle of social change. Initiatives like the Green Gospel Project and the Creation Care Choral Festival demonstrate that music can disseminate ecological messages while reiterating the religious concept of stewardship to the faithful. In addition to working together with environmental groups and taking advantage of the publicity offered to disseminate environmental consciousness, these church choirs can influence beyond the religious community to affect policy and grassroots conservation efforts.

This study utilises interviews, participant observation and a descriptive study to articulate a deep understanding of Nigerian church choirs' approach to environmental activism. The study shows how choral music can instill consciousness, spark discussions among the congregation, and, most importantly, motivate individuals to contribute to ecological conservation. Despite challenges such as inadequate institutional support and theological opposition from some religious denominations to environmental activism, the fact that ecological issues are increasingly being taken more seriously within religious spaces suggests that Nigerian church choirs have a significant role to play in the discourse.

By playing this part, church choirs enhance their work, making it more holistic and relevant and helping to solve Nigeria's environmental problems. The songs they sing are a direct message to the faithful about the ethical and divine command to protect the environment. As the issues of climate change and environmental degradation intensify, church choirs will become increasingly vital in bridging the divide between faith and the environment.

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