# THE ROLE OF THE MAJOR RELIGIONS IN NIGERIA IN COMBATING GLOBAL WARMING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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**Abstract**
Global warming presents Nigeria with severe ecological, economic, and social risks, including desertification, flooding, food insecurity, displacement, and pressure on already fragile infrastructure. Because religion remains one of the most influential sources of moral authority and collective mobilisation in Nigeria, the country's major religious traditions—Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion—occupy a strategic position in climate action. This paper examines the doctrinal, ethical, institutional, and practical roles these religions can play in combating global warming in the twenty-first century. It argues that religious actors contribute through environmental education, moral persuasion, community mobilisation, tree planting, waste reduction, disaster response, advocacy for climate justice, and support for public policy. The paper also identifies major barriers, including limited climate literacy, theological fatalism, prosperity-oriented teachings, weak institutional coordination, poverty, and dependence on fossil-fuel-based livelihoods. It concludes that Nigerian religions will be most effective when they translate creation-centred theology and Islamic stewardship into measurable congregational and community-level climate programmes, while collaborating with government, civil society, scientists, and international partners.
**Keywords:** Global warming, climate change, Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religion.

## 1. Introduction

Global warming is no longer a distant scientific abstraction for Nigeria. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, desertification in the north, coastal and riverine flooding in the south, erosion in the southeast, and increasing competition over land and water resources have made climate change a present threat to livelihoods, health, security, and national development. Nigeria's Climate Change Act, 2021 establishes a national framework for mainstreaming climate action and building a "low carbon emission, environmentally sustainable and climate resilient society" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021, s. 1). Yet government policy alone cannot achieve the behavioural, cultural, and ethical transformation that climate mitigation and adaptation require.

Religion is central to that transformation. Nigeria is one of the world's most religiously active societies, with Christianity and Islam constituting the two largest religious communities, alongside substantial adherence to African Traditional Religion and syncretic practices. Religious leaders command trust, control networks of congregations and mosques, shape moral imagination, and can mobilise millions of believers more rapidly than many state institutions. As Hitzhusen and Tucker observe, "Religious communities are playing an increasingly important role in advancing Earth Stewardship" (Hitzhusen *et al*., 2013, p. 368). Their influence arises not merely from institutional power but from their capacity to connect environmental responsibility with deeply held beliefs about creation, justice, compassion, and accountability before God.

This paper examines the role of Nigeria's major religions in combating global warming in the twenty-first century. It addresses four questions. First, what doctrinal and ethical resources do Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion offer for climate action? Second, how have Nigerian religious actors already engaged with environmental degradation and global warming? Third, what practical roles can religious institutions play in mitigation, adaptation, education, advocacy, and disaster response? Fourth, what barriers limit religious climate action, and how can they be overcome?

The paper argues that Nigerian religions possess significant potential to combat global warming, but that potential remains under-realised. Religious environmentalism must move beyond occasional tree-planting ceremonies, prayers for rain, or disaster relief. It must become an organised, theologically grounded, scientifically informed, and institutionally sustained movement capable of influencing everyday behaviour and public policy.

## 2. Conceptual Clarifications

### 2.1 Global Warming and Climate Change

Global warming refers to the long-term increase in Earth's average surface temperature caused primarily by the accumulation of greenhouse gases—especially carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide—in the atmosphere. Climate change is the broader term encompassing changes in temperature, precipitation, sea level, extreme weather, and ecological systems resulting from global warming. Although the two terms are related, global warming emphasises temperature increase, while climate change includes its wider consequences.

In Nigeria, global warming manifests through multiple hazards. The northern states face expanding desertification, declining soil fertility, and shrinking pastoral resources; the Niger Delta and coastal cities face sea-level rise, flooding, and saltwater intrusion; and riverine communities face recurrent floods. These impacts interact with poverty, weak infrastructure, deforestation, gas flaring, poor waste management, and rapid urbanisation. Climate change therefore cannot be treated as an exclusively technical problem; it is also a moral, social, and spiritual problem.

Pope Francis frames the issue in explicitly moral terms: "The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all" (Francis, 2015, p. 15). This claim is especially relevant to Nigeria, where climate impacts disproportionately affect the poor, farmers, fishers, women, children, and communities with limited capacity to relocate or rebuild after disasters.

### 2.2 Religion and Environmental Ethics

Religion influences environmental behaviour by supplying narratives about the origin and purpose of the natural world, norms for human conduct, rituals that reinforce communal values, and institutions capable of collective action. Religious traditions may encourage stewardship, restraint, gratitude, justice, and intergenerational responsibility. They may also hinder action when believers interpret environmental disasters fatalistically, view nature as existing solely for human exploitation, or assume that divine intervention will resolve ecological problems without human effort.

Hitzhusen and Tucker caution that mobilising believers for Earth stewardship requires "a critical appreciation of the complexity of religious traditions and the ways that religious communities view nature" (Hitzhusen *et al.,* 2013, p. 368). In other words, religious environmental action must be internally authentic. It should arise from each tradition's own scriptures, rituals, moral vocabulary, and community structures rather than being imposed as a secular agenda.

### 2.3 Climate Action in the Nigerian Context

Climate action includes mitigation, adaptation, resilience-building, education, advocacy, and disaster response. Mitigation reduces greenhouse-gas emissions through renewable energy, energy efficiency, reduced deforestation, sustainable transport, and responsible consumption. Adaptation adjusts human systems to unavoidable climate impacts through flood control, climate-smart agriculture, early-warning systems, water conservation, and resilient housing.

"Nigeria's Climate Change Act provides a legal foundation for such action by establishing the National Council on Climate Change and requiring mechanisms that foster low-carbon development and climate resilience" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021, s. 1). Religious organisations can complement this framework because they operate at the grassroots, where policy implementation often succeeds or fails.

## 3. Nigeria's Climate Vulnerability and the Need for Religious Engagement

Nigeria's exposure to global warming is uneven but widespread. Northern Nigeria experiences desert encroachment, drought, declining agricultural productivity, and conflicts between farmers and herders intensified by pressure on land and water. The Middle Belt experiences changing rainfall patterns and competition over fertile land. Southern Nigeria faces coastal erosion, flooding, oil-related environmental degradation, and increasing urban heat. The Niger Delta is particularly vulnerable because of the combined effects of sea-level rise, pollution, deforestation, and gas flaring.

These conditions create a compelling case for religious involvement. Climate change threatens the material conditions under which families worship, marry, farm, trade, educate children, and plan for the future. It also raises questions of justice: those who contribute least to global emissions often suffer the most severe consequences. Pope Francis describes climate change as "a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods" (Francis, 2015, p. 118). In Nigeria, this description is visible in displacement after floods, loss of farmland, food-price inflation, and conflict over shrinking natural resources.

Religious communities are strategically positioned because they are present in rural villages, urban neighbourhoods, schools, hospitals, markets, and humanitarian networks. Churches, mosques, and traditional religious institutions can reach populations that may not be reached effectively by government agencies or environmental NGOs. They can also give climate action moral urgency by presenting it not simply as environmental management but as obedience to God, protection of neighbour, and responsibility to future generations.

## 4. Christianity and Climate Action in Nigeria

### 4.1 Biblical Foundations of Creation Care

Christianity offers several theological resources for combating global warming. The doctrine of creation presents the world as God's good creation rather than as meaningless matter to be exploited. Human beings are given responsibility within creation, not unlimited licence to destroy it. Christian stewardship therefore interprets environmental care as a religious duty.

The concept of stewardship is especially important. It teaches that the earth belongs ultimately to God and that human beings are caretakers who must use natural resources responsibly. This perspective challenges wasteful consumption, deforestation, pollution, and indifference to the suffering of climate-vulnerable communities. In Christian teaching, care for creation is inseparable from love of neighbour, because environmental degradation harms real people—especially the poor and future generations.

Pope Francis develops this idea through "integral ecology," which links environmental protection with social justice, poverty reduction, and human dignity. He argues that environmental degradation is closely connected to "human, ethical and social degradation" (Francis, 2016, p. 1). For Nigerian Christianity, this means climate action should address not only carbon emissions but also deforestation, illegal mining, gas flaring, poor waste disposal, corruption, and social inequality.

### 4.2 Nigerian Christian Institutions and Climate Awareness

Nigerian Christianity is diverse, encompassing Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Aladura, Pentecostal, and Evangelical traditions. This diversity creates both opportunities and challenges. Catholic, Anglican, and mainline Protestant churches often possess established schools, hospitals, development agencies, and social-teaching traditions that can support climate programmes. Pentecostal and Evangelical churches often have enormous youth populations, media reach, and mobilisation capacity, though climate action has historically received less institutional attention in some of these communities.

Research by Nche shows that "Nigerian church leaders are aware of climate change but often possess narrow or varied understandings of its causes. His study of Catholic, Anglican, and Pentecostal leaders found that although all participants had heard of climate change, their perceptions of the causes of the phenomenon were narrow and varied along religious denominational lines" (Nche, 2020a, p. 149).

"The study also found that awareness creation, charity for disaster victims, and prayer were identified as major roles churches could play, while climate action was generally poor" (Nche, 2020a, pp. 149–169).

This finding is significant. It suggests that Nigerian churches do not lack influence or moral authority; rather, they often lack climate literacy and practical frameworks for action. Sermons, Sunday schools, catechism classes, Bible studies, youth fellowships, women's meetings, and church media can become powerful channels for correcting misinformation and promoting sustainable behaviour.

### 4.3 Christian Practices for Climate Mitigation

Christian communities in Nigeria can undertake several practical climate actions:

- Plant and protect trees around churches, schools, hospitals, and homes.
- Promote energy-efficient lighting, solar power, and reduced generator dependence.
- Encourage waste separation, recycling, and reduction of single-use plastics.
- Support climate-smart agriculture among church-based farming cooperatives.
- Include creation care in liturgy, preaching, catechesis, and youth programmes.
- Establish church environmental committees with measurable annual targets.
- Support flood preparedness, early-warning communication, and relief for climate-affected families.
- Advocate against deforestation, illegal logging, open burning, and gas flaring.

These practices should not be treated as merely symbolic. A single congregation that plants and maintains trees, manages waste responsibly, installs solar power, and educates members can produce measurable local benefits. When replicated across thousands of parishes, such actions can contribute meaningfully to national mitigation and adaptation efforts.

### 4.4 Christian Advocacy and Climate Justice

Christian churches can also advocate for climate justice. This includes urging government to enforce environmental laws, regulate emissions, support renewable energy, protect forest reserves, and assist communities affected by flooding and desertification. Churches can use their moral authority to challenge corruption in environmental governance and to defend communities whose land, water, or air has been degraded.

Nche found that "Catholic churches engaged more in organisational climate action than Anglican and Pentecostal churches, while Pentecostal climate action was more personal than institutional" (Nche, 2020a, pp. 149–169). This suggests a need for stronger denominational structures, policies, and partnerships. Christian climate advocacy will be more credible when churches model the changes they demand from government: reducing energy waste, managing their lands sustainably, and supporting vulnerable members.

## 5. Islam and Climate Action in Nigeria

### 5.1 Qur'anic and Prophetic Foundations

Islam provides a rich theological basis for environmental responsibility. The Qur'an presents human beings as vicegerents or stewards on earth, entrusted with responsibility rather than absolute ownership. Creation is understood as a sign of God's wisdom, balance, and mercy. Destroying the environment without justification is therefore incompatible with Islamic ethics.

Islamic teachings emphasise moderation, prohibition of wastefulness, cleanliness, compassion, and accountability. These values can be applied directly to climate action. Reducing waste, conserving water, planting trees, protecting animals, avoiding pollution, and supporting the poor are not merely secular environmental practices; they can be framed as acts of worship and moral obligation.

Islamic charitable institutions also offer important resources. *Sadaqah* and *zakat* can support climate-vulnerable households, while *sadaqatul jariyyah*—ongoing charity—can fund trees, wells, schools, renewable-energy projects, and other enduring public benefits. Research on Muslim leaders in Sokoto found that "participants linked Islam to tree planting and environmentally conscious living through teachings such as *sadaqatul jariyyah"* (Mustapha, Mahmud, & Hajjaj, 2020, p. 225).

### 5.2 Nigerian Muslim Institutions and Climate Awareness

Islam is especially influential in northern Nigeria, where emirates, mosques, Islamic schools, *ulama*, and Muslim organisations possess deep social legitimacy. Religious leaders can communicate climate information in Friday sermons, Qur'anic schools, Islamic conferences, marriage counselling, community meetings, and radio programmes. Because religious leaders are trusted, their messages may be more persuasive than technical campaigns that do not connect with local values.

"A study of 300 Christian and Muslim religious leaders in northern Nigeria found that 85 percent believed in anthropogenic climate change, although many could not identify the human activities responsible for it" (Abdussalam *et al.,* 2021, pp. 283–288). "The study found no significant difference between Christian and Muslim leaders' perceptions of climate-change causes, likely because both groups shared exposure to northern Nigeria's ecological realities" (Abdussalam & Abukur, 2021, pp. 283–288).

This finding highlights an important opportunity. Muslim and Christian leaders in northern Nigeria already recognise that climate change is real and humanly influenced. What is needed is deeper education about specific causes—deforestation, fossil-fuel combustion, poor waste management, unsustainable agriculture—and practical solutions appropriate to local conditions.

### 5.3 Islamic Practices for Climate Mitigation

Muslim communities can implement climate action through mosques, Islamic schools, *zakat* committees, women's organisations, youth associations, and community development projects. Practical measures include:

- Planting shade trees around mosques, schools, and homes.
- Promoting water conservation in ablution facilities.
- Installing solar panels and energy-efficient lighting in mosques and Islamic schools.
- Reducing plastic waste during religious festivals and communal meals.
- Supporting sustainable farming, agroforestry, and livestock management.
- Teaching climate responsibility in Qur'anic schools and Islamic studies curricula.
- Using zakat and sadaqah to support families affected by drought, floods, or displacement.
- Encouraging simple lifestyles and condemning wasteful consumption.

These measures align Islamic ethics with climate science. They also demonstrate that environmental responsibility is not foreign to Islam but can be expressed through familiar religious categories such as trust, mercy, cleanliness, charity, and accountability.

### 5.4 Islamic Leadership and Public Advocacy

Muslim leaders can advocate for stronger climate governance at local, state, and national levels. They can support reforestation campaigns, challenge illegal logging, promote clean cooking alternatives, and encourage government investment in climate-resilient infrastructure. In northern Nigeria, where desertification and farmer-herder tensions are major concerns, Islamic leaders can promote dialogue, land restoration, and equitable access to natural resources.

Religious advocacy should be constructive and evidence-based. Muslim leaders can collaborate with meteorological agencies, agricultural extension officers, universities, and environmental organisations to ensure that sermons and community programmes communicate accurate climate information. This collaboration can prevent fatalism and misinformation while strengthening public trust in climate policy.

## 6. African Traditional Religion and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge

### 6.1 Sacred Nature and Community Ethics

African Traditional Religion (ATR) is often overlooked in discussions of modern climate policy, yet it contains valuable ecological resources. Many African communities traditionally regard land, rivers, forests, sacred groves, and certain animals as sacred or spiritually significant. These beliefs historically restricted indiscriminate exploitation and preserved biodiversity through taboos, rituals, and communal regulations.

Sacred groves, for example, have often survived because communities believe they are inhabited by spirits or ancestors. Rivers and streams may be protected through rituals that prohibit pollution or excessive extraction. Such beliefs do not replace science, but they can reinforce conservation norms and community enforcement. In many

Nigerian communities, traditional institutions remain influential in land allocation, conflict resolution, festivals, and local governance.

### 6.2 Indigenous Knowledge and Adaptation

Indigenous ecological knowledge can support climate adaptation. Local communities possess knowledge of seasonal rainfall, drought-resistant crops, soil conservation, water management, and early signs of ecological change. This knowledge should be documented, respected, and integrated with scientific climate information.

For example, traditional farming systems may include crop diversification, fallowing, agroforestry, and communal labour practices that improve resilience. Traditional authorities can support reforestation by designating community forests, enforcing seasonal restrictions on cutting trees, and mobilising young people for land restoration. These practices become more effective when combined with modern climate science, improved seed varieties, weather forecasting, and government support.

### 6.3 Challenges Facing Traditional Ecological Ethics

ATR's ecological potential faces serious challenges. Urbanisation, religious conversion, population pressure, poverty, and the weakening of traditional authority have reduced the influence of many indigenous conservation practices. Some sacred sites have been degraded, while others are protected only symbolically. In addition, traditional knowledge may be dismissed by policymakers or by adherents of Christianity and Islam.

A pluralistic approach is therefore necessary. Nigerian climate action should not privilege one religious tradition while ignoring others. Instead, Christianity, Islam, and ATR should be engaged as partners in a shared national effort. Interfaith cooperation can protect sacred groves, restore degraded land, promote environmental education, and build community resilience.

## 7. Interfaith Cooperation as a Climate Strategy

### 7.1 Why Interfaith Action Matters

Global warming is a common threat that transcends religious boundaries. Floods do not distinguish between churches and mosques; drought affects Muslim and Christian farmers alike; air pollution harms entire communities. Interfaith cooperation can therefore reduce religious division and create a broader moral coalition for climate action.

Interfaith climate initiatives can issue joint statements, organise tree-planting campaigns, establish environmental education programmes, and advocate for policy implementation. They can also prevent climate action from being perceived as the agenda of one religious group. In a country where religion can be politically sensitive, joint Muslim-Christian-traditional action gives climate policy greater legitimacy.

Pope Francis has emphasised the importance of religious actors in ecological transformation, stating that "the religions, and the Christian Churches in particular, have a key role to play" (Francis, 2018, p. 1). In Nigeria, this role is most powerful when Christian and Muslim leaders act together rather than separately.

### 7.2 Models of Interfaith Climate Action

Nigerian religious bodies can establish interfaith climate councils at national, state, and local levels. Such councils could coordinate annual tree-planting campaigns, develop shared environmental curricula, monitor local deforestation, support clean-energy projects, and engage government agencies. They could also create rapid-response networks for floods, droughts, and displacement.

A practical model would include:

- Joint sermons and public education campaigns during major religious festivals.
- Community tree nurseries managed by churches, mosques, and traditional institutions.
- Interfaith school clubs focused on climate science and practical sustainability.
- Shared disaster-preparedness plans for flood-prone and drought-prone communities.
- Joint advocacy for enforcement of environmental laws and climate finance.
- Regular interfaith climate summits involving religious leaders, scientists, and policymakers.

Such initiatives would demonstrate that care for the earth is a shared moral duty rather than a sectarian concern.

## 8. Education, Moral Formation, and Behavioural Change

### 8.1 Religious Education as Climate Education

Religious institutions reach people through sermons, religious instruction, youth groups, women's fellowships, media, and family life. These channels can make climate education culturally meaningful. Instead of presenting global warming only through graphs and technical language, religious teachers can connect it to familiar values: gratitude for creation, justice for the poor, responsibility to children, cleanliness, moderation, and accountability before God.

Nche's research indicates that "Nigerian church leaders recognise awareness creation as an important role, but actual climate action remains weak" (Nche, 2020a, pp. 149–169). This gap can be addressed by training clergy, imams, catechists, Qur'anic teachers, and youth leaders in basic climate science, local impacts, and practical

responses. Religious leaders do not need to become climate scientists; they need sufficient knowledge to communicate accurately and mobilise action.

### 8.2 Changing Consumption Patterns

Religious teaching can influence consumption. Christianity and Islam both warn against greed, extravagance, and waste. In Nigeria, these teachings can be applied to fuel use, electricity consumption, plastic waste, food waste, fast fashion, and unnecessary generator use. Religious leaders can encourage members to adopt simpler lifestyles without presenting poverty as virtuous or ignoring structural inequality.

Behavioural change should be realistic. Poor households may have limited ability to purchase solar systems or energy-efficient appliances. Religious climate programmes should therefore combine moral exhortation with practical support: bulk purchasing of efficient bulbs, community solar projects, tree seedlings, waste-collection partnerships, and training in low-cost sustainable practices.

### 8.3 Youth and Women as Agents of Change

Young people are essential to long-term climate action. Churches and mosques can establish environmental clubs, support green entrepreneurship, train climate ambassadors, and use music, drama, social media, and sports to communicate climate messages. Youth-led tree planting, clean-up campaigns, and renewable-energy advocacy can transform climate concern into visible community action.

Women are equally important. In many Nigerian communities, women manage household energy, water, food, waste, and family health. Religious women's organisations can promote clean cooking, water conservation, waste reduction, home gardening, and disaster preparedness. Empowering women through religious networks can therefore produce both climate and development benefits.

## 9. Disaster Response, Adaptation, and Climate Resilience

### 9.1 Religious Networks in Humanitarian Response

Nigerian religious organisations often respond quickly to floods, displacement, drought, and other emergencies. Churches and mosques provide shelter, food, clothing, counselling, and material assistance. This capacity is vital for adaptation, because climate change increases the frequency and severity of extreme events.

However, relief alone is insufficient. Religious organisations should also invest in preparedness and resilience. They can map vulnerable households, store emergency supplies, train volunteers, disseminate weather warnings, and coordinate with the National Emergency Management Agency and state emergency agencies. Faith-based schools and hospitals can serve as evacuation centres, communication hubs, and distribution points during disasters.

### 9.2 Climate-Smart Agriculture and Livelihoods

Agriculture employs a large share of Nigerians and is highly climate-sensitive. Religious institutions can support climate-smart agriculture by promoting drought-tolerant crops, agroforestry, composting, water harvesting, soil conservation, and sustainable livestock management. Faith-based cooperatives can help farmers access improved seeds, extension services, microcredit, and markets.

In northern Nigeria, where desertification and land degradation are severe, mosque- and church-based agricultural programmes can promote tree planting alongside farming. Agroforestry provides shade, improves soil fertility, reduces erosion, and offers alternative income through fruit, fodder, and timber. Such programmes address both mitigation and adaptation.

### 9.3 Water, Sanitation, and Health

Climate change affects water availability and sanitation. Religious institutions can promote rainwater harvesting, protection of wells and streams, proper waste disposal, and hygiene education. Mosques and churches can model responsible water use, especially in ablution areas and church facilities. They can also support borehole maintenance, community water committees, and sanitation campaigns.

These actions are especially important because flooding can contaminate water supplies and increase disease. Religious leaders can communicate public-health guidance during emergencies, counter misinformation, and encourage cooperation with health authorities.

## 10. Advocacy, Policy Engagement, and Climate Justice

### 10.1 Holding Government Accountable

Religious organisations can play a prophetic role by holding government accountable for climate policy. Nigeria's Climate Change Act establishes a framework for climate governance, carbon budgeting, and the National Council on Climate Change (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021, s. 1). Religious leaders can ask whether these institutions are functioning effectively, whether climate funds reach vulnerable communities, and whether environmental laws are enforced.

Faith-based advocacy should be informed, peaceful, and constructive. Religious leaders can meet policymakers, submit memoranda, participate in public hearings, and support community monitoring of environmental projects.

They can also use pulpits, minbars, radio, television, and social media to explain climate policy in accessible language.

### 10.2 Climate Justice and the Preferential Option for the Poor

Climate justice requires recognising that the people least responsible for global emissions often suffer the most. In Nigeria, this includes rural farmers, fishers, pastoralists, residents of flood-prone areas, and communities affected by oil pollution. Religious traditions can insist that climate policy prioritise these groups.

Christian social teaching expresses this through the preferential option for the poor. Islamic ethics expresses it through zakat, sadaqah, and the protection of the vulnerable. African Traditional Religion expresses it through communal solidarity and respect for ancestral land. These traditions can together challenge climate policies that protect elites while abandoning marginalised communities.

Pope Francis argues that "climate change causes poverty and hunger, afflicting the most vulnerable and sometimes forcing people to leave their land" (Francis, 2020, p. 1). Nigerian religious organisations should therefore link climate action to housing, food security, employment, education, health care, and protection of displaced persons.

### 10.3 Engagement with Business and Extractive Industries

Religious bodies can also engage businesses, especially those involved in energy, mining, logging, agriculture, and waste management. They can encourage corporate environmental responsibility, transparency, community consultation, and investment in clean technology. In the Niger Delta, faith-based organisations can support communities affected by oil pollution and advocate for remediation, compensation, and stronger regulation.

This advocacy must avoid corruption and partisan capture. Religious organisations should publish their own environmental commitments, use transparent accounting for climate projects, and work with credible scientific and civil-society partners.

## 11. Barriers to Religious Climate Action in Nigeria

### 11.1 Limited Climate Literacy

A major barrier is limited understanding of climate science. Religious leaders may recognise that weather patterns are changing but may not understand the distinction between weather and climate, the role of greenhouse gases, or the difference between mitigation and adaptation. Nche found that "church leaders' perceptions of climate causes were narrow and varied" (Nche, 2020a, pp. 149–169). Similarly, Abdussalam and Abukur found that "many leaders believed in human-caused climate change but could not identify responsible human activities (Abdussalam *et al.,* 2021, pp. 283–288).

Climate education for religious leaders should therefore be a priority. Seminaries, theological colleges, Islamic study centres, and interfaith training programmes should include modules on climate science, Nigerian climate impacts, sustainable development, and practical congregation-based action.

### 11.2 Theological Fatalism and Misinterpretation

Some believers interpret environmental crises as signs of the end times, divine punishment, or inevitable fulfilment of prophecy. Such beliefs can produce passivity if they are understood to mean that human action is unnecessary. Nche identifies "end-time beliefs, dominion theology, theological fatalism, and religious pessimism among the theological interpretations that shape Nigerian church leaders' responses to climate change" (Nche, 2020b, pp. 81–115).

Religious leaders can address fatalism by emphasising human responsibility. Prayer and trust in God should not replace action; they should inspire it. In Christian terms, faith without works is incomplete; in Islamic terms, trust in God is joined to taking practical means; in African Traditional Religion, communal survival requires respect for the forces and resources that sustain life.

### 11.3 Prosperity Theology and Consumerism

Some forms of contemporary Nigerian Christianity emphasise material prosperity, personal success, and conspicuous consumption. This can weaken environmental ethics when success is measured by acquisition rather than stewardship. Religious leaders can challenge this by teaching that true blessing includes responsibility, moderation, and concern for the common good.

This does not mean condemning wealth or development. Rather, it means questioning wasteful consumption, environmental destruction, and indifference to the poor. Religious communities can promote a vision of flourishing that includes clean air, safe water, fertile land, stable communities, and justice for future generations.

### 11.4 Poverty and Infrastructure Constraints

Many Nigerian congregations and communities lack funds for solar panels, boreholes, waste-management systems, or climate-resilient buildings. Poverty can make environmental concern appear secondary to immediate survival. Religious climate programmes must therefore be affordable, incremental, and linked to livelihood benefits.

For example, a church or mosque may begin with tree planting, waste reduction, and energy-saving bulbs before progressing to solar installation or water-harvesting systems. Partnerships with development agencies, universities, microfinance institutions, and government programmes can reduce costs and expand impact.

### 11.5 Institutional Fragmentation

Nigeria's religious landscape is highly fragmented. Christian denominations differ in doctrine, governance, and priorities; Muslim organisations also vary across Sufi, Salafi, reformist, and community-based lines. This fragmentation can duplicate efforts and weaken advocacy.

Interfaith and intra-faith coordination is therefore essential. National Christian associations, Muslim umbrella bodies, traditional rulers' councils, and civil-society networks should create shared climate agendas while respecting institutional autonomy.

## 12. Recommendations

### 12.1 For Religious Institutions

1. Establish environmental or climate-change committees in churches, mosques, and traditional institutions.
2. Include creation care and climate responsibility in sermons, religious education, youth programmes, and women's fellowships.
3. Plant and maintain trees, especially native and fruit-bearing species, around worship centres, schools, and homes.
4. Reduce energy consumption and invest progressively in solar power and energy-efficient appliances.
5. Promote waste reduction, recycling, composting, and elimination of open burning.
6. Support climate-smart agriculture, agroforestry, water conservation, and sustainable livelihoods.
7. Develop disaster-preparedness plans and coordinate with emergency-management agencies.
8. Use zakat, sadaqah, tithes, offerings, and development funds to support climate-vulnerable households.
9. Adopt transparent reporting and measurable annual environmental targets.
10. Collaborate across religious lines through interfaith climate councils.

### 12.2 For Government

1. Recognise religious institutions as formal partners in climate education and community adaptation.
2. Provide technical support, seedlings, training, and climate information to faith-based organisations.
3. Include religious leaders in state and local climate-planning processes.
4. Enforce environmental laws against deforestation, illegal logging, gas flaring, and pollution.
5. Support renewable energy, clean cooking, waste management, and climate-resilient infrastructure.
6. Ensure climate finance reaches grassroots communities, including faith-based projects with clear accountability.

### 12.3 For Educational and Research Institutions

1. Develop climate-education modules for seminaries, theological colleges, Islamic study centres, and religious leadership training.
2. Conduct more research on the effectiveness of religious climate interventions in Nigeria.
3. Document indigenous ecological knowledge and assess its contribution to adaptation.
4. Create partnerships between universities, meteorological agencies, and religious networks.
5. Evaluate tree-planting, waste-reduction, and renewable-energy projects using measurable indicators.

## 13. Conclusion

The major religions of Nigeria have a decisive role to play in combating global warming in the twenty-first century. Christianity offers a theology of creation, stewardship, justice, and love of neighbour. Islam offers teachings on trusteeship, moderation, cleanliness, charity, and accountability. African Traditional Religion offers sacred understandings of land, forests, rivers, and community responsibility. Together, these traditions can shape values, mobilise communities, support adaptation, and advocate for climate justice.

However, religious potential must be converted into organised action. Nigerian religious bodies must deepen climate literacy, overcome fatalism, address consumerism, strengthen institutional coordination, and implement practical programmes with measurable outcomes. They must also collaborate with government, scientists, civil society, and international partners. Climate change is too large for any single institution to solve, but religious communities can provide what technical solutions alone cannot: moral vision, trusted leadership, communal discipline, and sustained motivation.

The task is urgent. Nigeria's future depends not only on laws, technology, and international agreements but also on the ethical transformation of millions of believers. If churches, mosques, and traditional institutions place care for creation at the centre of their moral teaching and community practice, they can help Nigeria move toward a lower-carbon, more resilient, and more just future.

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