ALA AS ECOLOGICAL MOTHER: IGBO RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW AND THE ETHICS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract
Africa's escalating ecological crisis, marked by deforestation, erosion, biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate instability, has sparked increasing calls for environmental approaches grounded in indigenous knowledge. This study explores the Igbo concept of Ala, the Earth deity seen as an ecological mother, and its relevance to today's environmental sustainability debates in Africa. In Igbo cosmology, Ala is more than a spiritual figure; she is the moral guardian of land, fertility, social harmony, and ecological balance. Traditional reverence for Ala shaped human-nature relationships through taboos, rituals, sacred groves, moral sanctions, and communal ethics that discouraged environmental harm and promoted ecological stewardship. Using Indigenous Ecological Knowledge and African Environmental Ethics as frameworks, this qualitative and interdisciplinary study analyzes oral traditions, ethnographic records, religious practices, and scholarly literature on Igbo religion and ecology. It argues that modernization, urbanization, and religious shifts have eroded indigenous ecological values, weakening cultural systems that regulated environmental care and contributing to degradation. Recovering and reinterpreting Ala's ethical principles offers culturally rooted pathways for sustainable governance and biodiversity conservation in Africa. The study concludes that indigenous African religious philosophies provide valuable ecological insights that can complement modern environmental policies and global sustainability goals.

Keywords: *Ala*, Igbo Cosmology, African Traditional Religion, Environmental Sustainability, Indigenous Knowledge.

Introduction
The world faces increasing ecological challenges threatening both humanity and the natural environment. Issues like climate change, pollution, deforestation, desertification, flooding, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion demand urgent and interdisciplinary responses. These crises are especially severe in Africa due to rapid urban growth, industrial exploitation, weak environmental governance, and the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems. Consequently, scholars, environmentalists, policymakers, and development experts advocate for alternative ecological paradigms that foster sustainable human-nature relationships. African indigenous religious worldviews offer rich philosophical and ethical perspectives on environmental sustainability and responsibility.

Among the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, the concept of *Ala* holds a central place in cosmology, morality, religion, and community life. Known also as *Ani, Ana,* or the Earth Mother, *Ala* is revered as the deity of the earth, morality, fertility, productivity, and social harmony. Rather than viewing the earth as a mere resource, Igbo metaphysics sees it as a sacred living entity deserving respect, protection, and ethical engagement. *Ala's* worldview emphasizes deep

connections among humans, nature, ancestors, divinities, and the spiritual universe. Accordingly, traditional Igbo environmental ethics were embedded in religious beliefs, rituals, taboos, and communal values guiding human conduct toward land, forests, rivers, animals, and all natural elements.

The sacredness of *Ala* functioned as an indigenous ecological mechanism fostering conservation and social control. Certain forests, rivers, animals, and farmlands were protected by cultural prohibitions and spiritual sanctions to maintain cosmic balance. Activities such as reckless tree cutting, water pollution, killing sacred animals, and misusing communal lands were seen as offenses against *Ala* and the community. This religious-ecological framework enabled sustainable practices that preserved biodiversity, balanced agriculture, shared responsibility, and harmonious coexistence with the environment.

However, colonialism, Christianity, globalization, modernization, and capitalist exploitation have weakened indigenous ecological values across many African societies. The desacralization of nature and decline of traditional religious institutions have contributed to environmental degradation, irresponsibility, and resource commodification. In Nigeria, environmental problems like erosion, flooding, pollution, deforestation, and unsustainable land use continue to threaten livelihoods and ecological stability, especially in Igbo areas. Despite these challenges, indigenous ecological philosophies such as the *Ala* worldview remain underexplored in mainstream environmental discussions and policy.

This study thus examines *Ala* as an ecological mother within the Igbo religious worldview and its relevance to modern environmental sustainability in Africa. It argues that the ethical principles in *Ala* worship offer vital indigenous frameworks for ecological awareness, environmental justice, and sustainable development. By revisiting Igbo cosmology's ecological dimensions, the study shows that African traditional religions are not only spiritual institutions but also rich repositories of environmental ethics and conservation knowledge.

The paper is organized into five sections: a literature review highlighting the research gap; presentation of the theoretical framework; description of the qualitative interdisciplinary methodology; findings addressing five research questions on Ala's meaning, ecological values, traditional conservation, modernization's impact, and contemporary relevance; and a conclusion discussing implications for ecological justice and governance and recommendations for integrating indigenous values into African environmental policies.

Literature Review

The literature on environmental sustainability increasingly acknowledges the significance of indigenous worldviews and traditional knowledge systems in shaping human–nature relationships. Concepts such as Ala, Igbo cosmology, African Traditional Religion (ATR), environmental sustainability, and Indigenous Knowledge systems have gained scholarly attention for elucidating ecological ethics in African societies.

Concept of Ala in Igbo Cosmology

Ala, also known as *Ali, Ani, or Ana,* is revered as the Earth Mother and a principal deity in the Igbo pantheon, integral to cosmology, morality, religion, and social organization. Scholars like Mbiti (1969) and Arinze (1970) observe that African cosmology perceives the universe as a sacred, interconnected order where divinities, ancestors, humans, and nature coexist. *Ala* functions as the spiritual custodian of land, fertility, morality, and communal harmony. Isichei (1976) explains that

the earth in Igbo thought is not merely physical but a sacred entity with spiritual and moral authority. The reverence for Ala reflects the belief that the earth sustains human life and serves as the resting place of ancestors. Metuh (1987) further notes that *Ala* embodies the community's ethical conscience, with offences against social morals interpreted as offences against Ala. Taboos on murder, incest, land pollution, and desecration traditionally attracted spiritual sanctions.

Ala's cosmological importance extends to agriculture and communal prosperity. Uchendu (1965) highlights that agricultural productivity depended on Ala's favour, promoting careful stewardship of farmlands and natural resources. Through rituals, sacrifices, and festivals, the Igbo nurtured a spiritual connection to nature that reinforced ecological responsibility and social cohesion.

Igbo Cosmology and Human-Nature Relationship

Igbo cosmology emphasizes the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, spirituality, and ancestors. Unlike mechanistic modern views, the traditional Igbo see nature as sacred and spiritually animated. Tempels (1959) argues that African ontology is grounded in the philosophy of vital force, where all beings possess spiritual essence and relational significance. Rivers, forests, mountains, animals, and farmlands are spiritually significant and command reverence. This worldview established moral guidelines for human-environment interactions. Sacred forests and rivers were protected as abodes of spirits and deities. Mbon (1991) notes that many African societies developed environmental conservation through religious taboos and customary laws prohibiting indiscriminate resource destruction. In Igbo society, sacred groves preservation, hunting restrictions, and pollution sanctions reflect the spiritualization of ecological spaces.

Communalism in Igbo cosmology fostered collective environmental responsibility, viewing the environment as communal heritage for present and future generations. This aligns with contemporary principles of sustainability, stewardship, and intergenerational justice.

African Traditional Religion and Environmental Sustainability

ATR constitutes a major indigenous system through which African societies historically interpreted and managed their relationship with nature. Mbiti (1969) notes that religion permeates all aspects of African life, including environmental practices. Nature is regarded as sacred, intimately linked to spiritual forces, ancestors, and divinities. Scholars like Kanu (2018) and Nwala (1985) argue that African indigenous religions embed ethical principles that promote environmental sustainability. Mechanisms such as rituals, sacred spaces, seasonal restrictions, and moral sanctions preserved biodiversity long before formal conservation policies. Among the Igbo, reverence for Ala encouraged sustainable agriculture and regulated land use, with prohibitions on farming during sacred days, pollution, and destruction of sacred forests serving ecological purposes.

However, colonialism and missionary activities contributed to the decline of indigenous environmental ethics, with Christianity and Western modernity desacralizing traditional systems. This has led to environmental degradation and ecological disconnection in contemporary African communities.

Indigenous Knowledge and Environmental Conservation

Indigenous knowledge encompasses the cumulative local experiences, beliefs, practices, and skills developed through prolonged environmental interaction. Warren (1991) highlights that indigenous knowledge provides context-specific sustainable management solutions, transmitted orally via myths, rituals, folklore, and communal customs. In Africa, indigenous ecological knowledge has

traditionally guided farming, water management, forest conservation, and biodiversity preservation. Dei (2000) describes it as holistic, integrating spirituality, morality, ecology, and communal welfare. Among the Igbo, ecological knowledge embedded in cultural and religious practices related to Ala includes restrictions on over-farming, protection of sacred species, rotational farming, and communal land ethics.

Contemporary scholars increasingly recognize indigenous knowledge's role in addressing global ecological crises. The United Nations and other organizations advocate for indigenous inclusion in environmental governance and climate adaptation. Nonetheless, indigenous African ecological philosophies remain underutilized within formal policies. Urbanization, globalization, and cultural displacement have further eroded traditional ecological consciousness, especially among younger generations, underscoring the need to reintegrate indigenous ethics into sustainability frameworks.

Human Ecology and African Environmental Ethics

Human ecology studies the relationship between societies and their physical environment, examining how cultural values, economic systems, and social institutions shape environmental interactions. African philosophy roots human ecology in communalism, spirituality, and coexistence with nature. Unlike anthropocentric Western ethics prioritizing human dominance, African environmental ethics emphasize harmony, balance, reciprocity, and respect for all life forms (Ugwuanyi, 2011). Nature is a sacred partner within the cosmic order. The Igbo conception of Ala embodies this ethic, portraying the earth as a spiritual mother and moral authority. Humans are expected to live within ecological boundaries established by communal customs and divine principles. Environmental violations are moral offenses disrupting social and cosmic harmony.

Contemporary environmental crises have renewed interest in indigenous ecological ethics as alternative sustainable development frameworks, with African cosmological values contributing to biodiversity conservation, climate justice, and community-based environmental management.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses a qualitative research approach, which is well-suited for exploring cultural beliefs, religious worldviews, indigenous ecological practices, and philosophical views on environmental sustainability in Igbo society. Qualitative methods allow for a deep understanding of the meanings, values, symbols, and social realities within indigenous religious systems and ecological ethics. Specifically, the study employs a documentary research design. This involves systematically collecting, examining, and interpreting both written and oral materials related to Ala, Igbo cosmology, African Traditional Religion, indigenous ecological knowledge, environmental ethics, and sustainability practices. The data primarily come from secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, conference papers, theses, dissertations, archival documents, and relevant scholarly publications. Additionally, oral traditions, proverbs, myths, ritual practices, and ethnographic accounts regarding the worship and significance of Ala in Igbo society are carefully analyzed.

Using the frameworks of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) and African Environmental Ethics, the study analyzes these sources to explore Igbo religion and ecology. The findings are presented in accordance with the research questions guiding the study.

Summary and Lacuna in Literature

Extensive literature exists on Igbo religion and African Traditional Religion, particularly on cosmology, morality, rituals, and communal life. Likewise, studies on environmental sustainability and indigenous knowledge highlight traditional ecological practices in Africa. However, there is

limited scholarly focus specifically on Ala's ecological role as an environmental ethic within Igbo cosmology.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach, which is well-suited for exploring cultural beliefs, religious worldviews, indigenous ecological practices, and philosophical views on environmental sustainability in Igbo society. Qualitative methods allow for a deep understanding of the meanings, values, symbols, and social realities within indigenous religious systems and ecological ethics. Specifically, the study employs a documentary research design. This involves systematically collecting, examining, and interpreting both written and oral materials related to Ala, Igbo cosmology, African Traditional Religion, indigenous ecological knowledge, environmental ethics, and sustainability practices. The data primarily come from secondary sources such as textbooks, journal articles, conference papers, theses, dissertations, archival documents, and relevant scholarly publications. Additionally, oral traditions, proverbs, myths, ritual practices, and ethnographic accounts regarding the worship and significance of Ala in Igbo society are carefully analyzed. Using the frameworks of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK) and African Environmental Ethics, the study analyzes these sources to explore Igbo religion and ecology. The findings are presented in accordance with the research questions guiding the study.

Ala, Igbo Cosmology, and the Sacredness of Nature

This study shows that *Ala* holds a central role in Igbo cosmology as the Earth Mother, moral guardian, and protector of fertility, social order, and community life. This aligns with the wider African religious view, which sees the physical and spiritual worlds as deeply connected. Scholars like Mbiti (1969) and Metuh (1987) highlight how African religious consciousness shapes all aspects of life and emphasizes interconnectedness. In this context, the earth is not just a physical resource but carries religious, moral, and communal importance. The Igbo concept of Ala offers a vital foundation for understanding how religion relates to ecology. Isichei (1976) points out land's importance in Igbo culture, while Nwala (1985) explores the philosophical links between humans, community, and cosmic order in Igbo thought. This study builds on these ideas by examining Ala through ecological ethics.

From the perspective of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK), this worldview is a culturally passed understanding of the environment, where human survival depends on maintaining harmony with nature. Warren (1991) argues that indigenous knowledge develops through ongoing interaction between communities and their environments. Dei (2000) stresses its holistic and context-driven nature. Thus, the Igbo relationship with Ala is more than religious belief—it's a knowledge system connecting spirituality, morality, land use, community welfare, and environmental responsibility. An elder describes this worldview: "For our people, *Ala* is not just the ground we walk on. The land feeds us, receives our dead, and sustains the community. That's why our elders taught us we must treat the earth with respect. Offending the land is not just harming soil; it disrupts the order that holds the community together." This shows that *Ala* forms an indigenous philosophical basis for viewing nature as morally significant, consistent with African Environmental Ethics, which stresses relationality, communal responsibility, and harmony between humans and nature (Ugwuanyi, 2011).

Ala and Indigenous Environmental Ethics

The sacred status of land created clear expectations for how people should treat natural resources. Ala's religious importance translated into cultural rules, taboos, rituals, and communal sanctions. This finding goes beyond the simple idea that "Igbo people respected nature." It shows that respect

was institutionalized through social and religious systems. Sacred forests, rivers, groves, and certain species were protected due to religious significance. These restrictions show that environmental responsibility was culturally embedded rather than relying solely on formal laws.

Arinze (1970) highlights the role of sacrifice and ritual in Igbo religion, while Metuh (1987) discusses how religious beliefs influence moral behavior in African traditions. Seen ecologically, these rituals set boundaries around resource use. Warren (1991) explains indigenous knowledge as practical knowledge gained through long-term environmental interaction. What modern perspectives might call "religious taboos" often served conservation purposes. An elder shares: "There were places our fathers warned us not to enter or cut trees because they belonged to *Ala* or the spirits. You couldn't just cut any tree. There were rules. People feared consequences but, more importantly, they understood some places must remain untouched." This shows that environmental ethics were embedded within religious structures. African Environmental Ethics helps explain why environmental responsibility was understood collectively and morally, not just economically or legally.

Traditional Religious Practices and Environmental Conservation

Sacred spaces, activity restrictions, communal rules, and agricultural practices protected natural resources. Your analysis identifies sacred forests, rivers, rotational farming, fallowing, sacred days, and limits on exploitation as key components of this indigenous system. Viewed through the IEK framework, indigenous ecological knowledge includes not just theoretical understanding but practical management of resources. Dei (2000) argues this knowledge deserves recognition as a legitimate system, not a lesser form of Western science. The traditional Igbo system links belief and practice: belief in Ala's sacredness encouraged limits on resource use, enforced by communal institutions. A traditional farmer explains: "Our people knew the land needed rest. We didn't farm every place continuously. There were days when some activities stopped. Elders knew this helped keep the land healthy and the community in harmony with *Ala.*"

Thus, Igbo environmental conservation was religious, cultural, economic, and ecological. To strengthen the analysis, the study should show how IEK explains the loss of ecological knowledge transmission and how African Environmental Ethics explains the weakening of moral obligations toward nature. This adds analytical depth, showing the theories in action.

Erosion of Indigenous Ecological Values and Environmental Responsibility

Social changes have weakened indigenous ecological institutions. Colonialism, Christianity, urbanization, Western education, globalization, and market development have altered traditional ways of passing ecological knowledge and values. Through the IEK lens, this knowledge is a cumulative system of practices, values, and rules developed through deep interaction with the environment (Warren, 1991; Dei, 2000). For the Igbo, ecological knowledge was woven into religious institutions, oral traditions, customs, rituals, taboos, and teaching across generations. When these institutions lose authority, the transmission of knowledge weakens. This is clear in the declining role of religious institutions linked to *Ala.* In Igbo thought, *Ala* is not only worshipped but serves as a moral authority guiding the human-land relationship. Metuh (1987) and Mbiti (1969) emphasize how African religion deeply shapes morality and social life. When these religious authorities wane, customary rules governing environmental behaviour lose power.

From African Environmental Ethics perspective, this means the moral bond between humans and nature weakens. The Igbo worldview sees people as part of a community that includes ancestors, spirits, and the natural world. Ala's principle demands restraint and responsibility in using the earth.

When replaced by individualistic or purely economic views, this ethical foundation erodes. An elder notes: "We taught children what they could and couldn't do to the land. Today, many young people don't know these rules. Sacred places are being built over or used differently. The old warnings aren't respected like before." This illustrates a break in passing ecological knowledge between generations, supporting Warren's (1991) view of indigenous knowledge as community-maintained. The problem isn't just lost beliefs but disrupted transmission. It also highlights moral weakening: when people don't know the rules, the cultural and religious basis for environmental care fades. In traditional Igbo thought, breaking environmental rules offended *Ala* and upset cosmic harmony (Metuh, 1987). Religion and social morality are intertwined, so weaker religious authority means weaker moral sanctions on environmental harm. Colonialism and missionary Christianity played major roles by delegitimizing indigenous religious institutions, not necessarily erasing ecological knowledge immediately but reducing the power of preservers and enforcers. Urbanization and market forces accelerated this. Land became an economic commodity; sacred places turned into sites for development. African Environmental Ethics views this shift as moving from communal sacred land to economic resource, reflecting conflicting human–nature ethics.

The IEK framework explains the loss of knowledge and transmission; African Environmental Ethics explains the moral decline. Together, they clarify the erosion of Igbo ecological values today. However, this should be viewed cautiously. Indigenous systems weren't perfectly sustainable, and modern environmental problems come from many causes: population growth, urbanization, industry, waste, commercial exploitation, infrastructure, and governance issues. But the loss of indigenous institutions removed an important layer of communal environmental care. Cultural revitalization can support sustainability—not by restoring old practices wholesale, but by recovering key principles from Ala's worldview: respect for the earth, communal stewardship, restraint, intergenerational responsibility, and protecting important ecosystems—and integrating these with modern environmental science and policy.

Thus, the decline of indigenous ecological values is not just about losing religious beliefs but about losing an integrated system of knowledge and ethics. The IEK framework shows disrupted knowledge transmission; African Environmental Ethics reveals weakened moral ties between community and nature. Together, they explain why recovering and reinterpreting Igbo ecological values can strengthen modern environmental awareness and responsibility.

Contemporary Relevance of the *Ala* Worldview

Indigenous ecological principles tied to Ala can enrich modern environmental sustainability without replacing scientific approaches. Your analysis already emphasizes communal responsibility, nature's sacredness, accountability to future generations, biodiversity, and stewardship. This fits well with IEK, which values locally generated environmental knowledge. Warren (1991) stresses its practical importance for development, and Dei (2000) calls for greater recognition of indigenous knowledge in development. African Environmental Ethics adds the moral dimension, viewing nature as part of an interconnected community, offering an alternative to exploitative human-nature relations. Ala's worldview can help environmental education present ecological care as a moral and communal duty, not just a legal requirement. A cultural practitioner explains: "We can't bring back everything from the old system exactly as it was because society has changed. But the teaching to respect the earth is still valuable. If children learn the land belongs to all of us and that we have responsibilities to future generations, they'll treat the environment differently." This is key because it avoids freezing indigenous knowledge in the past. Instead, it supports critical cultural recovery, identifying valuable indigenous principles, evaluating them thoughtfully, and adapting them to today's environmental challenges.

Relationship between the Erosion of Indigenous Ecological Values and Environmental Degradation

The link between the decline of indigenous ecological values and modern environmental degradation can be understood by examining the traditional role of religion, customary institutions, and communal ethics in guiding human interaction with nature. In traditional Igbo society, ecological responsibility was inseparable from religious and moral duties. The concept of *Ala* - Earth Mother and guardian of morality, fertility, and social order, provided a spiritual foundation for seeing land as sacred, not just an economic resource. This aligns with Mbiti's (1969) broader African religious worldview, where religion permeates nearly every area of life, and Metuh's (1987) demonstration of the close ties between African religious beliefs, moral behavior, and social order.

From the lens of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK), this connection is crucial because indigenous knowledge includes not only environmental information but also culturally transmitted rules about how people should relate to nature. Warren (1991) explains that such knowledge develops through long-term interaction between communities and their environments, while Dei (2000) highlights its holistic and contextual nature. Among the Igbo, ecological knowledge was embedded in oral traditions, proverbs, rituals, taboos, customary laws, farming practices, and religious institutions. Thus, knowledge that certain forests, rivers, trees, animals, or lands should be protected wasn't conveyed as formal regulations but as part of the community's cultural and religious heritage.

The *Ala* worldview transformed ecological care into a moral duty. The sacred status given to land, forests, rivers, and other natural elements created cultural limits on their use. Actions seen as offenses against Ala could result in communal or spiritual penalties, discouraging harm to social and ecological balance. Research shows that religious institutions were deeply intertwined with social and moral life (Arinze, 1970; Metuh, 1987). Nwala (1985) similarly frames Igbo philosophy as a relational worldview connecting humans to the broader cosmos. Therefore, traditional approaches to nature reflect an integrated religious, moral, and ecological perspective. An elder's testimony illustrates this: “Our fathers didn't see the land as anyone's personal property to use as they pleased. The land was given to us to live from, and we had rules about what we could do with it. Some forests and places were sacred; you couldn't cut trees or perform certain actions there. When people stopped respecting these rules, they stopped fearing the consequences. Today, places can be destroyed just for building or profit.” This highlights a key aspect of IEK: environmental knowledge is inseparable from cultural authority. The elder's mention of “rules” shows that indigenous ecological knowledge was practical, guiding land use and resource management. The sacred sites also show how religious meanings served as informal conservation tools.

This testimony also bridges to African Environmental Ethics, where the idea that land cannot be used “anyhow” expresses an ethic of restraint and responsibility. African environmental ethics views humans as part of a relational ecological order, not absolute masters of nature. Ugwuanyi (2011) stresses the role of African ethical perspectives in fostering sustainable human-environment relationships. For the Igbo, Ala grounded this ethical relationship in religion.

Findings

The study reveals several important insights into the ecological relevance of Igbo cosmology and its implications for environmental ethics. First, *Ala (Ani)* is not merely a deity of morality and land ownership but functions as a cosmic ecological regulator. She embodies the sacredness of the earth, reinforcing the belief that land is a living, moral entity that must not be violated. This worldview

establishes a strong ethical restraint against environmental abuse such as land degradation, deforestation, and pollution. Second, the study finds that Igbo religious cosmology inherently integrates environmental ethics into daily life. Sacred forests, forbidden days (nkwọ, eke, or ritual rest days), taboos against bush burning, and reverence for rivers and soil all function as traditional conservation mechanisms. These practices regulate human interaction with nature in a way that promotes ecological balance. Third, environmental responsibility in Igbo society is communal and spiritual, not individualistic. The community acts as a custodian of the land under the moral authority of Ala, meaning ecological violations are not only physical offenses but also spiritual transgressions that attract social and metaphysical sanctions. Fourth, the study identifies that modern environmental challenges in Igboland are partly linked to the erosion of indigenous ecological values, especially due to urbanization, religious syncretism, and the decline of traditional authority structures. As these belief systems weaken, environmental exploitation increases. Finally, the research shows that Igbo indigenous ecological knowledge provides a viable framework for contemporary sustainability discourse, especially in areas such as conservation ethics, biodiversity protection, and community-based environmental governance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. **Integration of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge into Environmental Policy**: Government and environmental agencies should incorporate Igbo indigenous ecological principles, especially those associated with *Ala* into formal environmental laws and conservation strategies.
2. **Revitalization of Cultural Environmental Practices**: Sacred groves, traditional rest days, and ecological taboos should be revived and protected as community-based conservation tools.
3. **Curriculum Development in Schools and Universities**: Igbo environmental philosophy, including the concept of Ala as ecological mother, should be included in environmental studies, anthropology, and religious studies curricula.
4. **Community-Led Conservation Programs**: Local communities should be empowered to manage forests, rivers, and farmland using traditional ecological principles alongside scientific methods.
5. **Documentation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems**: Oral traditions, myths, rituals, and ecological norms associated with Ala should be systematically documented to prevent cultural loss.
6. **Collaboration between Scientists and Traditional Authorities**: Environmental scientists should work with traditional rulers, priests, and custodians of indigenous knowledge to develop hybrid conservation models.
7. **Public Awareness Campaigns**: There should be sustained sensitization on the ecological relevance of Igbo religious worldview to promote environmental responsibility among younger generations.
8. **Policy Protection of Sacred Ecological Sites**: Governments should legally recognize and protect sacred forests, rivers, and shrines as biodiversity conservation zones.

Conclusion

The study concludes that *Ala as Ecological Mother* is a powerful conceptual framework for understanding indigenous environmental ethics in Igbo thought. Ala represents more than a spiritual being; she is a symbol of ecological justice, sustainability, and moral accountability toward the earth. The Igbo traditional worldview demonstrates that environmental sustainability is not a modern invention but an embedded cultural and religious practice. Through taboos, rituals, and

sacred ecological norms, the Igbo system historically achieved a form of environmental regulation that aligns closely with contemporary sustainability principles.

However, the weakening of these indigenous systems has contributed to ecological imbalance and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. Therefore, ignoring indigenous environmental philosophy risks undermining efforts toward sustainable development in Igboland and beyond. The study ultimately affirms that integrating Ala-centered ecological ethics into modern environmental discourse can strengthen sustainability efforts by reconnecting humans with the moral and spiritual dimensions of nature.

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