

PLANT BIODIVERSITY OF NIGERIA AND OUR RELIGIONS AND CULTURES IN A CHANGING WORLD

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ABSTRACT: *The plants constitute a major component of the planet earth, which all living things need to sustain their life. The early man being limited in all forms of endowments of humankind, made very little use of these plants. He therefore maintained a stable equilibrium with them. The modern man (Homo sapiens), with his endowments, has asserted himself over other living and non living things and is making use of the plants in diverse ways. These diverse ways, are in addition to a number of other benefits other living things including human beings, derive from the plants. This paper dwells on the services to which humankind has put the plants in the diverse religions and culture of people in Nigeria. The paper besides reviewing the diverse roles of plants in diverse religions and cultures, also discusses the changes that are now being experienced in the interactions of humankind with the plants. Nigeria is part of the African region, where biodiversity is claimed to be concentrated. It therefore behoves the people of Nigeria, to conserve the plants, so that their sustainability, can be assured.*

KEYWORDS: Plants, Humankind, Religions, Cultures, West Africa, Yoruba People.

INTRODUCTION

Any time an environmentalist or a lover of plants takes time off to do a survey of what today is referred to by environmentalist as plant biodiversity (Adeyewa, 2009), such a person will always give thanks to the Almighty God who created these plants, among other living things. These plants have today, become the very base of all trophic interactions within the planet earth (Fatubarin, 2009a). Similarly, an environmentalist doing a survey of the diverse uses to which the modern man (*Homo sapiens*) has put the plants, can not but forget for once, the failings of humankind in his relationship with other creations of God and give glory to the Almighty God, for creating humankind. This is because the modern man has to some extent, done justice to the dominion the Supreme Being gave humankind over other creations (Genesis 1:26). This verdict will become clearer in this paper, as further discussions are done on the diverse uses to which the modern man has put the plants. Fatubarin (2013), noted that the ancient man, in the forms of *Dryopithecus*, *Australopithecus*, *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus* (Fatubarin, 2008), made very minimal uses of the plants. His interactions with plants, were limited to their uses as foods, medicines and tools for hunting animals. His other uses included climbing them to escape from dangers and resting under them, during the occasional inclement weather of the day time, in tropical environments. The

ancient man was therefore more or less in equilibrium with his environment. This is not surprising when one remembers that the ancient man by the stage of evolution he had reached, was much limited in his mental capacity. Beyond this fact, is the fact that he was equally limited in his interactions, both with the members of his population, which at that time was relatively scanty and with other components of his environment, both living and non-living. Because of all these, he was not able to tilt the equilibrium between him and his environment towards himself, to the detriment of the environment. It must also be mentioned that it is to his credit that he did not indulge in corruption and violence, that now constitute the bane of the natural environment, with the lordship of the modern man over the environments, through his biological and other forms of evolution in the planet earth.

The modern man (*Homo sapiens*), that carries the features that are described as the culmination of the endowments of all forms of humankind and in fact, all other living things (Fatubarin, 2009b), has not only asserted his supremacy over other living things, he has extended the frontiers of his dominion over other creations much beyond that of the ancient man. He has gone beyond the uses to which the ancient man put the plants. He has also improved the plants through breeding and in modern times, through genetic engineering of some of the plants.

Today, our plants are being classified into diverse groups, based on their taxonomic characteristics (Olorode, 1984; Gill, 1988), as well as on the basis of their ecological importance (Fatubarin, in press). They are also being grouped into diverse classes, based on their economic importance (Fatubarin, in press), as well as their religious and cultural importance. All these are reflective of the extent to which humankind has brought advances in knowledge, to bare on the plants that nature has surrounded him with. It must however be borne in mind that the Almighty God has made the plants among other living things, to serve certain purposes in the planet earth. These purposes which constitute what are referred to as biological as well as ecological benefits of the diverse plants on earth, include the following:

- a. The plants that constitute plant biodiversity, are very important as **the organisms that trap solar energy that comes into any ecosystem**. They are able to do this because of the chlorophyll they have. It is this chlorophyll that assists these plants to trap sunlight (i.e. solar energy) and convert the solar energy into chemical energy in form of the organic food material they produce, through the process of photosynthesis. It is from this organic food produced by green plants, that all other organisms in the ecosystems, obtain their own food either directly or indirectly.
- b. The green plants by making use of carbon dioxide during the process of producing their food by photosynthesis, **help in reducing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere**.
- c. The green plants **help in purifying the atmosphere** through the oxygen they send into the atmosphere, as the by-product of their photosynthesis.
- d. Plants in the process of their transpiration – a process whereby plants send out water in vapour form into the atmosphere, **help in creating cool atmosphere around them**.
- e. Plants help in **providing shelter for other organisms** that stay under the shade produced by them. In fact, wildlife species are found only in places where plants of their choice exist.
- f. Plants are the **source of food of animals** either directly or indirectly. Besides food, plants provide habitat for wildlife. It is in such habitat, they reproduce and multiply.

- g. Plants **help in protecting the lands and soils** of the places which they inhabit, from hazards such as erosion and insolation, that may result from the hazards of wind and water and direct rays of sunlight. In the same vein, shelter belts of suitable species of plants are being established in the drought-susceptible places in different Countries of the world. Such shelter belts serve as wind breaks in places where they are established.
- h. Plants that establish themselves on the banks of streams and other flowing water bodies, **help to protect them from stream bank erosion.**

Several titles have been produced on the taxonomy of tropical plants, with special emphasis on the plants of the West African sub-region (Olorode, 1984 and Gill, 1988). Companion papers to this, also discuss the plants of the West African sub-region, from the perspectives of their ecology, as well as their economics (Fatubarin, in press). The remaining parts of this paper, are devoted to the diverse roles of plants in our religions and our cultures, as well as the modifications the changing world has imposed on the roles of plants in these two important aspects of the life of people, in Nigeria which is located in West Africa – a sub-region of Africa, which forms part of the centre of concentration of world plant biodiversity (Adeyewa, 2009).

Our Plants and Our Religions

Equipped with a spiritual being (Adeboye, 2013), humankind learnt along with his evolution, the need to recognize the Supreme Beings as the Almighty God. This is besides a number of other gods humankind produced in diverse cultures across the world, with their worshippers using such gods as their intermediary to the Almighty God. With the recognition of these gods and the recognition of the Almighty God, different forms of religions also came into being. In many parts of West Africa, the main religions are Christianity and Islamic religions and the others, often referred to as traditional religions. These traditional religions are usually named after the gods worshipped by their adherents. Thus, we have among the Yoruba people of South Western Nigerian, ifa, ogun, oya, osun, among others.

Over several ages of humankind's interactions with plants, he has learnt to put the plants into a number of uses in the religions, with such uses varying with the diverse religions. The Christians make use of a number of plants, prominent among which are the oil palms (*Elaies guineensis*), the plantains and bananas. The oil palm was seen by the followers of Christ, as a symbol of victory of our Lord, Jesus Christ in his mission on earth. The palm comes in handy as an occasional plant for use during the Palm Sundays, that are commemorated annually, in remembrance of the triumphant entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, during His pastoral mission on earth. The oil palm and the plantain and banana fronds, also feature prominently as decorative plants, during the annual harvest thanksgiving services. It is remarkable that even with the advent of the numerous synthetic decorative materials in forms of flowers and assorted nylon cloths, the use of these plants as decorative plants in churches, has not reduced. It must also be mentioned that some Church Missions still keep up the Christian tradition of "going to Galilee," at distant locations to meet with risen Christ every year, during the Easter Monday. Many churches now do this in their premises, that are adequately planted with shade trees, that offer protection to such people during the afternoon hours at their "Galilee grounds." In recent years, as a result of the wide spread distribution of ceremonial halls built by churches within their premises and the equally large number of recreational spots, such as biological gardens, zoological gardens, amusement parks

and beaches, celebration of the annual Galilee event in open ground in distant locations, is now very much on the decline.

It is however worth mentioning that right from the colonial era in many countries of West Africa sub-region, many of the premises occupied by churches and mission houses, are usually properly landscaped with ornamental plants, prominent among which are flamboyante (*Delonix regia*), Pride of Barbados (*Caesalpinia pulcherrima*) and Frangipani (*Plumeria rubra*). Others include *Lantana camara* and many varieties of mangoes, brought into the country by the missionaries. Mention must also be made of the fact that many of the “white garment” Christian missions, that frequent what are commonly referred to as “prayer mountains,” do spare some of the trees met on such locations or plant some, in order to provide shade on these locations.

The moslems (of Islamic religion) of all sects, also observe their annual salahs and such other Islamic religion celebrations, on special praying grounds, which are usually well planted with shade trees, the species of which vary with the location of such praying grounds. While in the south of Nigeria, banyan is very popular, in the north, it is neem (*Azadiracta indica*). Though in both the south and the north, it is not unusual to have mango (*Mangifera indica*) and *Gmelina arborea* – an exotic tree species, grown on these prayer grounds. Mention must also be made of the fact that in the distant past, many believers of the Islamic faith, who cannot afford the skin of rams, made use of locally woven mats, made from the long stems of the sedge *Cyperus articulatus*, on which they sit in the praying grounds. Such mats are also what are spread on the floor in the mosques. Today, these local mats are either replaced with synthetic mats or the more expensive rugs, such as those imported from the Asian countries. It must however be admitted that it is not only the local mats that have given way to synthetic mats and rugs. Even the mode of transport by the Chief Imams and the prominent Emirs, who in the past, usually rode on beautifully adorned horses to the praying grounds, now go there in some of the latest brands of automobile vehicles.

The advent of foreign brands of religions such as Christianity and Islamic religions, have drastically reduced the worship of traditional gods in many parts of Nigeria. However, it must be mentioned that many families still hold fast to a number of tradition religions. This is particularly so for those families who take care of all the traditional rites, that are connected with the worship of these gods. For instance, the worshippers of ogun – the god of iron, still ardene the places where this god is worshipped during the ogun festivals, with palm fronds. These palm fronds also ardene the sheds where the black smiths ply their trades. Similarly, drivers of vehicles, who worship this god or believe in it, also decorate their vehicles with palm fronds, during the annual festival periods.

The worshippers of some deities, also demarcate the shrines and groves where they worship such deities with some peculiar plants, which all people within and around such communities, have learnt to use to identify such shrines and groves. One notable example of such plants is *Dracaena* (Yoruba: Peregun). Many forest estates are also frequented by spiritualists, not only to collect the herbs they need and other ingredients for diverse concoctions, but also visit them for spiritual meditation (Fatubarin, 2013). Certain tree species are also of special importance because their base is used as the spot for depositing fetish materials of diverse types. One good example of such tree species as *Melicia* (*Chlorophora*) *excelsa* (Yoruba: Iroko).

Our Plants and Our Cultures

If it could be claimed that our religions took advantage of our diverse plants to benefit from them, it can be rightly claimed that our cultures have benefitted far more from the plants, than our religions. It is such benefits that our religions made of the plants, that are on parade, in the previous section of this paper, that provides a resume of the diverse uses to which plants are put in the countries within the West African sub-region. What is of far more interest in this paper, are the modifications that have gone into many of the uses to which the plants are put in the diverse cultures within the West African sub-region. These modifications are reflected in the decline in the uses of some of the plants, while greater interest is being taken in the use of some others.

In many parts of West Africa, a number of species of tropical forest plants still find use in the culture of the people. One notable example is the plant *Newbouldia laevis* (Yoruba: Akoko), whose leaves find use in ardoning the heads of chiefs, who are being newly installed in Yorubaland, as chiefs. The fronds of the oil palm find use as part of the dress of some masquerades, notably in some parts of Yorubaland. This is particularly so with the masquerade known as Aladoko masquerade. The palm frond has from ages, formed an insignia attached to the front and back of motor vehicles, conveying corpses, whether placed in coffins or not. Branches of plants are also carried by aggrieved people on demonstration. Whole plants and branches, are also put on certain spots at some distance from broken-down vehicles on high ways. This particular practice is still a common sight today, in spite of the red-coloured reflective triangular stands, that are now in common use. Such triangular stands are now made to complement the use of these plant branches that can extend to a considerable distance, beyond what the triangular stands, which are never more than two can do. In many cultures across West Africa, the native sponge got from a species of plant, is in common use. So common is the use of this plant, that the Yoruba people in an adage of theirs, claim that no other plant rivals the use of this plant in the bathrooms, which in the past, were built at a distance from the main buildings, which are in most cases, constructed with mud. Nowadays, there are now diverse types of synthetic sponges, made of nylon net and foam materials. Similarly, the local ropes made from the fibres of some plants, such as *Urena lobata* and sisal hemp, are now gradually giving way to synthetic ropes. This is also true of the jute bags used for packaging commodities such as cocoa, ground nut and cotton. They too are now being gradually replaced with bags made with synthetic materials.

One interesting example is the use of the plant *Thaumatococcus daniella* (Yoruba: Ewe iran), for wrapping roasted ground beans (Yoruba: Moinmoin) and pounded yams. Though the plant is still in use, the large populations of people in diverse communities where they are in use, have now made people to resort to using empty milk tins for the roasted ground beans and synthetic nylon for the pounded yam. Many of the old people used to this plant, will not mind spending any amount to buy the leaves, which they believe add special taste to the moin moin and the pounded yam. The Yoruba people even have a saying weaved round the use of the leaves to wrap moin moin. When ever they are involved in a discussion on a serious matter, the first contributor on it, will advise that they start the discussion on issues that are relatively peripheral to them, rather than delving into the main issues at a full swop. They will say it in Yoruba like this:

“E je ka tibi pelebe mu oole je”

These leaves that make the moin moin have the flat overflow from the main product, will no longer be there again with the use of empty tins of milk and such other similar containers. The time will come, when the younger ones will no longer be able to appreciate the import of this common saying, used in spicing discussions among the Yoruba people.

Besides this common Yoruba figure of speech that comes in handy in spicing discussions among the elderly people in Yorubaland, are some others that come in forms of figures of speech, proverbs and wise sayings, weaved around plants, over several years of Yoruba people's interactions with them. Some of them also come in handy, when the elderly people are pronouncing blessings on people. Diverse examples readily come to mind, on the special cultural importance of plants to Yoruba people.

When pronouncing blessings on people, the Yoruba elders will occasionally start such blessings with the following sayings, that are weaved around the plants:

***“Oju oro ni nleke omi
Osibata ni nleke odo”
Iwo ni o leke nibi gbogbo.***

Meaning: “The water lettuce always floats on freshwater bodies, while the water lily always rests its leaves on the surface of the water body, in which they are growing.” You will always surpass all your peers.

Another is:

***“A ki i ridi omo onigelegele”
Omo araye ko ni ridi re.***

Meaning: “No body ever see where the plant parasite dodder takes its roots from.”
No body will ever have an understanding of the basis of your success in life.

Yet another is:

***“Gbogbo igi ti elegbede ba fowo kan,
Didun lo n dun”
Gbogbo oun ti o ba dawole ni yio sese fun o.***

Meaning: “What ever tree the gorilla beats will its palm, it must produce a sound”. What ever you lay your hands upon, must yield good results.

To a lady being given out in marriage, the Yoruba elders will pray in this way for her:

***“Atare ki i di tire la abo.”
Opolopo omo ni Olorun yio fun o.***

Meaning: “As *Aframomum melegueta* pod is always filled with seeds, you will produce many children for your husband.”

Similar to this, is another one:

***“Oye omo ti itoo ni,
Ni o n wo fun oloko”
Gbogbo omo inu re,
Ni o o bi fun oko re.***

Meaning: “As the mellon gourd always produces several mellon seeds for the farmer, you will give birth to all the children God has blessed you with, for your husband.”

These prayers usually offered to the bride on the eve of her formal wedding at ceremonies now known as “engagement ceremonies,” preceding the wedding ceremonies, constitute part of the culture of Yoruba people, which in the past, contributed to producing of many children in many Yoruba families. Not only are items such as *Aframomum melegueta* pods and *Garcinia kola* (Yoruba: orogbo), no longer featuring much as part of the gifts often provided by the families of the bride grooms to those of the grooms, prayers such as those given above, no longer feature among prayers often said on such occasions. This is because every one is now conscious of the need to plan for the size of families one can adequately cater for.

When the unexpected happens, the Yoruba people may occasionally express their surprise by saying:

**“Igi ki i da loko, ko para ile,
Aja ki i jin, ko pero ona.”**

Meaning: “This is an extremely strange occurrence”

There are also many other sayings, Yoruba people use, to spice their contributions on diverse issues of life.

Examples of these are:

“Eni na a je iya, a je ewe iya”

The leaves of *Daniellia oliveri* are not edible to human beings. If Yoruba people now say that a person will eat the leaves of this tree, what they are saying is that he will suffer an unprecedented consequence, as a result of what he is about to do, or is doing, or has done.

Another is:

“Akengbe lo n ko ni, ni biti a o ti fi okun si”

Meaning: “It is the gourd that will guide some one, where on it to tie a rope.”

The point being made is that with the rate at which many of these plants are disappearing, the Yoruba people as an example, may be losing those aspects of our culture in form of wise sayings and prayers, among others, that are weaved round these plants. This may not argue well for some aspects of our cultures and traditions in the countries of West Africa. This is because the new generations of people from these countries, may never know about them in future.

Besides the broad leaves of the plant *Thaumatococcus daniella*, a number of others, such as the leaves of *Bauhinia monandra* and fronds of plantain and banana plants, are also used for wrapping food materials, such as the locust bean (*Parkia clappertoniana*), (Yoruba: Iru), fresh and cooked corn meal (Yoruba: Ogi and eko) and others such as salt and cola nuts.

In Yorubaland, it is a common observation that the traditional wedding ceremonies, usually referred to as “engagement ceremonies” and the naming ceremonies of new born babies, usually feature the use of the three or more lobed cola, known as *Cola acuminata* (Yoruba: Obi Abata) and *Garcinia kola* (Yoruba: Orogbo), as gifts for the family of the bride. This culture is still sustained till date, even though the use of these ceremonial fruits, is gradually undergoing decline in the naming ceremonies, partly due to the influence of Christianity and Islamic religions. There was the culture in the past in many parts of Nigeria, involving the use of some grasses of the species *Hyparrhenia*, *Pennisetum* and *Jardinea congoensis* in roofing buildings and fencing of some others, that have some hard materials such as long woods, as their supporting structures. Such hard wood materials may be the long branches of trees and the sawn materials obtained from

the trucks of coconut trees or oil palm trees. In recent times however, these roofing and fencing materials, are now being replaced with corrugated iron sheets, which may be in as short as 2 metres or long span sheets, cut to measure from factories, to match the length of the roof. Roofing materials in form of corrugated asbestos called Aldex sheets and factory-made asbestos materials of short pieces, are now in vogue, in many parts of West Africa. The use of branches of trees and roofing elements from coconut trunks and the trunks of oil palm, has now reduced considerably, being confined to rural communities, where they are used to built farm houses, barns for storing farm produce, among other similar structures. It must however be mentioned that the use of this grass species in roofing buildings, has now caught the fancy of some hoteliers, resort centres and relaxation spots, who now use them to roof sheds in open grounds, where people give reception to their guests in ceremonies and where some visit for relaxation and sight seeing, during the festivals. This grass species is however now reinforced with corrugated iron sheets as their underlay, with the planks being similar to those used in roofing modern buildings. To make them last long, some owners even cover them with iron wire mesh, to serve as additional support for these thatched roofs.

From ages past in West Africa, people have learnt to brush their teeth with assorted types of chewing sticks, which are obtained from the relatively thin branches of many indigenous species of plants. These chewing sticks besides making the teeth clean, also remove remnants of food materials from the teeth. They also help in preventing decay of teeth. Besides these, they help in making the breath coming from the mouth to be fresh and odourless. Many people also pick on some species as chewing sticks, not just because of their cleaning role, but more importantly because of their medicinal properties, of helping to reduce the frequency of crisis in individuals afflicted with sickle-cell anaemia and some others, who are either diabetic or hypertensive. Modernity and the changing times all over the world, have brought about some replacements for these chewing sticks in many homes in West Africa, with the synthetic materials in form of tooth brush and cleaning materials called tooth paste. However, it must be mentioned that these modern-day teeth cleaning materials, are only very popular with the elites and the younger people, such as the youths and the children. The older people among the indigenes in West Africa, still prefer the use of these chewing sticks, while some use them in combination with the modern synthetic tooth brushes and pastes. Kayode and Omotoyinbo (2009), listed close to fifty diverse species of chewing sticks in Ekiti State of Nigeria. The plants producing these chewing sticks, are still patronized in the modern day Nigeria. The number of chewing-sticks plants similar to that listed for Ekiti State, can be listed for other States of Nigeria and possibly other countries of West Africa. This is an indication of the fact that the use of indigenous and non-indigenous plants species as chewing sticks, has not been eclipsed by the changing times in the world.

In a similar vein, it is worth mentioning that many ornamental shrubs, still find use in many parts of West Africa, for demarcating farmlands and plots of lands. Examples of such ornamental shrubs are *Hibiscus rosasinesis*, *Ficus* species and yellow bush, which are all exotic species. Examples of indigenous species used in some parts of Nigeria for demarcating farmlands and in particular for warding off the livestock species, who occasionally wander into farmlands, are *Cactus* species with their thorns and some species of *Euphorbia*, which many livestock species have recognized for their poisonous nature. The plant *Dracaena* species (Yoruba: Peregun), is now restricted in its use for marking burial sites, shrines and other places of spiritual importance. It is no longer as

common as it used to be in the past. In the same manner, it must be mentioned that tobacco plant (*Nicotiana tabacum*), whose leaves when curried, can either be rolled into sticks and smoked, or ground into powder and savoured in the mouth or sniffed, is gradually on the decline, for these uses. Today, tobacco has become a multi-million naira business, around which tobacco industries are now established, where cigarettes of assorted types are produced from the leaves. It has also become a major cash crop, for many farming communities in the northern part of Oyo State of Nigeria. The tobacco industries partner with the cooperative societies formed in these communities, to ensure large scale production of tobacco, which are bought by them.

In West Africa, the natural forests exist in most of the countries of this sub region, with some of them still in their undisturbed state. Chief Philip Asiodu, President, Nigerian Conservation Foundation and a foremost environmentalist, has been reported in 2013, to have noted that the natural forests of Nigeria, has now decreased to a low figure of 4%. These natural forests have been referred to as “God’s Own Pharmacy,” because of the numerous drugs for use of human beings and livestock species, got from them. Foresters in West Africa, often grouped the plants of the natural forests into medicinal and non medicinal plants. So many and so important are these medicinal plants, that whole books have been written on them, to document the names (including the botanical, common and local names), their organs that are in common use as the sole ingredients of the drugs produced from them and the uses to which they are put. Example of these books are those by Odugbemi (2008), on the titles “**A Textbook of Medicinal Plants from Nigeria**” and “**Outlines and Pictures of Medicinal Plants from Nigeria.**” One remarkable thing about these medicinal plants, is that more attention is now being devoted to their ethno-botanical uses in drug production, in spite of the advances in modern medicine. It is believed that the ultimate solution to many of the diseases that are now in the front burner among those ravaging humankind in the world today, may be found in these plants, with passage of time. This belief is anchored on the saying of the Yoruba people of Nigeria, that before “maize grains became the staple food of domestic fowls, our domestic fowls have been eating some other foods in the distant past, before maize became domesticated and a source of food for fowl.” The point this paper underscores is that inspite of the advent of the modern times, that has made many of the uses to which plant species are put in Nigeria, to be replaced by many products which are of synthetic nature, our plants are still of much values to us in Nigeria. This is particularly so, for many of their uses for which no suitable alternatives have so far been found. It therefore behoves us in Nigeria, to endeavour to conserve our local plant species effectively, to make them continue to contribute to development in the country.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that even though the ancient man benefitted minimally from the plants in the distant past, it is the modern man that has taken the frontiers of such benefits from plants to greater heights. Though some of the previous uses have been overtaken by new day developments, some of them are still retained, with some of them modified, while new uses have been found for many plants. Many species of plants now have big-time businesses built around them. Examples of such businesses are those built around fibre-producing plants, such as cotton (*Gossypium* species), silk cotton fibre, coconut fibre, among the fibre plants. Other businesses include those of agro-based industries, such as paper, rubber, edible oil, sugar and beverages. Others still, include those involving use of ornamentals in landscaping. The association of humankind with plants has been that of mutual benefit. Humankind has benefitted immensely from

the plants. The plants too have benefitted tremendously from humankind. All these are to the glory of the Almighty God, who created the earth and place the living and non living things there, with humankind created and made to dominate over all these creations. It is such admirable dominion, that is reflected in these diverse uses, to which the plants are being put. It has therefore become a challenge to humankind, to see to it that these plants are not sent into extinction, with the massive loss of biodiversity, many of them are now experiencing. Their sustainability has to be assured through carefully planned programmes of conservation. The present 4% land cover of natural forests of Nigeria, is probably reflective of a similar situation in other West African Countries. This 4% forest cover, is as remarked by Chief Asiodu, a far cry from the 25% average, recommended by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, for sustainable environment. If as he remarked, the country had well over 30% of forest vegetation cover in 1960-the year of the country's independence and this has now decreased to a meager 4% in 2013, within a period of a little over 50 years! This should be a matter of concern to all people, not just the environmentalists alone. The time for action is now, tomorrow may be too late.

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