Foundations for Individual Environmental Responsibility in the Niger Delta

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Abstsract: Endowed with rich natural resources and biodiversity the Niger Delta region of Nigeria continues to experience the perennial affliction of environmental degradation. The usual culprits of this degradation are the oil companies. This is not the whole story. Human individuals too are also culpable in causing the Niger Delta's environmental crisis through domestic and occupational practices. How then can environmental awareness and care be improved be improved at the human individual level? Biocentrism, ecocentricism and African tradition. World view provide philosophical foundations that make human individuals aware of their connection to their natural surroundings. These philosophies also provide an impetus and imperative for individuals in the Niger Delta to love, preserve and protect their environment not the sense of obeying a regulation but in the sense of moral relation.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is well documented that the Niger Delta are of Nigeria is rich in biodiversity and natural resources. Many literature point to the variety and richness of the natural entities in the area like the forests and vegetation, rivers and swamps, together with the aquatic and land species. It is well documented too that the Niger Delta is rich in petroleum resources which form the backbone of the Nigerian economy. Indeed all the states in the region have petroleum resources and there are many petroleum related companies operating in the land and waters of the Niger Delta states. It is also well documented that the Niger Delta area, in spite of its rich resources and biodiversity, has been afflicted for decades by environmental degradation. This degradation has been a source of concern to scholars, people and government.

The oil companies have for long been viewed as the sole mediums of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta . Their oil extraction activities, gas flaring and industrial waste disposal have often been viewed as the sole cause of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. This is not the full scenario. Although the corporate entities like the oil and construction companies do contribute to the degradation malaise in the Niger Delta, a more detailed view is needed in order to better understand the extent of ecological harm and pursue a remedy . In this vein this paper proposes that human individuals play a critical role too in causing the degradation that has plagued the Niger Delta for decades. Individuals in the Niger delta do engage in domestic and occupational practices that contribute to the regions's ecological challenge. Activities like bush burning, logging, using firewood and kerosene for cooking , indiscriminate disposal of domestic

waste and illegal oil refining (bunkering), for instance, all bear adverse impact on the water, land , air and biodiversity in the Niger Delta. Human activities like those just mentioned lead to the accumulation of harmful pollutants in the air, water and soil of the Niger Delta region. Such activities also damage wildlife habitats and vegetation cover.

The author of this article together with co researcher Samuel Mkpado conducted a survey research in the oil producing communities of Kokori and Elume in Delta State and in the tri communities of Oluama, Agudama and Kula in Rivers State. And the findings from this Survey research indicate elevated levels of particulculate matte matter and volatile organic compounds in the ambient air around domestic households. This elevated domestic air pollution is only one form of environmental harm caused. And there are other environmentally detrimental activities perpetrated by individuals in the Niger Delta. However, these factors have not received the same level of attention as the operations of oil companies.

This paper focuses on exploring the ethical basis for individual environmental responsibility. It does so by drawing on three key ethical frameworks: biocentrism, ecocentrism and African traditional worldview. Biocentrism highlights the intrinsic value of all living beings. Ecocentrism highlights the interconnectedness between human beings and the ecosystem. Afrcan traditional world view on its part view the environment and as sacred and considers the human being intricately related to this environment. These theories are helpful in creating a strong ethical foundation that goes beyond laws or economic considerations and focuses on

moral values, cultural practices, and community-driven environmental awareness.

The need for such a philosophical approach is clear. Environmental issues in the Niger Delta are not only about technical solutions or institutional reforms. They are also deeply ethical. Aldo Leopold (1949) captures this idea when he writes, "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" (p. xviii). This ethical focus is exactly what the Niger Delta needs.

Therefore this paper critiques environmental harm and conversely calls for personal and moral responsibility. It is the position of this paper that individuals have an essential role in either preserving or damaging their environment. Without the involvement of individuals too, interventions for environmental sustainability cannot be successful.

II. CLARIFICATION OF TERMS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

➤ *Environmental Responsibility:*
Human individuals all have an ethical obligation to protect their environment. The term "environmental responsibility'' encompasses this ethical obligation human beings have to protect, preserve and restore the natural environment. Ethical responsibility is grounded on the consideration that human actions have consequences for fellow human beings and also for the ecosystem. Environmental responsibility implies that individuals have a moral right to both human and ecological entities around them. Environmental responsibility is both an awareness and a command. As awareness, it refers to the individual's conviction that choices and behaviors can impact on the condition of the natural world. As a moral command, ethical responsibility is the imperative to live and act in ways that do not harm the ecosystem or other human beings

While environmental responsibility can be interpreted in a narrow sense as a legal or regulatory obligation, this paper highlihgts that moral aspect of the term. This is the aspect that that shows an understanding of the connection between the human individual and their natural surroundings. Ethical responsibility is a kind of moral consciousnesses that individuals must cultivate in order to achieve environmental sustainability.

➤ *Biocentrism:*
For a long time in the history of philosophy, the human person was viewed as the central part of the universe. In this sense, the interest and wellbeing of the individual became the main concern in ethical matters. This inclination to assign more value to the human person over and above other entities in nature became known as anthropomorphism. In ethical matters anthropomorphism meant the interest and wellbeing of man became a standard for judging the moral worth of actions. Biocentrism arose as anti-anthropomorphism in the sense that it ascribes inherent value not only to humans but to all living things in nature. The philosopher Paul Taylor, a

leading proponent of biocentrism, describes the philosophical position this way: every living thing "has a good of its own, which is not reducible to its usefulness to humans" (p. 45). For Paul Taylor, all organisms even things like bacteria and birds have equal moral worth and deserve ethical consideration. The philosophy of biocentrism does not view human beings as separate or superior to other living things like anthropomorphism does. Instead biocentrism assign equal moral worth to all living things such that there is no justification to treat non-human species as resources or tools.

According to the philosopher Taylor, "Humans are but one species among others, and we are not inherently superior in any morally relevant way" (Taylor, 1986, p. 99). This kind of philosophical orientation is needed in the Niger Delta where daily practices like bush and killing of rare wildlife for food continue to tinge the already delicate ecological balance.

➤ *Ecocentrism:*
Biocentrism ascribes moral consideration to all living organisms. Egocentrism goes a step further to ascribe moral consideration to every entity in the ecosystem, both living organisms and the so called non-living things. So it is said that ecocentrism extends moral concern to the entire ecosystem and this includes entities like the rivers, forests, wetlands, and the biosphere as a whole. A prominent thinker whose writing promoted ecocentrism is Aldo Leopold. He wrote a book on the theme of "land ethic." And in this book, Aldo Leopold suggests stretching the moral boundary to include all entities in nature be they humans, biological organisms or other natural species.

According to Leopold (1949) : "Soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" deserve ethical treatment (p. 204). He notes further, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (p. 224).

Ecocentrism is an impetus for people to expand their worldview. Ecocentrism places task on people to move beyond treating the environment as a resource for human benefit. Ecocentrism challenges human individuals to act in a way that promotes the integrity and balance of entire ecosystems. In the Niger Delta context and in specific terms, ecocentrism will highlight the fact that burning farmland does not affect only a few trees and shrubs. It disrupts a whole ecological system.

In the Niger Delta context, ecocentrism reminds people to think about the long-term and large-scale consequences of their actions. A single act of cutting down a tree might seem insignificant. But when members of many households cut down trees, it results in deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and worsening climate impacts like erosion and flooding.

➤ *African Traditional Worldview:*
Just like biocentrism and egocentrism see the connection between the human being and other natural entities, African traditional systems also underscore this interconnection. African traditional world view considers the

relationship between the human person and the environment to be deep and sacred. In afrcan systems, nature is a material and an immaterially sacred reality of interwoven entities. The human person is part of this reality. The human being finds their place in this reality by interacting with other entities in reverence and respect. The kind of dualism that exists in western philosophical thought which separates man from nature is not present in African traditional systems. In African systems, nature is a community of entities imbued and enabled with spiritual connection.

Omorovie Ikeke (2012) states that "African environmental ethics is rooted in the belief that nature has intrinsic value and spiritual significance" (p. 139). This belief system treats rivers, forests, and animals not just as natural resources but as sacred beings or the dwelling places of ancestors and deities. Harming them is not only an environmental issue but a spiritual violation.

The spiritual worldview of African traditional systems leads to practices beneficial to the protection of the environment. For example, certain groves and bushes are restricted from cutting, clearing and burning because they are places of traditional worship or habitats of sacred entities (shrines). Usually cultural taboos are enforced to ensure the protection and preservation of such places. And these taboos serve as informal but powerful regulations.

Among ethnic groups such as the Urhobo and Ijaw in the Niger Delta, it is commonly believed that the land possesses its own spirit. To damage the land is to invite punishment from the gods. As Ikeke (2013) notes, "traditional African societies had a well-established system of ecological balance long before the advent of modern environmental science" (p. 143).

This worldview aligns naturally with both biocentric and ecocentric philosophies. It is also a way to encourage environmental responsibility in the Niger Delta. By tapping into long-held cultural beliefs, it becomes possible to cultivate a deep and enduring respect for nature.

III. BIOCENTRISM AND THE ETHICS OF RESPECT FOR ALL LIVING BEINGS

Biocentrism, as a philosophical and ethical standpoint, posits that all living things—human and non-human—possess inherent worth. According to this belief system humans do not have an exclusive ethical standing above other beings in nature since natural beings exist beyond human instrumental value. The perspective establishes essential understanding about environmental degradation ethics in the Niger Delta while defining individual responsibility.

➢ *Paul Taylor's Biocentric Ethics:*
Philosopher Paul W. Taylor stands as a leading biocentric advocate through his book Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics (1986) where he establishes complete life-centered environmental ethical principles.

According to Taylor every living thing maintains value without considering its utility for human purposes. A person must possess a moral attitude which expresses deep felt respect for nonhuman beings as independent ends in themselves (Taylor, 1986, p. 99).

Taylor develops his environmental theory from the foundation of four central fundamental beliefs.

- Living humans exist as members of Earth's life community alongside all other beings in the natural world.
- Living beings form a network where each element depends on the others.
- Each organism exists as a teleological center of life because it follows its own path to achieve self-benefit.
- Humans lack any natural superiority which separates them from other living creatures.

The conceptual framework transforms human conduct by shifting people from natural control to Earth-friendly coexistence. Each personal decision from bush-burning to river pollution to wildlife killing functions as a moral action that impacts the entire living community.

➢ *Biocentrism and Individual Responsibility in the Niger Delta:*
According to biocentric ethics the individuals residing in the Niger Delta must examine their individual environmental practices. A household that cooks with firewood causes forest loss leading to destruction of numerous animal habitats. Bush burning which is widespread in rural Niger Delta areas leads to plant life destruction as well as death of small animals and insects and microorganisms thus causing an imbalance in the local ecosystem.

Oil bunkering operations combined with informal crude oil refining processes initiated by poverty cause persistent damage to the environment. The toxic substances discharged by illegal operations pollute both the soil and water bodies and atmospheric air which jeopardizes human wellbeing and endangers fish and birds and amphibians that inhabit these ecosystems.

According to biocentrism principles people should abandon human centered convenience because it conflicts with sustainable ecological actions. The system prompts individuals to examine the multiple consequences that result from their actions. The act of tree felling disrupts more than wood removal because it destroys bird habitats and removes carbon sinks and disrupts temperature regulation in the area. Taylor's view is clear:

When we include nonhuman organism welfare in our ethical decision-making we must refrain from needless harm to them even though it benefits human interests (Taylor, 1986, p. 174).

➢ *Integrating Biocentrism with African Ethics:*
Biocentrism and the African traditional worldview share significant ethical overlap. Nature has intrinsic value according to these two perspectives along with the

fundamental requirement for human beings to nurture harmony with the environment. The idea that trees and rivers possess spirits corresponds to the fundamental biocentric value which exists independently of human usage.

According to Nigerian scholar Omorovie Ikeke (2012) "African ethics establishes that all creatures have God-given dignity because God created them" (p. 140). The requirement for moral care and reverence towards all creatures demands such an attitude from people (p. 140). A strong moral framework emerges when secular biocentrism from Taylor merges with African reverence through spirituality because this unified ethics aligns both rational reasoning with religious respect which educationally supports individual environmental duty.

➤ *Toward a Culture of Personal Accountability:*
Bio-centrism demands that people conduct themselves to prevent damage to every life form. Every individual should use environmentally-friendly cooking methods while managing their waste properly and seek methods of sustainable fishing and farming as well as work to protect biodiversity.

According to biocentrism individuals in the Niger Delta must take responsibility for their environmental impact since the government and multinational corporations typically face criticism for ecological destruction. The practice seeks to break the pattern of external force-blaming culture while promoting daily environmental impact analysis.

• *As Taylor Notes:*
To follow a biocentric life requires people to modify their fundamental values together with their daily lifestyle choices. According to Taylor (1986, p. 243) this outlook involves the growth of three virtues: humility, self-restraint and profound ecological connectedness.

Such ethical transformation establishes both global sustainability and environmental recovery in the Niger Delta region.

IV. ECOCENTRISM AND THE LAND ETHIC – A HOLISTIC VIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

The moral core of biocentrism defends single living beings but ecocentrism applies this moral value by including entire ecosystems which unite soil and water along with plants and animals into an ethical system. According to ecocentrism the three pillars of the biotic community's integrity stability and beauty should determine human conduct. The worldview provides another philosophical base for environmental responsibility which fits perfectly with the Niger Delta's complicated ecological system.

➤ *Aldo Leopold and the Land Ethic:*
Aldo Leopold established the ecocentric view through his book A Sand County Almanac (1949) which introduced the revolutionary land ethic concept. In Leopold's view the ethical sequence requires people to establish ethical connections between themselves and their environment alongside their human connections.

According to Leopold a thing achieves moral righteousness by maintaining the natural stability along with beauty and integrity of the ecological community. According to Leopold (1949, p. 224) something is ethically wrong when it works in an opposite direction.

The author established a new ethical standard by taking morality beyond individual life forms to focus on eco-systemic welfare. According to Leopold human beings occupy the same position as other members of the biotic community so they should not consider themselves superior conquerors (p. 204). Through the land ethic people can develop ecological citizenship which enables them to maintain the health of the complete natural system.

➤ *Ecocentrism and the Niger Delta Ecosystem:*
The urgent need for ecocentric thinking in the Niger Delta stems from the intense pressure that exists on its ecosystem systems. The region holds the title of being one of its most biodiverse areas since it contains mangrove forests, freshwater swamps, estuaries and abundant wildlife populations. Environmental degradation in these ecosystems results from both oil multinationals and domestic and community-based environmental abuses.

The survey of Elume, Kokori, Orogun, Oluama, Agudama and Kula households displayed concerning evidence of environmental deterioration through community-based actions. These include:

The practice of bush burning occurs extensively throughout the area thus leading to topsoil loss and vegetation destruction and resulting in the displacement or death of ground-dwelling animals.

• The use of firewood and kerosene stoves leads to deforestation and raises carbon emission levels.
• Local waste disposal methods create water contamination leading to illness among aquatic organisms.
• The practice of illegal oil refining known as bunkering causes hydrocarbons to enter both the soil and water thus resulting in biodiversity loss.

These activities damage both single species and the entire ecological network which endangers soil systems together with aquatic life and forest density and wildlife corridors. Under the ecocentric ethic people must analyze the effects of their behavior by studying both human benefit and ecosystem well-being.

• *As Leopold puts it:*
"The land is a community. Ecology defines all elements in nature as linked to one another. You cannot modify any section of the whole system without altering the entire structure according to Leopold (1949, p. 204).

➤ *Environmental Virtue and Communal Resilience:*

According to the perspective of ecocentrism people should practice virtues which include ecological humility and reverence for nature and restraint and foresight. People make daily choices about using lower amounts of wood for fuel alongside practicing regenerative farming combined with avoiding stream pollution and caring for local plant and animal species.

The land ethic finds compatibility with community values because it exists in a Niger Delta environment where ecological damage combines environmental and social effects. The contamination of local rivers past fishable levels triggers multiple detrimental effects because it endangers both natural ecosystems and the cultural heritage alongside the food security of the local population. Ecocentrism shows that environmental protection functions as both personal survival and community safeguarding activities.

• *As Nigerian Philosopher Ikeke Observes:*

According to African ontology the universe functions as a moral system which indicates that breaking its equilibrium through individual or corporate actions creates both moral and safety risks (Ikeke, 2020, p. 117).

The ecocentric viewpoint prompts human beings to change their view of nature from exploitative use to responsible protection as well as from controlling power to protective shepherd responsibilities and from fleeting profits to enduring sustainability practices.

V. AFRICAN TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS – A SACRED RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

The ethical direction of African traditional environmental thought is fundamentally based on the belief that human beings are inextricably linked with nature and are part of a complex web of life. Such ontological interconnectedness between human beings and the natural world makes possible an environmental ethics grounded in communal values, religious beliefs, and moral imperatives. Nature, in this world view, is not passive, nor is it value-less until activated by human beings. Instead, it is viewed as a living entity, with spirit and moral accountability, deserving of respect and consideration.

➤ *Cosmological Foundations:*

African cosmology understands the universe to be made up of observable and unobservable realities that are interconnected. In many African societies, for example, those in the Niger Delta, land is not understood just as a physical space but as a metaphysical entity. It is widely believed that trees, rivers, mountains, and animals are habitats for spirits, ancestors, or gods. For example, in Urhobo society, some groves are sacred due to the belief that they are dwelling places of the guardian spirits of the society. In the same manner, in Ijaw cosmology, aquatic ecosystems tend to be sacred as the abodes of some powerful water spirits like Owu or Egbesu (Ikeke, 2012, p. 139).

The religious reverence for nature leads to some level of ethical restraint among traditional societies. It encourages a profound respect for nature and discourages abusive exploitation. In the past, these cultural beliefs operated as unstated environmental laws, regulating the use of natural resources and providing taboos against wanton destruction.

Ikeke (2013) reminds us that "traditional African ecological consciousness, informed by spirituality and communalism, enabled indigenous societies to live in relative harmony with their environment" (p. 142). This perspective is in strong contrast with contemporary utilitarian and anthropocentric models, which conceive of nature largely in terms of resource extraction and economic value.

➤ *Ethical Implications Concerning Personal Responsibility:*

The African perspective contends that human beings are not free to utilize natural resources without accountability. Ethical conduct is not limited to human-to-human relations but is also extended to relations with animals, plants, rivers, and forests. It was unethical in traditional African societies to kill animals unnecessarily, to farm or fish on sacred days, or to desecrate sacred groves and water bodies. These standards bolstered a form of ecological responsibility, in which individuals were evaluated not only based on their interactions with others but also concerning their treatment of the planet.

This moral principle continues to have immense applicability in confronting environmental irresponsibility in the Niger Delta. It provides a culturally appropriate avenue for building environmental ethics from the grassroots. Instead of copying foreign environmental models, this method uses indigenous values that naturally underscore harmony, balance, and sustainability.

The applicability of this tradition to contemporary society is in its emphasis on communal ethics. For Ikeke (2020), "the African person is situated within the community and finds his or her identity through engagement in communal life. As such, care for nature is part of one's obligation to the community" (p. 113). That is, destroying the environment is equivalent to hurting the community, and taking care of the environment is synonymous with promoting collective well-being.

➤ *Reviving Indigenous Principles for Ecological Sustainability:*

Against the backdrop of the current environmental crisis in the Niger Delta, there is a necessity to re-activate local environmental ethics. This involves re-educating individuals on indigenous environmental values and integrating such education into formal and informal educational systems. For instance, stories, proverbs, and taboos that support ecological care should be conserved and transmitted to the younger generations.

Ikeke (2012) refers to the promise of indigenous ethical systems to connect environmental science today with local culture. He believes "Africa's traditional values can be

harmonized with contemporary ecological principles to produce a contextually relevant environmental ethic" (p. 140). This synthesis is not rejecting of scientific methods but situates them within actual experiences, beliefs, and ethical systems of communities most immediately impacted.

In the Niger Delta, where communities more often feel a sense of alienation from governmental action and corporate policy, environmental responsibility based on cultural identity and moral obligation might prove more engaging of grassroots involvement. The African traditional worldview provides not only moral warrant but also emotional and spiritual encouragement for environmental stewardship.

VI. TOWARD A CULTURE OF INDIVIDUAL ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE NIGER DELTA

For many years the environmental crisis in the Niger Delta has received attention through its opposition between multinational oil companies and the local population. This way of presenting the issue obscures an essential ethical truth about the system because human activities at both personal and household levels contribute to ecosystem deterioration. This section demands a philosophical change of direction because environmental responsibility should exist at both institutional and personal levels through individual habits and ethical choices.

➢ *Expanding the Scope of Responsibility*
The public perception suggests that oil companies bear full responsibility for harming the environment of the Niger Delta region. Except for their fundamental role in pollution generation the accusations avoid examining how human activities from day-to-day routines collectively harm the environment.

- The results from Elume and Kokori along with Orogun and Kaima and Kula showed that local residents:
- The practice of bush burning leads to decreased biodiversity alongside diminished soil fertility.
- The use of firewood together with kerosene as household energy causes air pollution and destroys forests.
- The act of backing illegal oil refining operations known as bunkering results in harmful contamination of soil and water resources.

The improper disposal of household waste results in drainage blockages and water pollution of rivers. Such practices increase atmospheric particulate matter levels and result in water contamination and damage vegetation together with wildlife habitats. The individual stands as an active member who creates ecological damage instead of remaining an innocent outsider. Environmental responsibility starts from seeing that the environmental issues stem from both external sources and internal choices made by all citizens.

➢ *A Philosophical Reorientation: From Blame to Accountability:*
The combination of biocentric, ecocentric and African traditional ethical perspectives creates an effective philosophical basis for holding individuals responsible for their actions.

Paul Taylor advocates biocentrism which establishes that every form of life carries moral value so people must maintain integrity for non-human beings.

According to Aldo Leopold we need to examine the well-being of full ecosystems because our activities must be judged by their influence on natural stability.

Omorovie Ikeke presents African traditional ethics which show nature exists as a spiritual and moral community that deeply includes human beings.

These traditions share common perspectives about interconnectedness as well as humility and care for all things. All beings exist below nature rather than above it. Damaging the environment goes beyond being unethical because it violates the fundamental order of existence.

- *As Ikeke (2012) Explains:*
In African cosmology nature holds both divine and living character. This worldview mandates not just utility but reverence and moral restraint" (p. 138).

Such reorientation transforms discussions away from pointless blaming of others toward adopting individual accountability. Environmental ethics should start as individual choices between conservation and pollution and regeneration or environmental destruction.

➢ *Environmental Education and Moral Formation:*
Individuals need both ethical instruction and character development to establish a responsible culture. Moral habits require development through values-based environmental education which should operate across all social settings starting from primary schools up to community meetings and continuing to churches and youth clubs.

- *Programs should focus on:*

✓ The education system should teach environmental ethics within civic and moral education programs.
✓ The promotion of domestic sustainability requires teaching people how to use clean cooking methods along with waste recycling techniques.
✓ Encouraging community monitoring of pollution and local conservation efforts.
✓ The recovery of traditional ecological traditional knowledge and ritual ceremonies that focus on nature reverence needs to be revived.

Lifestyle transformation needs to develop from this moral formation process. The creation of an ecological virtuous citizen represents the objective to educate people about how their daily choices impact the planet.

- *Leopold's counsel remains pertinent:*

✓ Leopold explains that building a land ethic requires intellectual development as well as emotional growth because it creates public support for correct actions and condemnation of incorrect choices (Leopold, 1949, p. 225).
✓ People modify their behaviors through communal ethical standards that support correct actions which become learning models for the community.

➢ *Reclaiming Traditional Wisdom and Indigenous Environmental Practices:*

Many Niger Delta communities used to regulate how their inhabitants related to nature through their traditional knowledge systems. The cultural practice forbade the destruction of specific trees and the fishing of particular rivers during breeding seasons and the killing of particular animals. These taboos along with totems served as moral codes which originated from ecological understanding.

Segun Ogungbemi alongside other African philosophers maintains that traditional knowledge systems should be merged with modern ethical frameworks. He writes:

According to traditional African values people share a deep connection with nature which exceeds human-centered ethics. Ogungbemi (1997, p. 207) explains that traditional African values work to build peaceful relationships between people and their environment.

Going back to this smart understanding requires linking ecological lifestyles to cultural heritage. This connection provides environmental responsibility with moral significance which derives equally from philosophical abstraction and cultural heritage.

Traditional celebrations that express gratitude to nature or maintain community participation in environmental projects or ritual rain prayers provide established rituals to conduct environmentally focused actions. These environmental practices make the movement connect better with traditional cultures through the integration of local religious customs and traditions.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research introduces a philosophical structure to analyze environmental duty in the Niger Delta region. The paper shifts focus beyond typical oil company blame by uncovering individual domestic activities that create major environmental damage in this region. The philosophical theories of biocentrism, ecocentrism, and the African traditional worldview offer compelling ethical foundations that affirm the moral worth of non-human life, the integrity of ecosystems, and the sacred interconnectedness of all beings.

Household survey results from Elume, Kokori, Orogun, Kaima and Kula show industrial pollutants join local practices of bush burning and firewood use and kerosene use and illegal oil bunkering as causes of harm to air, water, soil, vegetation and wildlife. Environmental Impact Assessment reports throughout the Niger Delta validate that grassroots degradation of the environment exists alongside corporate responsibility for environmental harm.

Our research demonstrates that individual environmental responsibility needs an ethical transformation to develop into persons who actively belong to natural communities while upholding their duties of care and restraint and stewardship. Sustainable environmental education and virtue development alongside recovery of traditional wisdom enabling people to value Earth as both its economic resource and sacred life system which belongs to us.

SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS

Biocentrism establishes the natural worth of every living creature which drives people to show respect for life regardless of human requirements.

Leopold's version of ecocentrism focuses on ecosystem health and stability because it demonstrates how human communities depend on nonhuman communities.

Traditional environmental ethics in African societies already considered nature as a moral and sacred entity which must be brought back into present-day discussions about the environment.

The environmental crisis in the Niger Delta has both ethical dimensions as well as political and technical characteristics. The solution needs individuals to evolve from being passive victims towards becoming active change agents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations will help advance individual environmental responsibility in the Niger Delta:

➢ Educational organizations together with governmental bodies need to incorporate ecological philosophical and moral teachings into their standard educational programs at every academic level.
➢ Local governments should collaborate with civil society organizations to establish community-level training programs for environmental practice surveillance.
➢ The implementation of solar power and clean cookstoves and eco-friendly technologies should be accessible at community levels to decrease dependency on firewood and kerosene.
➢ Traditional environmental perspectives should be revitalized through the involvement of elders and cultural protectors who will lead indigenous practices for safeguarding nature while combating damaging household behaviors.
➢ Philosophical discussions and public ethics training should take place through multimedia platforms including

- forums and seminars to teach biocentric and ecocentric values in daily life.
- ➢ Interdisciplinary research should continue with additional studies that document the relationships between local ethics and domestic actions and ecological conditions across different parts of the Niger Delta.
- ➢ Environmental philosopher Omorovie Ikeke ((2020, p. 121) correctly asserts that society needs an environmental morality which urges people to treat Earth as their home rather than an object of usage.
- ➢ The goal is to establish environmental ethics through philosophical heritage and daily routines so people in the Niger Delta as well as worldwide communities will develop environmental protection as both communal and individual life practice.

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