



## **The Role of African Traditional Religious Leaders in the Conservation of Marine Life in West Africa**

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### **Abstract**

Marine life occupies a significant position in the life of the traditional African man. The Niger River is the main river of West Africa. Its source is in the Guinea highlands in Southeastern Guinea near the Sierra Leone border. It runs in a crescent shape through Mali, Niger, on the border with Benin and then through Nigeria, discharging through the Niger Delta, into the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. Some West African rivers, Lakes, etc., like “Debo” in Mali, “Kosson” in Cote D’ Ivoire, etc., are receptacles of some African divinities, in African indigenous setting. Their socio-economic importance is enormous. For proper data collection, both the primary and the secondary sources have been adopted. The use of the sociological method is for proper analysis of the data collected. West African rivers, streams, etc., especially in the indigenous society, evoke reverential fear, because of the belief that certain African divinities dwell in them. The African traditional priests, diviners, etc., via this process, in the said situation, encourage a healthy utilization of the above waters and the resources in and around them. This accounts for the economic vibrancy witnessed by the indigenous West African man. This is no longer the case now. Piracy, harmful fishing practices, etc., are posing a great threat to sustainable development in West Africa, today. Thus, the contracting parties of the Abidjan Convention and their partners have called for the conservation of the marine life in this part of the world. The contemporary West African political leaders should, in synergy with the African traditional religious leaders, make and implement stringent laws to protect marine life in West Africa from further abuse.

**Keywords:** Marine Life, Traditional Religious Leaders, West Africa, Conservation, Abidjan Convention.

### **Introduction**

Ordinarily, the term “Marine” concerns itself with the sea. As regards the word “sea”, it deals with a large body of salt water. Usually, marine life has to do with the plants, animals and other

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organisms that live in the salt water of seas or oceans, or the brackish water of coastal estuaries. The world's second-largest ocean is the Atlantic Ocean which lies in the west of Africa. The West African rivers, especially the Niger River, discharge into the said ocean.

Lakes, streams, rivers, etc., in west African traditional set up, like the “Anyinaso River” located in Anyinasuso in the Ashanti region of Ghana, the rivers “Osun”, “Ogun”, “Ogunpa”, “Oba”, “Ose” “Owena”; Niger and lakes, “Oguta”, “Abadaba”, “Usede”, “Atochi”, etc., in South – Western and South –Eastern parts of Nigeria, respectively, are considered sacred; thanks to the African indigenous cosmology which jealously guards the symbiotic relationship between the African man and the divine.

The indigenous African priests and priestesses frown at any attempt to soil the sacredness of the above waters and their immediate surroundings. They preserved the West African rivers, lakes etc., in the traditional setting, by taboos and sanctions .It is pertinent to observe here that the aforesaid streams, lakes, rivers, etc., are restricted to people and fishers whose fishing implements and methods are considered hazardous in the said situation. They (the above waters) are not accessible at night, and during the month preceding a festive period .This is to avoid any form of abuse and encourage a memorable festival that can strengthen the relationship between the people and the divine, since this is capable of improving the socio-religious and economic well-being of the people. Little wonder the traditional African man has a very high regard for the above rivers, streams, etc., in the said set up.

This is no longer the case today, due to unregulated and unsustainable exploitation of some contemporary West African rivers, lakes, etc., by certain fishers, miners, etc. The nefarious activities of the pirates, and some factories owners in this part of the world today, who sometimes pollute the above waters with wastes from their factories, are also posing a great threat to marine life, in contemporary West African countries, thereby impinging sustainable development in this part of Africa.

Unfortunately, certain indigenous priests and priestesses in West Africa today shy away from their socio-religious responsibilities due to the fear of being labeled as pagans or heathens, by Christians and Muslims. Little wonder they pay no attention to the deplorable state of the said streams, rivers etc. A lot of the fish, turtles, etc., in some contemporary West African rivers, streams, lakes etc.,

like “Onuiyi Eke Okwuoha” in Obowo Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria, “Nwangele” in Amainyi Nta Ihitte, of Ihitte/Uboma Local Government Area also in Imo State, Nigeria, Lake Volta of Ghana, etc., have died , as a result of the use of DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) for fishing in the above waters by certain fishers in this section of the globe today. There is no gainsaying that oil spills sometimes witnessed in Angola’s coastal waters, the creeks of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, today, have negatively impacted the standard of living of some contemporary West Africans. This may continue unless traditional African priests and priestesses in this part of the world today, turn over a new leaf and start exercising their duties with diligence, boldness and wisdom. The genuine spirit of the African traditional religion promotes sustainable development in its entirety; therefore any attempt to relegate the said religion to the background must be strongly resisted.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The traditional African man has a very high regard for the marine ecosystem; his overall well-being, to a reasonable extent, depends on the viability of the said environment .The socio-economic, religious and medicinal importance of water, plants, animals, and other organisms that live in the water cannot be over emphasized, as long as the indigenous African man and woman are involved .A sizeable quantity of the pearls, crabs, codfish, etc., are often used in preparing food in African traditional set up, while turtles, seaweeds, etc., are used among other things, in the preparation of traditional medicines, in the above situation. It is a taboo to urinate or defecate around, or into the river, stream, lake, etc., in this part of the globe, in the days of yore. Bringing any form of pollutant or contaminant close to the aforesaid waters in the indigenous African situation is a no-no. The environments of some of these rivers, lakes, etc., like that of the “Abadaba lake” in Obowo Local Government Area Imo of State, Nigeria, are places of worship in the said setting. Such waters, their environments and inhabitants are considered sacred, and thus must be used according to the directives of the African traditional priests or priestesses who are at the service of the deities that live in those streams, rivers, oceans, etc., to avoid the wrath of the ancestors and the gods of the land .It is pertinent to observe here that some marriages contracted in this section of the world in the said set up were the results of the contact between some African sons and daughters during recreational exercises around the above stated environments. Some of the aforesaid priests and priestesses, today, are either adherents of Christianity or Islam. Though

some of them still practice their trades especially at mid night to avoid being noticed and labeled as pagans, by members of the Christian or Islamic sect which they now profess. This, to an extent has led to the abuse of some of the West African oceans, streams, rivers, lakes, etc., and their inhabitants today, by certain contemporary West Africans and even foreigners. Millions of tonnes of plastic now leak from land-based sources into the Atlantic ocean and Gulf of Guinea, polluting the marine ecosystems in them (Aderonke, 2023,P.1). Oil spillage and oily waste, also according to Aderonke(2023, P. 3), in oil –rich countries like Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria are equally posing a very big threat to the marine ecosystems in this part of the world. There is no gainsaying that the extensive theft of local fish by foreign trawlers has left some communities in West Africa today, poorer. Invasive species of plants, animals and microbes are among the greatest threats to the contemporary West African ocean, rivers, etc. For instance, the spread of the invasive South American water hyacinth, “*Eichhorniacrassipes*”, is damaging transport links in Nigeria’s economic capital, Lagos. It forms a thick mat that impedes navigation and halts fishing (Aderonke, 2023, P.4).

The impact of the above ugly situation on the contemporary West African economy is indeed horrible. Traditional priests and priestesses in this part of the globe today must support the recent call for the transformation of the current West African marine sector, for a more resilient and sustainable ocean, river, etc., through the “blue economy”. The blue economy promotes economic growth, social inclusion and preservation of livelihoods, while sustaining the environment (The conversation Africa, 2023, P. 6). Anything in this world that is great and edifying as long as the traditional African man is concerned comes from God. Therefore, the association of the above rivers, streams, etc., with any form of fetishism must be discouraged.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This academic work is aimed at appraising marine life in West Africa. The primary task is to establish whether or not there are viable elements of the African traditional values in the approaches of the indigenous West African priests and priestesses towards the conservation of the aforesaid marine life, in African traditional set up. Again, is the marine life in West Africa of any socio- economic and medicinal significance to the contemporary West African people? Specific to this purpose then are:

- a. To examine the recent concern expressed about the marine life in West Africa by some contemporary scholars like Aderonke Omolara Lawal-Are of the University of Lagos.
- b. To carefully, study the four (4) protocols adopted by the parties to the Abidjan Convention.
- c. To investigate the medicinal implications of the abuse of the above marine life, by certain local and foreign fishers, in contemporary West Africa.
- d. To make contributions by suggesting some objective ways the marine life in contemporary West Africa can be used to promote the socioeconomic well-being of the contemporary West African people.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The relevance of conceptual frameworks in an academic research cannot be overemphasized; they describe the connection between the principal concepts of a study (Obilor, 2021,P.43 ). Permit me to state here that the contribution of Randy Kryn(2014), in Wikipedia(2024,P. 1), is the fulcrum around which the concepts used in this part of our academic work revolve. Marine life, sea life, or ocean life is the plants, animals and other organisms that live in the salt water of seas or oceans, or the brackish water of coastal estuaries (Wikipedia, 2024,P.3). This framework “Marine life” carefully accommodates other terms such as “Marine habitats”, “Marine organisms” and “Marine viruses”.

A marine habitat is a habitat that supports marine life. A habitat normally is an ecological or environmental area inhabited by one or more living species. Marine habitat can be divided into “Coastal” and “Open Ocean” habitats. Coastal habitat are found in the area that extends from as far as the tide comes in on the shoreline out to the edge of the continental shelf. Most marine life is found in coastal habitats. Open ocean habitats are found in the deep ocean beyond the edge of the continental shelf (wikipedia, 2024, P.7). Alternatively, marine habitats can be divided into “Pelagic”and “demersal zones”. Pelagic habitats are found near the surface or in the open water column, away from the bottom of the ocean. Demersal habitats are near or on the bottom of the ocean. Marine habitats can be modified by their inhabitants. Some marine organisms, like corals, kelp, mangroves and seagrasses are ecosystem engineers which reshape the marine environment

to the point where they create further habitat from other organisms. By volume the ocean provide most of the habitable space on the planet (wikipedia, 2024, P.8).

In the worlds of Harvey and Gillaspy (2023), in Study. come (2024,P.3), marine organisms live in a variety of underwater habitats, and the habitats vary based on the chemical and physical properties of that section of ocean. Properties like the salt content of the water, temperature, light penetration and ocean currents dictate where different marine organisms live within the vast oceans of planet earth. Some of these organisms include; plankton, plants and algae, invertebrates, fish, mammals and birds. Plankton includes any organisms that are transported by water movement. Plankton that are capable of producing their own energy through photosynthesis are called “phytoplankton”, while larger plankton which can be classified as animals are referred to as “Zooplankton”. While small plankton are an incredibly important link within the marine food chain (Study. com,2024, P.8).

Many areas of the ocean are not hospitable to plants; most of the areas composing marine environments are too deep to receive sunlight. Plants are photosynthetic they cannot live where sunlight is not found. However, plants found near coastal areas are well adapted to excess ions in their water. Also according to Study.com (2024,p.8), marine algae can be incredibly small to many feet in length. While plant-like in shape kelp is a form of brown algae. Kelp forests offer complex environmental structures to the animals that live there. Green algae and red algae are also types of marine algae. Like plants, algae make their food via photosynthesis.

Ordinarily, invertebrates are organisms without backbones. There are many types of marine invertebrates. Examples include:

- a. Crustaceans (crabs, shrimp, and lobsters),
- b. Mollusks (clams, snails, squid, oysters, scallops, and octopi),
- c. Cnidarians (sea squirts and jelly fish),
- d. Corals and anemones,
- e. Urchins and starfish, etc.(Study.com,2024,P.11).Even though starfish have the word “Fish” in their name, they are not actually fish because fish have backbones, making them vertebrates .There are many varieties of fish in the marine environment, including the tasty sardines and anchovies, as well as sharks and barracudas.

Marine organisms, mostly microorganisms produce oxygen and sequester carbon. Marine life in part, shapes and protects shore lines, and some marine organisms even help create new land; for example, coral building reefs (Wikipedia,2024, P.2). As regards marine viruses, they (marine viruses) are defined by their habitat as viruses that are found in marine environments (Wikipedia,2024, P.10). They are small infectious agents that can only replicate inside the living cells of a host organism, because they need the replication machinery of the host to do so. They can infect all types of life forms, from animals and plants to microorganisms, including bacteria and archaea (Wikipedia,2024, P.17). When, not inside a cell or in the process of infecting a cell, viruses exist in the form of independent particles called “Virions”. A virion contains a genome a long molecule that carries genetic information in the form of either “DNA” or “RNA” surrounded by a capsid ( a protein coat protecting the genetic material).

A teaspoon of seawater typically contains about fifty million viruses (Wikipedia, 2024, P.14). Most of these viruses are bacteriophages which infect and destroy marine bacteria and control the growth of phytoplankton at the base of the marine food web. Bacteriophages are harmless to plants and animals but are essential to the regulation of marine ecosystems. By increasing the amount of respiration in the oceans, viruses are indirectly responsible for reducing the amount of carbondioxide in the atmosphere by approximately 3 gigatonnes of carbon per year. They (viruses ) are the main agents responsible for the rapid destruction of harmful “algal blooms” which often kill other marine life (Wikipedia,2024, P.21).

From the foregoing it is obvious that marine life has the capacity to enhance man’s socioeconomic well-being if properly harnessed. Traditional priests and leaders in West Africa today, contemporary West African people inclusive, must work together to ensure that marine life in this part of the globe is adequately conserved; this is necessary for proper entronement of sustainable development in West Africa.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theory, in the words of Uduigwomen (1996, P.69), is a unified system of laws or hypotheses, with explanatory force. Usually, framework concerns itself with the identification and categorization of processes or steps that constitute a complex task or mindset in order to render explicit the tacit and implicit. Scholars like Obilor (2021, P.44), and Grant and Osanloo (2014),

have written on theoretical framework and in all they agree that “theoretical framework” is based on an existing theory or theories in a field of research that is related and/or reflects the hypothesis of a current study. It is a “blueprint” or a guide for a research. For the purpose of this academic work the conservation of resources theory has been employed.

The conservation of resources theory is well-established theory in psychology that explains how individuals strive to protect and build resources in order to manage stress, cope with adversity, and promote well-being (Theory Hub, 2024, P. 1). According to the said theory also individuals seek to conserve, protect and build resources in three domains: personal resources, social resources, and structural resources. Personal resources refer to an individual’s internal characteristics, such as skills, knowledge, and self esteem. Social resources refer to external resources that come from social networks, such as social support, mentoring, and positive relationships. Structural resources refer to tangible resources that an individual has access to, such as financial resources, equipment, and facilities ( Theory Hub, 2024, P. 3). The core assumption of the conservation theory is that individuals are motivated to maintain and improve their resources because of the instrumental and intrinsic value of these resources (Theory Hub, 2024, P.7).

According to Study.com (2023, P.5), marine resources are oceanic materials that have monetary value or intrinsic value .A resource with monetary value can be harvested, processed, and utilized for economic activities. Resources like fish, oil, and sand all have monetary value. Resources with intrinsic value benefit society in their natural state. For example, marine bacteria and photosynthetic algae consume carbon dioxide and produce oxygen, which is vital for supporting life and moderating the climate. They benefit society without any human intervention.

The call for the conservation of marine life in West Africa by the contracting parties of the Abidjan Convention, like Cote d’Ivoire, Nigeria, etc., and their partners, like the United States Agency for International Development, the World Bank, etc., is timely. Some contemporary West Africans are under a lot of stress; some are frustrated due to under development, abject poverty, etc., caused by the underutilisation, and abuse of the marine life in this part of the world by certain fishers (who sometimes use harmful substances like Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane” (DDT) for fishing), factories owners (Who sometimes empty wastes from their factories into our streams, rivers, etc.), etc.



If West Africa must witness sustainable development today, every contemporary West African; the traditional religious and political leaders inclusive, must play a positive role in the attempt to protect the marine life in this section of the globe by the said contracting parties of the Abidjan convention and their partners.

### **Traditional Religious Leaders**

The religious leaders in West African traditional society are the traditional priest, the medicine man and the diviner. Though it is not rare to find one person combining all these roles in his person (Quarcoopome, 1987, P.74).

The West African traditional priests are the servants of the divinities; they minister in temples, shrines, sacred groves, etc. Some are set aside from birth to dedicate their lives to the priesthood others are called or appointed through the medium of spirit possession. Some others are appointed by succession through the traditional owners of the cult. The post of a chief priest is either inherited or appointed publicly to the office. The chief of a village automatically becomes the chief priest. The king is also a priest to his people since his person is considered as sacred (Quarcoopme, 1987, PP.74-76). As the means of establishing contact between God and the divinities and the ancestors the West African traditional priest is the chief intermediary between the divine and man.

As regards the African indigenous medicine men, Mbiti (1969), in kanu (2015, PP.142-143), writes that the African traditional medicine men or women are the greatest gift to African societies and the most useful source of health. Quarcoopome ( 1987, P.81), anticipates the above view when he opines that the main concern of the traditional African medicine men or women are with sickness, disease and misfortune. The physical aspect of the medicine involves the use of herbal potions prepared from herbs, plants, powders, bones, roots, juices, liquids, minerals, etc., while the spiritual aspect resides in the use of incantations, exorcism and ventriloquism. In the words of Kanu (2015, P.142), the West African traditional medicine men or women are mobile; there are times when they keep the sick in their homes and take care of them. There are also times when they visit the sick in their homes, especially when they are not living far away from the medicine man or woman.

Concerning the West African traditional diviners, they belong to the category of medicine men both in training and duties. They are mainly concerned with the art of divination. This is a method of finding out the unknown or hidden secrets by means of mediums, oracles, being possessed, divination objects, etc. The said diviners are agents of unveiling the mysteries of human life; they find out hidden secrets or knowledge and pass them on to people (Quarcoopome,1987,PP.82-83). Scholars like Kanu (2015,P.149), Adibe (2008), Madu (2004), and Parrinder (1975),have written on diviners in African traditional society, and in all they agree that the African diviners are more interested in the spiritual causes of disease rather than the physical.

A careful look at the aforesaid views indicates that the West African traditional religious leaders occupy a significant position in the lives of the indigenous West African people. Little wonder the directives of the above traditional religious leaders are followed to the letter in the said setting. Sea, streams, rivers, etc., in African indigenous set up are some of the temporary dwellings of some West African divinities, like “Oya” (the River Niger) wife of “Shango”, and “Olajuni”(goddess of the sea), of the Yoruba, in Nigeria; “Tano”, “Pra” and “Bosomtwe” among the Akans (Quarcoopome, 1987, P.72).

The said waters and the resources in and around them are highly cherished in African traditional society. They strengthen the relationship between the traditional West African people and the divine. A situation which contributes positively towards the socioeconomic well-being of the above people. Most rivers, sea, etc., in the above situation are considered sacred, once again, because of their association with some of the West African divinities. In the days of yore , in this part of the world, to fish in rivers like “Mata Fadan” in Kebbi State, Nigeria, without the permission of the custodian of the river “Sarkin Ruwa” who must first perform certain sacrifices to the river oracle to gain its permission (Artsandculture,2024, P. 2), and in the “Fosu” lagoon and the “Benya” lagoon and in the sea, in Fetu Afahye on Cape Coast, and in Elmina, all of Ghana, without the permission of the traditional religious leaders in the said parts of Ghana, is a taboo (La Casa Baatsona, 2024, P.9). This is geared towards the proper conservation of the marine life and the promotion of a cordial relationship between the people and the divinities. As a breach of the principles of the relationship between the divinities and the people will attract the wrath of the gods, and consequently, calamity upon the land.

The traditional West African religious leaders always recommend the use of fishhooks, nets, etc., for fishing. Throwing bottles, whether broken or not, into the river, sea, etc., in the said setting is a no-no. Attacking people who are on board the canoe moving from one community to another via the waterway is frowned at by the above religious leaders, the ancestors, the divinities and the society. There is no gainsaying that the marine life played a significant role in the development of the West African traditional communities.

This is no longer the case now. Today, millions of tonnes of plastic leak from land based sources into the oceans, rivers, etc. Leakage of crude oil and petroleum products and the discharge of untreated waste and chemical into marine ecosystems, illegal fishing, ocean acidity, bioinvasion, etc., are posing a great threat to marine life, in this part of the world today. Certain traditional African religious leaders, now, shy away from their socio-religious duties due to the fear of being labeled “Pagan”, by the Christians and the Muslims in contemporary West Africa. This crop of West African indigenous religious leaders must have a rethink.

The said ugly situation can be remedied if the contemporary West African political leaders work in synergy with the traditional West African religious leaders in the effort to protect the marine life in this section of the world.

### **The Abidjan Convention**

The convention for cooperation in the protection, management and development of the marine and coastal environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West and Central Africa region (Abidjan Convention), according to the UNEP (2024, P.2), came into force in 1984. Its secretariat is based in Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire; it is responsible for the coordination of the convention’s activities. The Abidjan Convention is a framework agreement which was born out of the need for a regional approach to prevent, reduce and control pollution of the marine environment, coastal waters and related river waters in West, Central and Southern Africa.

Permit me to observe here that the above Convention provides a framework for cooperation on marine and coastal environments, knowledge, environmental hazards, pollution, habitats, biodiversity, sustainable resource use and other activities that may have a negative impact on the health of ecosystems. It promotes scientific and technological collaboration (including exchanges

of information and expertise) as a means of identifying and managing environmental issues. The convention's secretariat states its mission is to "Protect, Conserve and Develop the Abidjan Convention Area and its resources for the benefit and well-being of its people" (UNEP, 2024, P.6).

The contracting parties that have ratified the Abidjan Convention are Benin, Cameroon, The Republic of the Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Togo. The formulation and implementation of the programme of work is a collaborative effort based on partnership between the secretariat, governments, donors and non-governmental organizations. Some of these partners are; GRIDArendal, the United States Agency for International Development, the MAVA Foundation, the World Bank, the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations-Institute for Advance Sustainability Studies (Potsdam), the United Nations Division for ocean Affairs and the law of the Sea, and the United States Africa Command (UNEP,2024, P.10).

The key achievements of the said Convention include the following:

- i. The Calabar Protocol on Sustainable Mangrove management;
- ii. GrandBassam Protocol on Pollution from land-based sources and activities;
- iii. Malabo Protocol on environmental standards and Guidelines for offshore Oil and Gas activities;
- iv. Pointe Noire Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone management.

It is pertinent to state here some interesting facts about the Abidjan Convention:

- a. Calabar in Cross River State, Nigeria, has the largest mangrove in Africa and the third largest in the world. The mangrove forests host some of the world's iconic species of fishes, crabs, snails, oysters, red mangrove and *Avicenia* species.
- b. The mangroves protocol is the only protocol of its kind. None of the Regional Seas Conventions have ever developed such an instrument.
- c. Africa's Atlantic Coast is rich in natural resources, biodiversity and marine ecosystems-one of the richest and most productive in the world (UNEP, 2024,p.12).

From the foregoing it is obvious that the Abidjan Convention is making a great effort towards the protection of the marine life in West Africa, which is a significant part of Africa. Unfortunately,

this effort has not been able to eradicate, completely, the five biggest threats to marine life in this section of the globe, which include; plastic waste, oil spillage and oily waste, illegal fishing, ocean acidity and bioinvasion. Perhaps due to the non-inclusion of the West African traditional religious leaders, by the contracting parties of the Convention, and their partners in the attempt to protect marine Life in West Africa.

In the indigenous West African society, the above religious leaders are highly respected. Some of them are custodians of the rivers, lakes, etc., in their communities, which are believed to be some of the temporary dwellings of certain West African divinities. It is a taboo, in the aforesaid set up to visit the said waters or use the resources in and around them, without the permission of the above traditional religious leaders. If marine life in this part of the world today must be properly protected, the said traditional religious leaders must be adequately incorporated, by those who are championing this cause.

## **Evaluation**

The traditional West African man has a very high regard for the sacred. Scholars like Kalu (2002), in Ofomata (2002,p.350), Aguwa (1993), in Anyanwu and Aguwa (1993,P.89), Offiong (1991,P.7) ,Onunwa (2005,p.16), and kayode (1984,pp.18-19), have written on the traditional West African man, and in all they agree that religion permeates every department of his life. Oceans, rivers, etc., and the plants, animals and other organisms that live in them, in the indigenous West African society, occupy a significant position in the traditional West African man's life. They promote his socioeconomic well-being and strengthen his relationship with the divine. No wonder the traditional West African religious leaders frown at any attempt to abuse marine life in this part of the globe, in the above setting.

This is no longer the case today. Certain West African traditional religious leaders, now, shy away from their duties, due to the fear of being labeled as pagans, by some contemporary West African Christians and Muslims. This has led to the abuse of the said marine life. The efforts of the Abidjan Convention and its partners to fix this untoward situation, are yet to bear results that are capable of enthrone sustainable development in its entirety, in West Africa, due to the nefarious activities of certain pirates, illegal fishers, etc ., in West Africa, today. This ugly situation can be remedied if contemporary West African traditional religious leaders work in synergy with our political leaders in the attempt to protect the marine life in this part of the world.

## **Recommendations**

The relevance of the marine life in the traditional West African man's life cannot be overemphasized; it enhances his socioeconomic well-being and strengthens the symbiotic relationship that exists between him and the divine. It is a taboo to use marine life, in the West African indigenous set up, in a manner that is not approved by the West African traditional religious leaders. This is no longer the case today, due to the failure of some of the above religious leaders to live up to expectations. A situation which is posing a great threat to sustainable development in this section of the globe today. To remedy the aforesaid unfortunate situation we recommend the following:

- i. The contracting parties of the Abidjan Convention and their partners must, carefully, involve the West African traditional religious leaders in the attempt to protect the marine life in West Africa.
- ii. Everything good comes from God, thus, the marine life in West Africa must not be, directly or indirectly, associated with any form of fetishism.
- iii. The genuine spirit of the African traditional religious leadership which promotes among other things boldness and altruism must be resuscitated.

## **Conclusion**

Oceans, rivers, etc., and the resources in and around them, in West African traditional setting are highly regarded. They sustain human life, and to a very significant extent, encourage the perpetuity of the society; strengthening the relationship between man and the divine.

This is no longer the case today, due to negligence of duty, on the side of certain West African traditional religious leaders. Oil spillage, plastic waste, illegal fishing, etc., are yet to be completely eliminated in this part of the world, by the efforts of the Abidjan Convention. This is posing a great threat to sustainable development in contemporary West Africa. This may continue unless the genuine spirit of the West African traditional religious leadership which promotes wisdom, togetherness, boldness, etc., which has been relegated to the background by the cowardice of certain West African traditional religious leaders, is properly resuscitated.

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