

PRACTICES OF THE TEACHINGS ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION IN THE FULL GOSPEL CHURCHES OF KENYA EMBU EVURORE DISTRICT, KENYA

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Cite this article in APA

Rubiri, E. K., Kagema, D. N., & Njeru, M. K. (2024). Practices of the teachings on environmental conservation in the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya Embu Evurore District, Kenya. *Journal of pastoral and practical theology*, 3(1), 44-56. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jppt.v3i1.615>



A publication of Editon
Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history

Received: 11.08.2024

Accepted: 07.09.2024

Published: 15.10.2024

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Abstract

This study sought to evaluate the ways in which the church worshippers practice the teachings on environmental conservation in the Full Gospel Churches in Embu Evurore District, Kenya. Despite the Full Gospel Church's teachings on environmental conservation, there is prevalent environmental degradation in Embu Evurore District, Kenya. This study was guided by behaviour change theory, which states that an individual is a victim of their environment. Descriptive formats were used to collect information, analyse, compare and interpret data. The study targeted the five local churches in Embu Evurore District. A Sample population was obtained through a random sampling technique. The findings of the study led to the conclusion that worshippers' awareness of the practices of environmental conservation influenced how they practised environmental conservation. The study also found that there were worshippers who were unaware of the conservation measures. The findings of the study contribute to religious knowledge in Eco-Theology. The findings of this study are beneficial to church leaders as they add insight to policy formulation and decision-making on environmental conservation. The findings of this study will sensitise the worshippers to proper practices in environmental conservation.



Key terms: Conservation, environment, leaders practices, teachings, worshippers.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The environment of the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya Embu Evurore District suffers environmental degradation. This is despite the teachings and the practices (methods of conserving the environment). The question, therefore, is whether the teachings (information passed to worshippers on environmental conservation) influence the worshippers' (members of the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya) practice of environmental conservation (preservation of natural resources). The environment encompasses the totality of human surroundings. It comprises the biosphere, hydrosphere, and atmosphere. The environment consists of both living and non-living things. These include soil, plants, animals, and water. It is upon these resources which man depends for his survival. It is a critical component to the survival of all life on Earth. In the recent past, the environment has suffered degradation as a result of natural events and human activities (Ndung'u, 2013). Destruction of natural resources threatens the survival of man. The man at creation was put in the Garden of Eden to work on it and take care of it (Gen 2:15), and he is accountable to God as a steward over all things that God created. This is the reason why God commanded him to subdue the Earth and have dominion over it (Gen 1:26). God makes man rule over the works of his hands (PS 8:6-8), and one of the best ways that man can do this is through conservation of the environment. The church derives the command of its teachings from the Bible. The influence of these teachings informs the practices of environmental conservation by the worshippers as stewards of God-created environment. The study explored ways the worshippers practised environmental conservation. Man's interaction with the environment has seen him cause degradation. This is despite the church's teachings on environmental conservation measures in a bid to sustain this generation and its benefactors. The environment has suffered degradation due to overgrazing, deforestation and mechanised agriculture (Gottlieb, 1996). He highlights how this has led to tremendous effects on the environment despite the church's teachings on environmental conservation.

The implementation of environmental conservation under the National Development Project in Embu Evurore District dates way back to 2016, with some leaders (people tasked to pass information) trained to disseminate information on environmental conservation (FGCK, Kanyuambora narrative report files 2016). The worshippers were to, in turn, practice this on their farms, but despite the teachings, environmental degradation ranges. It is with this concern that the teaching and practices on environmental conservation were assessed since there was continual environmental degradation in Embu Evurore District. The research sought to find out the influence of the FGCK teachings and practices on environmental conservation in the Embu-Evurore District, Kenya. The study findings will benefit future research in Eco-Theology, Natural theology, Religion and the environment. The study findings will benefit religious people in the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya and other denominations by adding insight into their policy on environmental conservation. The study findings are a challenge to the church in its global contribution to environmental conservation.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of the church in environmental conservation and awareness emerges from the comprehension of individuals as a component of the environment. Gichira (2009) acknowledges that Christians seek nature for signs of God's presence and reason. However, he does not provide guidance on how individuals can

actively engage in environmental conservation, which this study aimed to explore. Muhia and Gathogo (2018) date environmental degradation to Kenya's colonial period. They note that the colonialists introduced new ways of farming, mining, and even hunting. The result was the clearing of large tracts of land. To pave the way for large commercial farming, trees were felled in their millions to provide raw materials for colonial domestic use and for export to mother countries. Their bone of contention is how the environment was destroyed through human activities, but they do not address how the environment could be conserved by redeeming it from the cruel hand of the man who has lorded it without considering its sustainability. This study sought to find out ways the worshippers' of Full Gospel Churches of Kenya Embu Evurore conserve the environment according to the awareness they have from the church.

Douglas (2006) asserts that church leaders can draw specialised knowledge and personal initiative because of their vast knowledge of biblical teachings on the environment. This makes them best placed to spearhead grassroots environment conservation by allowing worshippers to become aware of how they can conserve the environment. Gottlieb (2003) opines that environmental degradation is not only a health danger, an economic catastrophe or an aesthetic blight but also sacrilegious, sinful and an offence against God. The church leadership is positioned in such a way that they can teach the worshippers the best environmental practices.

Nkonge (2016) proposes oiko theology as a way of helping conserve the environment. Oiko, the home of man, forms his environment. Eco-theology teaches man how he ought to conserve the environment. Church members have the duty to jealously take care of the Earth as their home, and this is done through their conservation practices.

Clive (2010) observes that the World Council is aware that climate change mitigation is urgent and notes that the Earth is in peril. He warns that our only home is in jeopardy, and we are at the precipice of self-destruction. To avert this crisis, eco-theology tries to make people understand that God never revoked his first commandment to man, to take care of the environment. Eco-theology appreciates the fact that God is the creator and was very strategic and intentional with his work of creation. Clive does not identify actions to reverse the peril that the Earth suffer or measures to save the Earth from self-destruction. He notes that Man is a glorified caretaker of the environment, and this enhances the image of God in him. The conservation methods that help man to take care of the environment were a concern in this study. Ong'ong'a (1999) ascertains human beings as tenants of the world and God as the 'landlord' of all creation. Worshippers should be involved in the utilisation and protection of natural resources in order to allow them to regenerate and be of use in the future. The churches emphasised that the worshippers should realise that they have a responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature as an essential part of their faith. Christians had, therefore, preserved the particular goodness of plants, water, soil, animals, and mineral resources. Misuse of these environmental resources would bring disastrous consequences to human beings and their environment. On'gong'a does not mention the methods Christians should use to conserve the environment, and this raised concerns in this study.

Gitau (2000) points out that in Africa, environmental conservation initiatives have become a matter of great concern because of their complex, widespread, and long-term contribution to the survival of life.

Africa's underdevelopment has a negative bearing on the environment. This is well exemplified by the magnitude of soil erosion, overgrazing and deforestation in certain parts of the continent. Conservation of protected areas in African countries has been severely affected by many threats and challenges, including over-exploitation of resources, encroachment of natural habitats by increased human population, closure of wildlife migrating corridors and dispersal areas, recurring droughts, desertification, land degradation and inequitable sharing of benefits occurring from natural resources. The impacts of these constraints and limitations manifest in the poor state of the environment in African countries and are a concern in this study.

Thomsons (2014) contends that for any substantial outcomes to be acknowledged towards a healthy environment, there has to be individual and collective effort. The job of every individual Christian, collectively and individually, is fundamental. He is of the view that Churches are institutions for creating awareness which must instruct worshippers on individual duties towards the conservation of the natural environment. The church's role in environmental conservation is significant and in need. Churches are given tasks to instruct and anticipate that their individuals perceive and value the provision of God. Thomsons (2014) view that churches create awareness, enabling members to be dutiful in conserving the environment, was a concern in this study since he does not mention worshippers' practices on environmental conservation.

The church community is part of this environment, which is suffering from deplorable conditions, and therefore, there is a need to identify its teachings concerning environmental conservation. The environment is the mainstay of survival of all life on the face of the Earth, be it in water or land. If not conserved, it can cause extermination of all life through threats like deforestation, burning of fossil fuels, emissions from industries and running engines (Segar, 2022). Practising Environmental conservation is as important as any other God-given command as it is service to God and obedience to God's call to environmental stewardship. This study sought to establish practices of environmental conservation by worshippers in the Embu Evurore District.

Christie (2019) acknowledges that from the perspective of the church, social education is a necessity for the planetary basic resources and further notes that there are objectives to conserve the environment for future generations and to guarantee that humankind's contemporaries live with respect. Whereas Christie recognises church social education as a necessity, the methods for conservation are not explicit. This raised a concern worth investigating among the worshippers of Embu Evurore District. Howard (2017) contends that the degradation of the environment isn't just an economic calamity but also an offence against God. He further contends that human economic activities influence the future of the earth community. Some of the human economic activities that are destroying and degrading the natural environment incorporate poor waste disposal, overgrazing and poor farming methods, which result in the extreme destruction of nature. Howard (2017) does not offer conservation practices to mitigate economic practices that destroy the environment. The concern of this study was whether conservation measures in Embu Evurore District were applied to create a healthy environment.

Blaikie and Brookfield (2015) ascertain that the development and advancement in technology prompt the destruction of the environment as raw materials for industrial production. They outlined the factors resulting in the destruction of the environment as intensive resource depletion and air pollution. Mankind has misused, altered, and degraded nature to the degree that it can barely offer economic sustenance to individuals. Hence, it was a requirement for the church to play this pivotal role of worshippers practising conservation measures, which Blaikie and Brookfield (2015) did not outline as this study sought to ascertain. Horrell (2015) ascertains that the Bible and Christian traditions have legitimated and encouraged humanity's aggressive dominion over nature. A new reading of the Bible is needed to enable the meeting of ecological challenges. He examined a range of Biblical texts that give insight into environmental conservation. Church teachings on environmental conservation are geared towards good stewardship because Christians are not lords over nature but stewards through their environmental conservation practices. He does not give the methods to apply in this conservation insight, and so was a concern in this study. Sayem (2019) asserts that religiously based environmental teachings, moral guidance, and Eco theological ethics are potential agents of environmental sustainability. Faith communities can discern this problem as their own problem. Sayem (2019) does not show the practices of environment conservation by the Faith communities. This study sought to find out how environmental conservation teachings by the church as a faith-based community impacted its worshippers' knowledge of environmental conservation practices in Embu Evurore District. The study sought to find out how the worshippers practised environmental conservation as influenced by the knowledge imparted to them. Worshippers' practice of environmental conservation is key to influencing it.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study was based on the Behaviour Change Theory by Skinner (1938). He opines that the environment impacts the behaviour of an individual. The exposure to environmental conservation practices would influence the methods of environmental conservation that an individual would practice. Behaviour change theory, which was expounded in regard to environmental conservation in Embu Evurore District, influences how worshippers practice environmental conservation. Their behaviour is determined by external physical controls. As people interact with society, they learn to respond in a particular way. Environment, therefore, motivates, reinforces and encourages behaviour. The worshippers of the FGCK Embu Evurore, informed by the teachings on environmental conservation, were influenced by the way they practised environmental conservation. The study utilised a descriptive survey research design to collect both qualitative and quantitative data on environmental conservation. The study used questionnaires and interview schedules to gather data on respondents' feelings, opinions, and reactions concerning environmental conservation. An observation schedule was used to gather data on environmental conservation practices. The data was then analysed, interpreted and presented in tables, graphs and charts. The study was carried out in the FGCK Embu Evurore District. The District has five local churches, within which twenty-one branches are found. The local churches include Ishiara, Kanyuambora, Kamumu, Kanthoki and Gitii. The study population was 2032. According to the table determining sample size from a given population by Kathuri and Pals (2004), a sample of 327 was chosen to represent the population. According to the table, a population of 2000 has a sample of 322, while that of 2200 has a sample of 327. The sample of 327 was chosen since it allowed for inclusivity. To determine the sample representing the sample to be administered with questionnaires, the study used the formula by Israel (2013) for a finite population of less than fifty

thousand. Kothari's (2004) percentage of 20 per cent or 50 per cent can be used to determine sample size where there is no estimate available in the proportion of the target population. There was a total of 50 per cent of the five leaders from the five local churches was 2.5. This was estimated to be 3 leaders to be interviewed to allow for inclusivity. A total of 324 worshippers and 3 leaders formed a sample of 327. The leaders were selected by proportional sampling since they were the key informants, while the worshippers were selected through random sampling since this gave an opportunity for any worshipper to be included in the interview. The study used questionnaires with both open-ended questions. The worshippers filled out their responses to the opinions and feelings in the structured questions. In some questions, the respondents had closed questions, and they chose answers from among the choices given. The questions were thematically arranged according to the objectives. The methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of how the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya influence the Environmental Conservation Practices among the worshippers in the Embu Evurore- District.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Environmental Conservation Practices in FGCK Embu Evurore District

Environmental conservation is a way of exercising dominion over creation, as taught in Genesis 2:15, where human beings are called to preserve nature. The study sought to find out whether the worshippers practised environment conservation as influenced by the teachings of the church.

Table 1: The Worshippers' Environmental Conservation Awareness

Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Very Good	37	12.9%
Good	103	35.8%
Moderate	139	48.3%
Poor	8	2.7%
Very Poor	1	0.3%

Total	288	100%

The study found that environmental awareness was common among the worshippers. The environmental awareness is as tabulated in Table 1, as hereby indicated by 12.9 per cent (37) of the worshippers, who were rated as very good in having information on environmental conservation. The study found that 35.8 per cent (103) were rated as being good in information, while 48.3 per cent (139) were moderately informed. The study established that 2.7 per cent (8) were poorly informed, while 0.3 (1) were very poorly informed. From the study, it is evident that the poorly 2.7 per cent (8) were informed, and the very poorly informed 0.3 per cent (1) were least involved in environmental conservation. Munyua (2024, OI) observes that the sensitisation of worshippers to environmental conservation influenced the way they practised it. Knowledge is power furnishing the worshippers with knowledge on environmental conservation and empowering them with knowledge to practice environmental conservation.

Worshippers' Awareness of Biblical Teachings on Environmental Conservation

Most worshippers were able to cite Biblical teachings that are catalysts for environmental conservation as a way of being obedient to the statutes of God. The Bible verses mostly cited include Genesis chapter 2:15, in which man was commanded by God to take care of the Garden of Eden. Psalm 24:1, where the psalmist cites the Earth as belonging to God, and so Christians are just but caretakers. Matthew 14:20, where after Jesus fed the five thousand, He commanded his disciples to have all leftovers collected. This not only helped keep the environment clean but also avoided the wastage of God's given resources. Deuteronomy 23:25, a hungry person is allowed to pluck the heads of their neighbour's standing corn to satisfy their hunger, but they should not use a sickle to cut these stalks. This would be destructive as it would not allow the corn to regenerate in the following season, making corn stalks lose any further use to man as human food. Munyua (2024, OI) averred that it is sound to teach Christians about environmental conservation so that they can put it into practice. He noted that it was not possible for one to practice what they were unaware of.

Table 2: Worshipper Awareness of Biblical Teachings on Environmental Conservation

Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	239	82.9%
No	49	17.1%
Total	288	100%

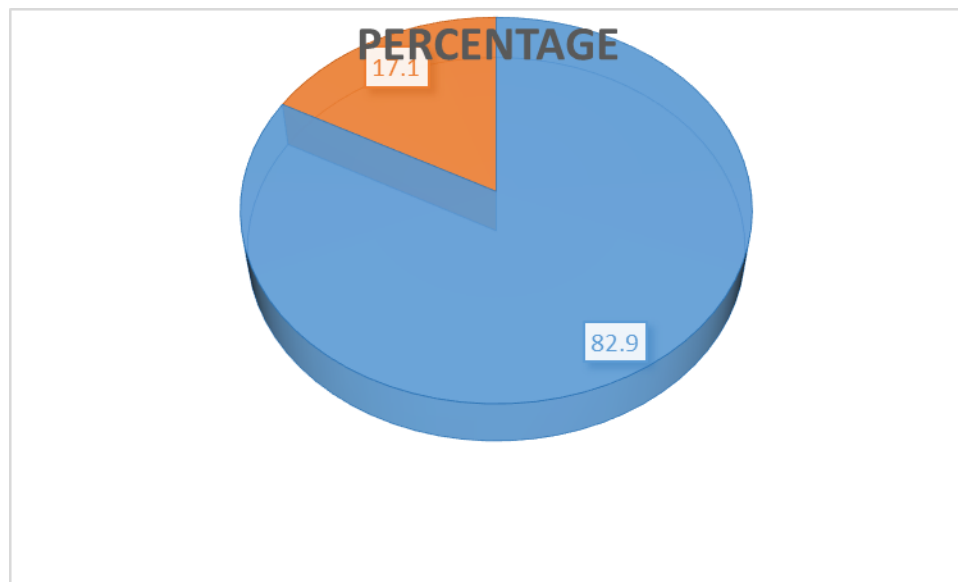


Figure 1: Worshipper's Awareness of the Biblical Teachings on Environmental Conservation

Worshippers' awareness of the importance of the Teachings on environmental Conservation

Gottlieb (1996) notes that God is the creator, and human beings are God's creatures who have been called to care for, cultivate and preserve God's work. The church has the role of imparting knowledge on authentic development support for the efficient use of environmental resources.

The study established that most of the worshippers 91 per cent (260) recognised the importance of being made aware of the need to conserve the environment, while 9 per cent (28) of the worshippers did not attest to the awareness.

Table 3: Worshippers' Awareness of the Importance of Teachings on Environmental Conservation

Awareness of the importance of teaching	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	260	91%
No	28	9%
	288	100%

Most of the worshippers 91 per cent (260) cited the importance of the teachings on environmental conservation awareness as follows: it made them aware of the methods to use in conserving the environment, and they realised the need to plant trees for benefit now and to the future generation. Environment conservation is a bank to guarantee good health in that conserved soils lead to good crop production, which would provide food security. The environment is cleansed of some pollutants like carbon dioxide by the presence of luxurious trees. A green environment is a good sight to behold and adds to the aesthetic value of the environment. The worshippers are aware of better farming methods, which include the harvesting of water surface runoff into pans around the stems of fruit trees. Land carrying capacity for livestock helps control soil erosion. Clearing bushes and collecting litter leads to a clean environment free from vermin like mosquitoes, which are a health hazard and can result in death. Mature trees were cited as of paramount importance due to their shade, which is much needed due to the scorching sun on very sunny days.

Ways the church Influences the Worshippers' Knowledge of Environmental Conservation

The findings of this study indicated that the church had influenced worshippers' response to environmental practices in various ways. This study established that the majority of the worshippers, 91 per cent (260), practised environmental conservation using various methods, as indicated in Table 4. The study also found that 28 (9%) did not relate their practices as influenced by the church. The areas mentioned as having influenced worshippers' knowledge in order of frequency were sensitising on proper disposal of waste at 104 (40%), on suitable farming methods at 96 (36.9%), participation in seminar 43 (16.54%), exposure to government policy on protection of the environment 12 (4.62%), training of leaders 5 (1.92%). Dispersal of published material to worshippers was not mentioned.

Table 4: Church Influence on Worshippers' Knowledge of Conservation Measures

Influence Through	Frequency	Percentage
Proper waste disposal	104	40
Suitable farming methods	96	36.9
Seminars	43	16.54
Government policy exposure	12	4.62
Training of leaders	5	1.92
Total	260	100

The study found that most of the worshippers were informed by the church in their knowledge of environmental conservation. Makanga (2024, OI) asserted that leaders followed up with the worshippers during health education sessions and noted that when the worshippers were healthy, they would participate with vigour when it came to environmental conservation practices.

Ways the Church Participates in Environmental Conservation

Whereas the Full Gospel Church of Kenya has initiated the environmental conservation process, it is the work of individual worshippers to practice environmental conservation. The study found that the church participated in environment conservation practices in the order of the methods mentioned below and in the order of their frequencies and percentages tabulated below:

Table 5: Church Participation in Environmental Conservation

Method of Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Tree planting	122	48.4%
Proper ways of cultivation	81	32.1%
Proper waste disposal	39	15.5%
Constructing a good drainage system	10	4.0 %

The study established that the majority of the worshippers, 90.6 per cent (228), responded positively to church participation in environmental conservation, while 9.4 per cent (24) of worshippers had a negative response. The study captured the following ways of participation in order of how common they were in practice. Tree planting was the most common, with 122 (48.4 %). Proper cultivation methods were at 81 (32.1%). Proper waste disposal was mentioned by 39 worshippers, which constituted 15.5 per cent of the total waste disposal. The construction of good drainage systems had 10 responses, which constituted 4 per cent of the total. The study indicated that 9.4 per cent of 36 respondents indicated that they had not participated in environmental conservation. The main reason for being unaware of the church's participation in environmental conservation was the short length of stay in the local churches to which they belonged. Others cited major reasons as lack of information. Some members noted that they lacked leadership. The study conclusion was that most worshippers in Embu Evurore District practised environmental conservation methods. The study was informed by Munyua (2024 OI) that some of the activities undertaken in conserving the environment were damming soil where galleys existed and farming

in God's way. Some members planted seedlings, which they transplanted to their farms and sold surplus to those who sought them. The reuse of empty milk sachets was evident in environmental conservation since the empty sachets would end up in landfills or as water pollutants.

Concern on environmental conservation in Embu Evurore District

This study sought to find out if the worshippers were concerned with the status of environment conservation in the area. The study found that all the worshippers, 288 (100%), were concerned about the prevailing state of environmental degradation in Embu Evurore District. They cited the methods that can be used to conserve the environment as Tree planting, proper waste disposal, good farming practices, protecting water catchment areas, checking on livestock population and the land carrying capacity where some of them have turned to zero grazing with goat kept in pens. Some of the respondents cultivate their own nurseries to provide seedlings. This is evidence of skills well internalised and being put into practice. The seedlings were planted and watered during the dry season so that they could be ready for transplanting during the wet season.

Frequency of Sensitisation on the Environmental Conservation

The study sought to find out how often the worshippers were sensitised on environmental conservation, and it found out that 4.2 per cent (12) attested to frequent sensitisation, 31.3 per cent (90) to having often sensitised, 54.1 per cent (156) as having sensitisation rarely done and 10.4 per cent (30) had not participated to any sensitisation session.

Table 6: Sensitisation on Environmental Conservation

Sensitisation	Frequency	Percentage
More often	12	4.2%
Often	90	31.2%
Rarely	156	54.1%
Not at all	30	10.4%

This study found that the degree of sensitisation influenced the worshippers' active role in environmental conservation. The degree of sensitisation influenced their cognition on methods of conservation, with some unaware of how their activities negatively impacted the environment, for example, tree felling for charcoal burning. Some lacked the seriousness of practising environmental conservation measures, especially proper farming methods. Farming along riverbanks was also cited as a practice that caused erosion and siltation of river beds, resulting in floods during heavy rains. Worshippers who often and more often participated in environmental conservation sensitisation were aware of the methods of environmental conservation practices and were well equipped with environmental conservation measures. The worshippers willingly planted trees and practised proper farming methods.

The study was informed by the interview tool that worshippers used various methods in environmental conservation in Embu Evurore District. All were in agreement that tree planting was a method used in environmental conservation. They practised terracing to control soil erosion. All the interviewees agreed

that seminars were used to disseminate knowledge on environmental conservation. Munyua (2024, OI) highlights farming in God’s way as one of the methods used in conserving the environment in Embu Evurore District. The method involves minimal tillage, early planting and early weeding, mulching, making water pans at the tree stems and making water trenches to trap water during the rainy season. Nguru (2024, OI) opined that community health empowerment is one of the major ways that the worshippers in Embu Evurore District received information on environmental conservation. Public places clean ups and table banking empowered the worshippers economically, making them meet financial obligations and equipping them to meet the challenges encountered during environmental conservation practices.

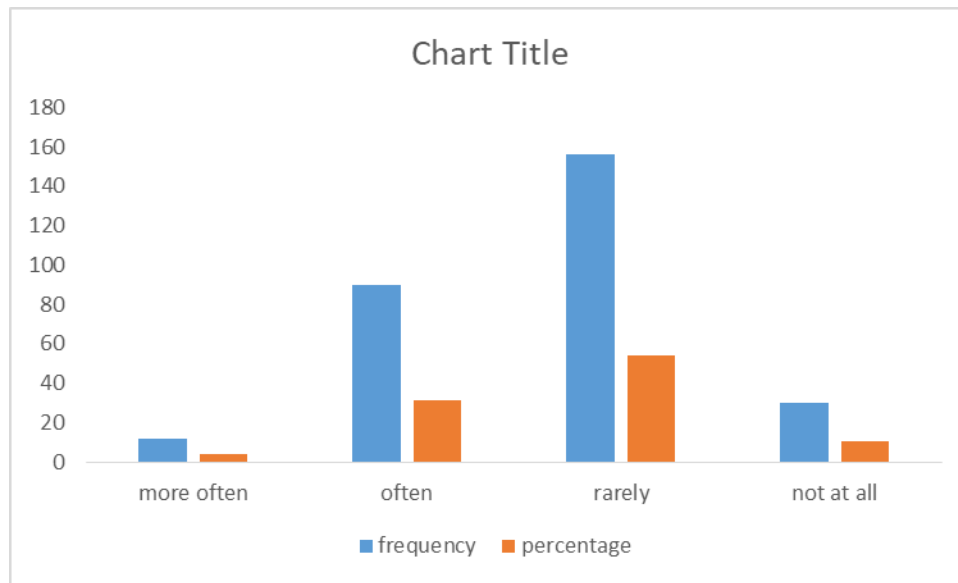


Figure 2: Sensitisation on Conservation of the Environment

Worshippers Activeness on Environmental Conservation

The study sought to find out the worshippers' activeness in environmental conservation. Howard (2017) contends that human economic activities influence the future of the earth community due to overgrazed land, poor waste disposal and poor farming methods. The study found the participation of environmental conservation and the frequency of environmental conservation as was as tabulated below.

Table 7: Worshippers’ Activeness on Environmental Conservation

Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Very active	23	7.986
Active	219	76.042
Not Active	46	15.972
Total	288	100

The study found that most of the worshippers, 76.042 per cent (219), are active in environmental conservation. The study found that 15.972 per cent (46) of worshippers were not active in environmental

conservation, while 7.786 per cent (23) were found to be very active. Those who were very active, 7.986 per cent (23), and those active 76.042 (219) were found to practice good farming methods like mulching, use of terraces and stone ridges, planting trees and draining stagnant water. Digging of cisterns and water pans to collect rainwater was noted. Others planted sisal plants to control soil erosion and keep their compounds clean. They avoided burning plant remains but instead used them to build ridges that controlled soil erosion and, in the long run, formed humus in the farms. The study indicated that worshippers actively engaged in environmental conservation.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study, therefore, concluded that the majority of the worshippers in Embu Evurore District practised environmental conservation measures of 92.014 per cent (219). The study found that there were worshippers who did not practice environmental conservation 15.972 (46). The study found that not all worshippers had an awareness of environmental conservation practices. The awareness of the worshippers on environmental conservation measures was, therefore, a major factor that influenced how they participated in conserving the environment. Most worshippers practised environmental conservation.

Recommendations: This study recommended that church leaders in both the FGCK and other religious denominations should have elaborate policies guiding their church's environmental conservation programmes. Also, religious organisations should plan on how to source finance to support environmental conservation.

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