

Echoes of Yoruba Indigenous Environmental Knowledge in Ipokia Traditional Songs

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Abstract

In response to the growing need for diverse approaches to addressing the current global environmental challenges, this paper investigates the indigenous environmental knowledge embedded within the musical culture of Ipokia, a Yoruba community in south western Nigeria. By employing ethnomusicological methods (which includes fieldwork, analysis of musical structure of songs and concepts of the lyrics) and theories of sustainable development and ecocriticism, this paper provides a nuanced understanding of the intricate relationship between music, environment and society in Ipokia. A close analysis of many Ipokia folksongs reveal that they promote principles of inclusivity, respect, cooperation, mutual aid, moderation and equity. These principles form the foundational basis for the community's conceptualization of the environment and societal well-being. This understanding highlights the significance of traditional knowledge in addressing contemporary environmental issues. This paper offers innovative theoretical frameworks and pathways for examining the intersectionality of environmental sustainability, music, and societal dynamics within a transdisciplinary discourse. By preserving and interpreting the cultural ecological heritage of Ipokia, this article helps to safeguard it for future generations, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of environmental sustainability and community development. Ultimately, this paper underscores the importance of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices in informing sustainable development initiatives and promoting environmental stewardship.

Keywords: *Environmental Knowledge, Environmental Sustainability, Indigenous Knowledge, Ipokia Music, Traditional Songs, Yoruba Musical Traditions.*

INTRODUCTION

The environment provides foundational resources for human development, and the Aboriginal cultures embody a wealth of autochthonous environmental knowledge, ensconced within the indigenous knowledge system.

This knowledge has historically sustained the societies by promoting practices that ensure food security, resource conservation biodiversity, and sustainable environmental management.

For instance, the use of regular low intensity fires by some First American Nations to manage grasslands and forests helped to clear underbrush, reduce risks of wildfires and promote growth of fire-adapted plants (Berkes et al., 2000); the Māori developed unique, low impact fishing techniques that prevented overfishing and disruption of the ecosystem (King et

al., 2008); and various communal resource management systems where the use of natural resources such as water and land are regulated and safeguarded by traditional African authorities through the practice of collective responsibility (Roe and Nelson, 2009).

Many of such indigenous ecological knowledges are intricately interwoven and archived within African musical traditions.

The music of the Yoruba, (one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, located in the southwestern region) is a composite of African musical traditions, and a treasure trove of indigenous knowledge that is crucial for the psychological and philosophical mobilization for development.

Thus, much of the cultural and environmental knowledge heritage of the Yoruba is embedded and preserved in its musical traditions and practices. This includes values and codes of interrelationships between humans, elements, flora and fauna of the environment, - and often incorporating principles that promote respect for nature and conservation of natural resources.

In recent decades, numerous scholars have engaged with Yoruba music and culture from various perspectives. For example, Euba (1999) analyzed the structures of traditional Yoruba musical forms; Fela Sowande and Akin Euba experimented with integrating Yoruba musical idioms into global musical forms (Akrofi, 2006; Sadoh, 2009); and Omojola, Omojola (2000; 2012; 2015) examined the sociocultural significance of Yoruba music and its interactions with contemporary African and global musical practices.

However, despite the growing need for diverse approaches to addressing the current global environmental crisis, the growing interest in sustainability, and the pressing environmental degradation in southwestern Nigeria which like the rest of the country, faces significant environmental degradation, few Yoruba music scholars, such as Titus (2017; 2019; 2021), have examined environmental issues.

Consequently, there is a notable gap in scholarly engagement with Yoruba folksongs that focus on environmental and societal sustainability connections. This study aims to bridge that gap by uncovering the indigenous environmental concepts, knowledge, values, and practices embedded in Yoruba indigenous songs, and to explore how this art embodies and transmits this ecological information, principles, and practices.

In order to do this, it focuses on indigenous songs of Ipokia, a Yoruba town in Ogun State, Nigeria which features a diverse landscape of wetlands, forests, and farmland. While rich in natural resources, like most towns in Nigeria, it faces environmental threats from deforestation, agricultural expansion, and unsustainable practices.

The Ipokia people maintain a rich cultural heritage conveyed through the local Yoruba dialect, Anago. Ipokia town has a diverse economy that relies heavily on agriculture, supporting over half its population, as well as fishing, trading and artisanal work (Ogundele, Odewumi, and Ganniy 2013). Ipokia, like other communities in Nigeria blends traditional governance structures with the modern, consequently, Oba [the traditional king], and chiefs are accorded significant roles in the community. While Traditional Yoruba religion, Christianity, and Islam are the main religions, others, including the Bahá'í Faith, are practiced. Adherence to more than one religion is also common. The Ipokia trace their lineage to Ijebu, one of the oldest Yoruba Kingdoms (Olanrewaju, 2021). Its environmental landscape and sociocultural heritage offer unique narratives.



Figure 1: Map of Ipokia Town in Ipokia Local Government Area

This paper, which focuses on relationships between music and the natural environment within cultural and social contexts, offers a framework for incorporating indigenous knowledge system in engaging contemporary environmental challenges, and highlights the role of music as a vehicle for ecological awareness and sustainability. Its multidisciplinary approach allows for a broader understanding of interconnections between music, environment and culture, and adds to the relatively new field of ecomusicology. Since it provides a unique perspective on how music reflects and influences environmental values, it provides innovative theoretical frameworks with which to analyse society in Ipokia community within the context of

environmental sustainability. It thus adds a fresh perspective by examining non-Western, indigenous musical traditions in relation to environmental ethics and sustainability.

As Nigeria undergoes rapid globalization, there is a risk of traditional knowledge and practices being lost. This research recalls, documents and interprets relevant cultural ecological heritage and helps to safeguard it for future generations. It also provides resources for scholars in environmental humanities, ethnomusicology, indigenous studies and spiritualities, for further exploration.

Environmental Concepts

The environment is a multifaceted concept that includes physical, biological, chemical and human dimensions. It encompasses both natural elements, such as air, water, soil, and biodiversity, as well as anthropogenic factors like cities, infrastructure, and pollution sources. These elements interact intricately to shape the planet's ecosystems and societies (Ruiz-Mallén & Corbera (2017). The environment is vital for sustaining life, providing essential resources like food, water, and materials, and supporting ecological processes that maintain biodiversity and ecosystem services. Environmental degradation occurs when natural resources are overexploited, polluted, or altered in ways that reduce their capacity to support life, leading to issues such as habitat loss, deforestation, desertification, and climate change.

Sometimes environment is used interchangeably with ecology. They however have subtle differences in their scope and focus. Ecology has to do with the interactions of organisms of the environment with each other and their influence on the broader abiotic and biotic aspects and processes of the environment (Begon et al., 2006; Molles 2019) and vice versa.

Indigenous Environmental Knowledge (IEK) refers to the cultural understanding and practices of Indigenous peoples of their immediate surroundings. It encompasses the physical, social, and biological aspects of their relationship with the environment. This system of values, practices, and ideas is shaped by the daily experiences of long-term inhabitants and their close interactions with the local environment (Thornton, 2014). Accumulated over generations, IEK encompasses the knowledge and practices developed by Indigenous peoples over centuries. It includes a wide range of information, such as knowledge of plants, animals, weather patterns, landscapes, sustainable harvesting, and land stewardship.

Preserved through cultural taboos and beliefs, IEK is widely recognized as a critical resource for sustainable environmental management and conservation efforts (Adesawe, 2023). It offers unique insights into species behavior, habitat management, and climate patterns that conventional scientific methods often overlook (Agrawal, 1995). This complex and dynamic body of knowledge evolves through adaptive processes and is transmitted across generations through oral traditions, rituals, and cultural practices, including music. Holistic in nature, IEK integrates ecological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, reflecting a deeply interconnected understanding of the relationships between humans, other living beings, and the environment.

The Yoruba environmental knowledge embodies a profound understanding of the natural world and its interconnectedness with human societies. Rooted in traditional beliefs and practices, it integrates ecological wisdom, resource management, and spiritual reverence for nature (Adesawe, 2023). A central aspect of Yoruba culture is the concept of Orisha, [deities] associated with natural elements such as rivers, forests, and animals, which fosters respect and sustainable interactions with these resources (Ojo, 2017). This notion is also prevalent in many African societies. For instance, among the neighboring Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, the elements of the environment—such as bodies of water, flora and fauna, hills, mountains,

valleys, land, and sky—are conceptualized as the abodes of various spirits (Ilogu, 1974). As such, these natural elements are treated with respect and honor since they have the power to protect or punish. This belief encourages moderation, consideration, and respect in the harvesting environmental resources. It is believed that failure to observe these principles can lead to adverse consequences for both individuals and the wider community.

Yoruba environmental knowledge emphasizes harmony between humans and the environment and advocates for sustainable resource use and resilience against environmental degradation (Adepetun, 2018). Some of these IEK are domiciled in stories, songs and literature which contain expressions of an environmental worldview, including how creation came into being, the need to conserve natural resources, warnings against abuse of the environment and maintenance of good relationship with it.

Traditional Songs

Traditional songs are indigenous songs that are deeply rooted in various cultures. Embedded in them are philosophical issues of life and the cultural value systems. They serve as vital channels for education and communication within specific cultural contexts. Characterized by anonymous composers and passed down through oral transmission, traditional songs preserve cultures across generations (Euba, 1970).

Indigenous African music is the product of the synthesis of the metaphysical, psychic, psychological and physical energies that produce behaviors which give rise to musical sounds (Nzewi and Nzewi, 2007). In African societies in general, the primary stimulants for music creativity are extra musical considerations, concepts and practices rather than artistic intentions. Thus, music-making involves the utilitarian creativity of the mind, which manifests as both sound and visual imagery. This perspective underscores the understanding that every musical sound is shaped by non-musical incentives, notions, and intents. Thus, the African traditional music is a vibrant and varied cultural form which is strongly anchored in oral traditions and community-based practices. It plays vital role in promoting social unity, enhancing spiritual ceremonies, and preserving history and the art of storytelling within African cultures. It relies heavily on improvisation and oral transmission, and fosters creativity and adaptation during performances.

Nzewi (2003) emphasizes the significance of rhythm, melody, and interwoven patterns that display intricate polyrhythms and call-and-response techniques in African music. Collective participation in vocal forms, particularly through call-and-response, strengthens social bonds within communities. Similarly, Nketia (2005) points out the richness of African musical styles, often defined by complex rhythms, group involvement, and integration into everyday life. Percussion instruments such as drums and xylophones are key, as they offer both rhythmic structure and melodic depth (Kubik, 2010).

Yoruba traditional songs reflect the forementioned utilitarian creativity of African music. They emphasize both sound and imagery, and extends beyond entertainment to include the profound societal intentions and effects they generate. They are interwoven into every stage of life, and highlight the important dynamics of human existence Vidal (1977).

MATERIALS AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

We employed a combination of field and analytical methods as well as an indigenist approach (an investigation by Indigenous people and which is informed by Indigenous philosophies, theories, and methods [Wilson 2007]) to examine the lyrics and musical

structures of selected songs. These songs were chosen for their direct and indirect references to environmental themes. About 50 songs were accessed, 30 were recorded on the field and these include story songs, dance, ritual, private, ceremonial and children's songs. Interviews were conducted with four experts in the musical and cultural traditions of Ipokia in order to achieve deeper insights into meanings and concepts of the songs.

Local ethics review was not sought because the research did not present any kind of risks to the participants and the society, and the required data is in the traditional Yoruba public domain. Communication was in Yoruba, and one of the authors, a member of that culture, had previous consultations with the participants about potential cultural sensitivities.

From the transcription, analysis and interpretation of the data, this paper asserts that some Ipokia songs engage with the environment and argues that they often use imageries and representations of animals, and the supernatural to do this. The Sustainable Development and Ecocriticism theories have been used to explore and give insights to the indigenous environmental principles and practices embedded in Ipokia songs.

Sustainable Development Approach

Sustainable development is an approach whose framework is built on (1) Economic Growth – Long-term, equitable economic development, (2) Social Inclusion – Fairness and equality for all members of society, and (3) Environmental Protection – Preservation of natural resources and biodiversity. It emerged from global discussions on the interconnectedness between human development and environmental stewardship (World Commission on Environment and Development, [WCED] 1987).

The concept of sustainable development arose from the need to address challenges posed by the unsustainable use of natural resources, environmental degradation, and social inequality. The Industrial Revolution of the 19th century caused significant environmental changes and resource depletion, sparking early conservation movements. Activists like Gifford Pinchot and John Muir, in the early 20th century, advocated for the responsible use of natural resources as early conservation efforts focused on protecting forests, wildlife, and national parks (WCED, 1987). After World War II, newly independent nations prioritized economic development to industrialize and improve living standards. However, by the 1960s and 1970s, it became evident that rapid industrial growth was depleting natural resources and causing environmental harm. The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm marked a pivotal moment, as global leaders acknowledged the need to balance development with environmental preservation (United Nations, 1972).

The formal concept of sustainable development was defined in the 1987 Brundtland Report and provided the widely accepted definition: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 45). This report linked environmental health with social and economic development and set the stage for global action. The sustainable development approach emphasizes that development must balance economic, ecological and social impacts. It advocates for the responsible use of natural resources, ensuring that ecosystems remain resilient and continue providing essential services like clean air, water, and fertile soil.

African Indigenous Knowledge systems have long embraced responsible resource management which ensured environmental sustainability for generations. For example, sustainable agricultural practices such as crop rotation, agroforestry, and organic farming protected soil health and biodiversity, safeguarding long-term productivity. Regulations on the

use of environmental resources helped protect ecosystems like rainforests and wetlands, preserving biodiversity and promoting ecological balance. In African cultures, the social equity in sustainable development extends beyond humans to inclusively consider fauna, flora, and even the supernatural. This ensures that IEK policies do not disproportionately affect weak communities. Principles of sustainability are examined in Ipokia traditional songs - how they reflect responsible environmental practices and promote social and ecological balance. Thus, the relevance of the sustainable development framework in this study.

Ecocriticism Theory

Ecocriticism offers a framework for analyzing Ipokia songs through the lens of IEK. It is an interdisciplinary literary and cultural theory that examines the relationship between literature, culture, and the physical environment, and focuses on how nature and ecological themes are reflected in texts. Although the term “ecocriticism” was coined by William Rueckert in 1978, its foundations were laid in the 19th century by philosophers and writers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Ralph Emerson who explored humanity's place within nature (Garrard, 2012). These literary scholars advocated for a more harmonious relationship with the natural world (Buell, 1995).

Ecocriticism emerged as a response to growing environmental concerns and evaluates how literature and art represent nature and ecological issues. It encourages a reevaluation of human interactions with the environment and extracts from theoretical perspectives such as feminism, postcolonialism, and deconstruction to explore themes like sustainability, nature, and the interconnectedness of all living things. While initially centered on literary analysis, ecocriticism has expanded to encompass a broad array of media, including film, art, popular culture, and music, thus, engaging with global perspectives on issues such as environmental justice, climate change, and the Anthropocene.

Ecocriticism examines how nature is portrayed, often critiquing anthropocentric representations (Garrard, 2012). While emphasizing the interconnectedness of all life forms and how human experiences are deeply rooted in the natural world (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996), it also recognizes that environmental issues are entangled with politics, economics, and culture, and thus takes into account the cultural, historical, and social contexts (Bennett, 2010). Ecocriticism promotes responsibility toward the environment and considers the moral implications of human relationships with nature (Buell, 1995). It investigates how texts engage with environmental issues, advocates for change, and highlights the role of indigenous voices and traditional ecological knowledge in shaping sustainable practices (Nash, 2001). It responds to crises such as climate change, deforestation, and biodiversity loss, raises awareness of environmental degradation and advocates for ecological justice (Morton, 2007).

Ecocriticism reveals the intricate connections between culture, environment, and social issues. Carrying out this investigation within the ecocriticism framework and examining the ways in which folksongs represent nature, express cultural identity, critique environmental challenges, preserve indigenous knowledge, and promote community action, affords deeper insights to the environmental concepts, values and practices embedded, either directly or indirectly, in Ipokia songs.

Here we situate Yoruba folksongs, particularly those of the Ipokia society, as carriers of indigenous knowledge. The songs encapsulate environmental principles that have traditionally guided the community in maintaining ecological balance and sustainability. This approach merges ecological and ethnomusicological perspectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The indigenous Ipokia music is interlaced with the religious and social life of the people and serves utilitarian purpose as it engages and addresses cultural needs. This results to two broad categories of music, namely, religious and social music. Religious music includes music used in traditional religious occasions such as invocation, appeasement, worship of the orisha including Sango (god of thunder) and Ogun (god of iron) and other deities. Social music is used for various festivals and ceremonies and other non-religious occasions when a group of people gather together. These include work songs, praise songs, ceremonial songs, music used by various age groups, children's music and other songs used for various functions. Within these broad functional categories of music as well as their subdivisions, are songs that have direct and indirect connotations of the environment.

Musical instruments are very important in Yoruba music and often consist of multiple layers of percussion including *dùdùn*, *bàtá*, *gángan* [drums of different sizes and shapes] and *sékere* [shakers]. String and wind instrument are fewer. Musical instruments often accompany traditional songs and enhance environmental communication through their musical roles, cultural significance and the fact that their materials are often directly sourced from nature.

In general, Ipokia music not only entertains but more importantly educates on the history and identity, provides correct atmospheres for cultural and religious activities, aids in communion with the deities and the metaphysical, and enhances the mechanisms of maintenance of laws, norms and values of the Ipokia society. In addition, ecological principles, and values are showcased in some of these songs.

Structural Forms of Ipokia Music

The arrangement and performance of the basic structural features of Ipokia music (such as form, harmony, instrumentation, melody, rhythm, repetition, scale, tonal organization, improvisation and vocal techniques) are implements for the stewardship of the environment. Ipokia traditional songs exhibit various structural forms which include solos and alternations between solo and chorus (see Musical Example 1).

Musical Example 1. Solo and Chorus/Refrain (Excerpts from Ojo maro)

The musical notation is presented in three systems, each with a Solo (So) and Refrain (R) part. The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 6/8.

System 1:
 Solo: O - joo ma__ ro, o - joo ma__ ro,
 Refrain: i - wu i - tu - ra l'o je,

System 2:
 So: O - joo ma__ ro, o - joo ma__ ro,
 R: i - wu i - tu - ra l'o je.

System 3:
 So: Bi o ba ro bi o ba
 R: i - gba - do o le__ ta,

The artistically crafted solos, which are sometimes executed in the speak-singing style enables deep expressions of implied and direct communications about the environment, and these have profound and lasting effect on the audience. The prevalent antiphonal structures of call-and-response and the dynamism it conveys, invites audience participation and creates a point of convergence for both spectators and performers, thereby fostering a sense of unity in the collective experience. These various structural forms in Ipokia music enhance the expressiveness of songs and facilitate the communication of desired environmental values as both the performer and audience engage in the music and its message.

The arrangement of the rise and fall of the melodic tones ensures the maintenance of correct tonal inflection of the language and enhances communication. They also reflect depth of sentiments, convey intricate emotions, express concepts and imitate actions. Short melodic motifs which are often subjected to repetition are rampant. Repetition emphasizes and helps retain the message of the music.

Intricate and simple rhythmic patterns may exist separately or together in a piece in Ipokia songs. These rhythmic patterns reinforce the communication of ecological values and norms by mirroring the textual rhythms, thereby amplifying their impact.

Harmonic Structure

Harmony (the simultaneous combination of different tones) helps to enrich the sonic qualities making it more enjoyable to listen to and thus, enhancing the communication ability inherent in Ipokia music. This augurs well for communication of environmental principles and values. For instance in the song used to invoke Sango, harmony serves to convey and stimulate the power and awe associated with Sango in the song.

Song Text

Reading the song text within the context of the indigenous knowledge system reveals Yoruba ecological philosophies. Words couched in music reach depths of emotion in both the physical and the metaphysical and are effective in arousing to action. This is apparent in the song text of *Ojo Maro* (see Example 1), which the Ipokia consider effective in invoking and arousing the spirit of rain. Olarinyan (female, cultural custodian of Ipokia, 60 years old) explained that farmers often perform such songs during the farming season in order to enhance supplication for rain so as to ensure bountiful harvests.

Example 1. Ojo Maar o

<i>Òjò máar ò</i>	Rain keep falling
<i>Iwu itura lójé</i>	It is a source of relief
<i>Bòò ba rò igbàdo òleèta</i>	Maize cannot yield its fruit if you do not fall
<i>Bòò ba ro pákí ò lè ta</i>	Cassava cannot yield
<i>Isu òlè ta</i>	Yam cannot yield

Respect and reverence for the supernatural elements of the environment, the knowledge of the importance of rain for agriculture and sustenance, as well as the devastating consequences of drought to farmers and the general livelihood of the people are articulated in this song. The song highlights the dependence of humans on the environment, therefore respect and veneration are accorded to the rain spirit in the invocation, in acknowledgement of its role in ecological and societal wellbeing. This is because water in form of rain is vital and without

it the society cannot survive. Any activity that could provoke ill feelings in the spirit of the rain is strongly avoided. Ahmed indicated that these activities may include malevolent acts, social vices against others and disrespect toward elements of the environment. Example 2 highlights communalism and its intrinsic duty of care in Ipokia culture.

Example 2 Excerpts from *Íbú mì*

<i>Íbú mì ò</i>	Something is insulting me o
<i>Sangisa</i>	Sangisa
<i>Ìròkò bú nì mì ò</i>	Iroko tree is insulting me o
<i>Mi la fejó sun bàbá</i>	I went to report to my father
<i>Bàbá ò dámi lóhùn</i>	My father did not answer me
<i>Mi la fejó sun màamá</i>	I went to report to my mother
<i>Màamá ò dámi lóhùn</i>	Mother did not answer me
<i>Wón lá wọn ófẹ wàhálà olúwéré</i>	They said they cannot face Iroko tree
<i>Tání hù fejó ìròkò sùn</i>	Who then can I report Iroko tree to
<i>Mi la fejó sun igi àràbà</i>	I will report to Araba tree
<i>Opé lọ pé igi àràbà</i>	All thanks to Araba tree
<i>Tó gbà mí lọwọ ìròkò olúwéré</i>	Who delivered me from Iroko tree

The child in this song cannot receive any succor from either of his/her parents as the tormentor, the Iroko tree (African teak) *milicia excelsa* is more powerful than both of them. However, an equally powerful, wise and understanding Araba (Kapok) *ceiba pentandra* could challenge the Iroko and was able to protect and save her/him. Both the Iroko and Araba are massive trees, economically significant, culturally important, and regarded as divine in Yoruba culture. Not only do their sprawling canopy provide shelter and protection for several plant and animal species who make it their habitats, they also offer dwelling places to spirits and deities. In addition, parts of the tree are used for various purposes, including herbal remedies, arts, crafts and more. These trees represent power, wisdom, fertility and continuity, and provide for societal wellbeing. In the song above, the role of Araba reflects the collective responsibility of care within a communal society. In the past, probably before the advent of colonial administration in 1861 in Nigeria, it was a collective responsibility to ensure the wellbeing support, and protection of fellow members within the community, particularly children.

Thus, parents did not shoulder the responsibility of raising their children alone, as the community has a collective stake in the well-being and upbringing which is intertwined with the community's interests and responsibility. This song text underscores duty of care, cooperation, inclusivity and interconnectedness with nature, indicating that everyone plays a role which contributes in ensuring the wellbeing of all and continuity of the society and the environment. Since elements of the natural environment are regarded as members of the community it is also a collective responsibility to protect the natural environment upon which the whole community is dependent for survival. The understanding that non-human members of the environment are vital in protection and sustainability of the environment is obvious. Protection of all ensures balance and harmony in the ecology which are essential for the general wellbeing.

Example 3 O la mugi sosoro accentuates the concept of empathy and reciprocity in dealing with all inhabitants of the environment in the community.

Example 3	<i>Óla múgi sósóró</i>	
	<i>Óla múgi sósóró, a fun gún òmọ ẹyẹ</i>	Take a sharp object to injure a bird
	<i>Áwá lamú pàmpé a fugún eniyàn wò</i>	Use the same sharp object on a human being
	<i>Bi bán dùn ẹ o, a jẹ ndún ọmọ ẹyẹ</i>	If it pains you, it definitely pains the bird

This song conveys an ethic of empathy shared among all members of the ecosystem. The pain experienced by a bird is equally felt by humans and, by extension, the entire ecosystem when subjected to the same sharp object. The sharp object symbolizes harmful behaviors and inconsiderate actions, while the bird represents all members of the ecological community, particularly the vulnerable ones. This song text highlights similarities between humans and other elements and the values of empathy, reciprocity, respect, consideration, compassion, equity and inclusivity for all inhabitants of the environment. In contrast to the Western anthropocentric view, the Ipokia do not consider humans as the apex of ecological hierarchy. Individualism at the expense of others is not condoned rather the collective wellbeing is of utmost importance.

Example 4 is a song that accompanies a fairytale.

Example 4

Yoruba	English Translation
<i>Yé yè yé taló gbé mi làwo</i>	Ye ye ye who took my skin?
<i>Àrèrè igbó ò ẹ bámi wá wò mí o</i>	The spirit of the forest and plants in the forest
<i>Ewé oko amì lègbè</i>	Should find my skin for me

The need for clarity, attentiveness, liveliness and retention of the lessons of traditional stories give rise to the songs that accompany them. Example 4 illustrates the understanding that all elements of the environment, both animate and inanimate, possess life through the spirits residing within them.

This allows them to communicate and interact with one another. The story tells of an animal that visits the human market on market days. To appear human, she removes her animal skin, takes on a human form, and transforms into a beautiful young woman. On one such day, a hunter hiding in the forest watches her transformation with keen interest.

Noticing where she hides her animal skin, he waits until she leaves for the market and then steals it. When she returns, she is unable to find her skin and panics, lamenting and calling out for help. She pleads with the iroko tree, asking it and the spirits of other plants and trees in the forest to help her find her lost form.

This song reveals existence of cooperation among inhabitants of the ecosystem. The woman's appeal to the spirits of trees and plants reflects a belief in the natural world's power to provide help and protection. Subtly, the song suggests the importance of harmony with the ecosystem to ensure support from its members when needed. This support will only be gotten when the norms and values governing peaceful coexistence of all the members of the ecosystem are kept.

The following song texts accompany a traditional story that teaches moderation thereby, amplifying its message.

Example 5. *Fere ku fe*

<i>Aja dure gberu mí funmi</i>	Dog, please wait and help me carry my load
<i>Maa ki gbé, oloko a gbo</i>	I will shout to alert the owner of the farm
<i>Ima gbo ò I ma gbé ẹ foba</i>	He will hear us and report us to the king.

During a particularly harsh famine, Aja the Dog reveals to Ijapa, the tortoise the secret of his survival. Aja takes Ijapa to a farm where he regularly steals just enough food to feed his family. Aja gathers only what his family needs. However, Ijapa driven by greed, collects far more food than necessary, so much that it becomes difficult to carry. When the farm owner is seen approaching, Aja quickly escapes. Ijapa, burdened with the excess food he has stolen, is unable to flee. He begins calling Aja to come back and help him. Aja ignores him and escapes. Ijapa is caught and punished.

While stealing is not condoned in Yoruba culture, the story illustrates that Ijapa might have escaped if he had been moderate in his actions. The moral is clear: doing something wrong is bad, but taking it to excess is even more reprehensible. The farm produce in this tale symbolizes natural environmental resources, while the animals represent humans. Through Ijapa's greed and its consequences, the song imparts the importance of moderation. It underscores the need to maintain balance with the environment by avoiding excessive and irresponsible exploitation of the resources which ultimately have devastating ramifications.

In line with the assertion that song texts play very important role in Yoruba culture, since they highlight key elements of human life and social interactions (Vidal, 1977), Ipokia lyrics offer understanding into concepts, value systems and societal norms. Its rich repository of literary materials creatively convey and communicate desired environmental attitudes and concerns either directly or subtly, using symbols, metaphors, imageries and rhetorics, as is shown in the examples above.

Ipokia music provide a rich source of knowledge about the Yoruba people's understanding of the environment and its connection to their lives. The dexterous execution of the solos whether in strophic, or free style ensures keen attentiveness and internalization of the environmental messages of the songs. The intermittent repetition involved in the antiphonal structures enhance the entertainment and communicability of the theme of music thereby heightening its social-ecological commentaries. The various performance structures, tailored to the exigencies of specific occasions also serve to enhance the message conveyed through the songs. The audience could join in some of the refrains thereby allowing the message sink even deeper into their subconsciousness.

Among all the musical components, song texts convey ecological messages the most. Extemporization, form, harmony, instrumentation, melody, rhythm, repetition, scale, tonal organization, and vocal techniques all help to intensify and amplify the message in the song texts. Compared to spoken words, words set to music are retained longer, and the message resonates more deeply as the music is learned, repeatedly sung in groups and sometimes, privately, over an extended period. The values, ideologies and perceptions of past generations on the environment are embedded in Ipokia traditional songs through symbols and representations of animals, plants, valleys, hills, bodies of water and other inanimate objects of the ecosystem. The belief that spirits and deities dwell within elements of the ecology, and thus

are interconnected and interact with humans is accentuated. This understanding fosters caution in how people relate with the environment. To achieve a harmonious and sustainable existence, respect, reciprocity and sometimes reverence are shown to these spirits and deities, who are believed to have the power to protect or destroy the society depending on how human activities affect them. This consideration for nature is expressed through adherence to various codes of conduct in exploiting the natural resources. Selfish, inconsiderate and unsustainable harvesting of environmental resources such as indiscriminate felling of trees, excessive harvesting of animals and fish are not permitted, as wastage of these will amount to disrespect, and so annoy the spirits. Thus, moderation and strict control in harvesting of water, plants, animal and other environmental resources are enforced. These foster regeneration and rejuvenation which contribute to good environmental stewardship and sustainability.

Collective responsibility of care within the Ipokia communal society is seen in the empathy, equity and inclusivity observed in dealings with inhabitants of the environment in the indigenous music. This duty involves acts of kindness, shared responsibilities, and mutual support, that benefits everyone, rather than prioritizing individual gain. In many traditional African societies, this sense of duty is tied to maintaining harmony, social cohesion, and sustainability, ensuring that all members of the community are looked after, particularly the vulnerable. This attitude fosters a collective approach to problem-solving, resource sharing, and social justice, where the welfare of one is linked to the welfare of all. Welfare of the elements of the environment is linked to that of the human population and affects both positively and negatively as seen in Figure 2.

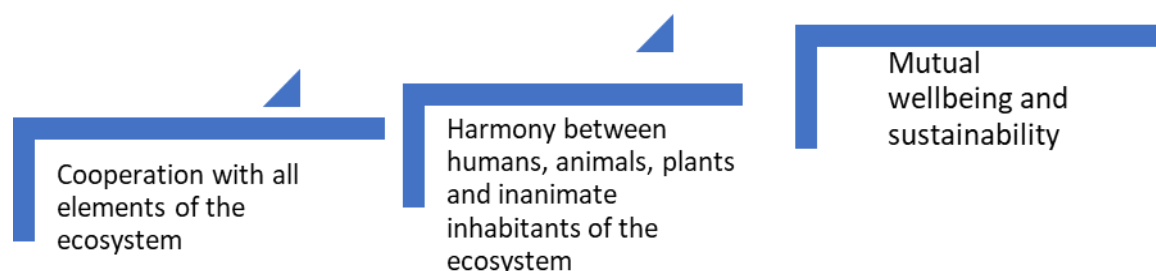


Figure 2: Environmental Sustainability

Holistic environmental stewardship emphasizes cooperation with all elements of the environment and their spirits. This fosters harmony among humans, animals, plants, and spiritual entities and promotes mutual well-being and sustainability. Unfortunately, colonialism regarded indigenous perspectives with disdain and actively promoted their marginalization. This disconnection has led to the erosion of indigenous perspectives, contributing to both environmental degradation and social atrophy. As decolonization concepts gain popularity, the Yoruba are now beginning to reevaluate indigenous worldview.

CONCLUSION

This paper has uncovered the indigenous environmental concepts, knowledge, values, and practices embedded in indigenous Ipokia songs. Equity, respect, cooperation, mutual aid, and moderation are the key components in relating with the environment. This article has also revealed that Ipokia traditional songs embody and convey these environmental attitudes through representations and symbols. These are expressed by depicting animals and plants as possessing human-like abilities and interacting as equals, while emphasizing the right to life

for all members of the community. Ipokia indigenous music plays significant role in promoting environmental sustainability. The music has the power to connect people with the natural world and to call to mind humanity's responsibility to care for the Earth. They are not only a means of preserving the natural environment and promoting awareness about environmental sustainability, but also a valuable tool for studying cultural heritage. Music can facilitate intellectual, cultural, historical, and physical connections (Allen, 2012).

Global trends have weakened indigenous environmental beliefs and practices as more capitalist and individualistic attitudes gain acceptance, working against environmental and societal sustainability and wellbeing. Nevertheless, indigenous environmental concepts continue to endure, though in subdued manners. For instance, many harbor the belief that current societal decadence is the result of retributory justice for failure to respect and responsibly care for the holistic environment.

Every physical activity of humans affects the environment (Fundación para la Aplicación y Enseñanza de la Ciencias, [Foundation for Application of Social Action] 2007). As the population increases more effect on the environment will be seen. This relationship is unavoidable. It therefore follows that the way humanity interacts with the environment to extract its resources is of utmost importance. If it is done with care and wisdom, environmental pollution may be minimal or even not take place, and this augurs well for sustainability. This is what African indigenous knowledge system understood long ago and was practicing and transmitting using various representations and symbols. African arts, particularly music, were used to nurture the imaginative, emotional and spiritual responses to environmental sustainability. This paper has been limited to the study of traditional Yoruba songs and its interaction with IEK. Further research could investigate how environmental issues are addressed in the music-making processes of other modern Yoruba genres, including art and popular music.

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