

## FIGHTING AGAINST ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION: THE CASE OF “ACHALAUGO” MUSIC AND DANCE OF THE OGIDI WOMEN

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### Abstract

The women of Ogidi, a town in Anambra State, South Eastern Nigeria, are concerned about the environmental degradation of their community. They blame this unprecedented level of degradation on non-observance of indigenous environmental protection measures, by members of that society. In objection, during the annual *Iwa Jialso* known as New Yam festival, one of the most important festivals in that community, they staged a protest music and dance to challenge the reckless attitude of people in regards to the environment. This study aims to decipher how Ogidi women, through ‘Achalaugo’ music and dance communicate environmental concerns and their impacts on the authority. Employing the participant observation research method and focusing on song, texts, dance and dramatic movements, this investigation examines the devices of communication in ‘Achalaugo’ music and dance. Among other findings, it is observed that communication for environmental sustainability and other developmental resources reside in the concepts and practices of ‘Achalaugo’ music. These are however, often overshadowed by the façade of entertainment exigencies of art. The product of this study contributes important knowledge to the fields of ethnomusicology and African Humanities Studies.

**Keywords:** Ethnomusicology, ecomusicology, environmental degradation, flooding, erosion, song analysis

### Introduction

Environmental problems remain a major challenge and central in global discourse of sustainable development. It is of global concern and has given rise to efforts in the way of conferences, advocacies, meetings and awareness campaigns the world over. This is essentially due to the realization of the need to protect the environment which people depend on for existence.

The response by many organizations has been to promote awareness through songs, folktales, riddles, and so on, because these are remembered more effectively

(Anton 1990, Idowu 1982). Studies on music, nature, culture and the environment as an evolving area of scholarship are increasing rapidly. Allen(2016), Feld (2012), Guy (2009), Impey (2008), Ramnarine (2009), Rees (2016), Silvers (2015), Titon (2013), among others, have studied the connection between nature, environmental crises, and music. However, none of the studies have looked at ecomusicology and environmental degradation especially in Ogidi community. Thus, a poor appreciation and use of these Igbo indigenous and popular music could account for

unregulated human behaviours that have resulted in an incessant recurrence of environmental degradation, which often resulted in the destruction of lives and properties (Pedelty, 2008).

Cultures, economic activities, cultural behaviours and livelihood practices are changing and changing fast as a consequence of the realization that when people have power to extract resources around them for a more fulfilling life, they sometimes unleashed such power with a sense of desperation to solve the increasing and mounting problems of survival and progressive improvement and this leads to environmental degradation. Thus, the desperate quest for self, family or organizational improvement is no longer a future threat.

The rich, natural and cultural Achalaugo dance has made tourism one of the most significant activities in the area. Accordingly, it had attracted the enormous spirit of oneness, dexterity and uniqueness. Therefore, Ogidi community has been suffering from the degradation of its natural resources and consequently, tourism is threatened.

The environmental degradation significance will be discussed to highlight the nature of problems involved as well as the fight to end environmental degradation can be achieved through the Achalaugo women dance of Ogidi.



**EROSION SITE**  
**Threatening Residential Buildings**



**ECONOMIC ROP (PALM TREE)**  
**Being Washed Away**

To look up to the future with optimism, depends to some reasonable extent on how we are able to set the stage for tackling environmental degradation problems of today, (Ogboru & Anga, 2015).

### **The Statement of the Problem**

Degradation of environment is one of the most serious challenges facing humanity today. Humanity has been facing a wide range of problems arising from the degradation of environment. Not only the areas under human habitation, but other areas of the planet without human population. The number of problems arising out of environmental degradation has been increasing and the intensity of these problems has, at the same time, been aggravated with time. Manifestations of the natural forces like forest fire, volcanic eruption, earthquake, tornado, tsunami, flood meteor-fall, cloud burst etc, which occur from time to time, cause serious damage to the environment. Human activities can generate severe negative impact on earth resulting in environmental degradation. The truth is that the present man induced or anthropogenic factors are causing many times more damages to the environment than their natural counterpart. However, the list of necessary commodities of our everyday life has growing longer and longer as a consequences of population growth and the prevalence of the concept of consumerism in the society which Ogidi community is not an exception. Consequently, there has been a continuous process of manufacturing of goods through the utilization of the natural resources. Like a double edged sword, this very process is causing degradation of environment in two ways namely, environmental pollution through industrialization and damage to natural environment and habitat of various life forms through the exploitation of natural resources.

With regards to the study area, it is observed that there has been a continuing process of land changes in Ogidi community. Most of these changes occur without clear and logical reasoning, paying no attention to their environmental impacts. Floods, pollution in large cities, deforestation, urban growth, soil erosion, desertification etc. are consequences of mismanaged planning efforts without considering environmental impacts.

### **Environmental Degradation, Consequences and Causes in Ogidi Land**

Traditionally, there is effective waste management conservation of natural resources in Ogidi. The traditional composting and subsequent transfer of composted manure to the farms and other agricultural lands. Now farmers have resorted to the use of synthetic fertilizers with their adverse effect on the land.

The population of Ogidi began to increase with the establishment of Ogidi as the headquarters of Idemili North Local Government Area. This brought about demands on land. Ogidi is also at the close of proximate with Onitsha, the commercial nerve centre of South eastern states of Nigeria and this also contributes to the increase in the population of the town.

During the administration of Dr. Chris Ngige, as executive governor of Anambra State, with his policy to decongest Onitsha, move the building material market to Ikenga/Mkwele Ogidi and this

brought about a further increase in the population of the town with the attendant environmental challenges.

No doubt, this brought rapid development of Ogidi but without adequate plan for environmental fall out like waste management, flooding and erosion. Today Ogidi is facing environmental degradation in area of waste management as it is a common site to see mountains of wastes on the road. There are flooding and erosion almost in every province of the town and coupled with the fact that Ogidi has no water body where storm water can be channeled into. The surrounding towns like Umudioka, Umunachi, Eziowe, Abacha are on a higher elevation to Ogidi, that storm water from these towns all connect at Afor Igwe Market, and the flood the entire province of Uru- Ogidi.

The people of Ogidi are not helping matters because during such rains, they dump their refuse in the flood water. The result is that Uru-Abo Ogidi sections of the old Enugu-Onitsha road are littered with refuse of all kinds without environmental consideration.

Some provinces in Ogidi like Ikenga, Nkwelle, Odida are facing heavy erosion problem. Almost all the forest reserve in Ogidi have been destroyed and converted to commercial and residential areas and this has brought about a great loss of biodiversity in these areas. This calls for urgent action and these are part of the problems that Ogidi women through Achalaugo Music and Dance hope to solve.

Consequences of environmental degradation includes increased poverty, over-crowding, famine, weather extremes, species loss, acute and chronic medical illnesses, war and human rights abuses, and an increasingly unstable global situation that portends Malthusian chaos and disaster. Unfortunately, most of the world's governments, guided by self-interest (or self-preservation) have adapted too slowly to environmental changes and as such faces decreasing internal stability, their health care systems are in crisis.

Major causes of environmental degradation include drift to urban centres, modern urbanization, industrialization, over-population growth, deforestation to mention a few. The smoke emitted by the vehicles and factories increases the amount of poisonous gases in the air. Urbanization and industrialization help to aggravate pollution of the sources of water through the discharge of toxic effluents directly into the water sources. Another cause of environmental degradation is sound pollution. The main causes of sound pollution are vehicles, loud speakers, mill etc. Sound pollution introduces to animals and human while wild life flees the environmental aggression to

safer zone. The excessive use of natural resources diminishes these resources and creates imbalance of the environment.

Deforestation is the massive cutting of tree. Trees as we know serve as carbon sink and purifies the air through absorbing the carbon dioxide. Deforestation is a major factor in climate change as ecosystem induces dysfunction of suitable land. Traditional farming methods like slash and burn practice increased use of pesticides, chemical fertilizer and insecticides, lead to environmental degradation. Also mining especially artisanal mining further degrades the quality of the environmental and impact the integrity of subsoil.

### **Effects of Environmental Degradation on Ogidi Community**

Mostly, the erosion, with heavy carriage capacity, transports domestic waste generated by the residents who often exploit the carrying capacity of the eroded hills to dispose of their waste (Ajala 2011). As it is often difficult to measure the extent of rainfall that causes the erosion, a sudden stop to the rainfall results in heaps of waste at the foot of those hills and mountains, which constitute the living areas in the city.

The potential adverse impacts for which appropriate mitigation and monitoring measures have been provided include: Loss of physical assets, loss of means of livelihood, loss of vegetation, dust generation and air quality, surface and groundwater quality, noise and vibration impacts, earth movements, occupational health and safety, waste generation as well as impacts on road diversion and climate change impacts. About 8,498 hectares of land will be required as setback for the stabilization of the gully wall particularly at the deep sections with the attendant loss of land and economic trees/crops. Invariably, environmental degradation has led to diseases and deaths, malnutrition, loss of biodiversity, natural disasters and loss of tourism industry.

### **Impact Mitigation Measures**

The designed measures to mitigate the identified adverse impacts include: creating of sustained community awareness and sensitivity to the project activities as well as capacity building and training programmes for the various Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP) responsible and implementing agents. Other measures include water dousing and heaped soil covering; regular maintenance of plant and machineries; erection of embankments around fueling and servicing areas; protection of water bodies from deposition of wastes and

construction materials; exposure control of workers and the public to noise and vibrations; selective vegetative clearing and quick regeneration of vegetation; erection of road warning signs, imposition of speed limits and road diversions; provision and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); provision of first aid kits, segregation and composting of waste and maintaining high hygienic standards (Guy, 2009).

### **Achalaugo Music and Dance**

This is reputed to be among the earliest dance of women folks from where other women dances took their root. The dance is rigorous, accompanied with sonorous sound and delicate body expression by the women dancers in colourful and beautiful themes (nzu) of varied colour which give the dance its uniqueness while on display. It tends to give real aesthetic value of greatness and beauty.



**Achalaugo dancers of Ogidi – Idemili Local Government Area, Anambra State.**

### **Dance Formations, Style and Performance Situation**

The “Achalaugo” dance involves movement of legs, hands, heads, trunks and shoulders. On the surface, the movement patterns appear to be identical but the intricate natural patterns and concepts differ greatly. Different dancers freely express themselves according to how the music influences their feelings and expressive talents. The only behavior common to all dancers are those adhering to the basic rhythmic patterns of the music and stylized formation and basic movement.

The dance formations are well organized. The basic formations include stretch wire, circular and triangular formation. These formations are selected according to the performance situation and

places of performance as they determine the dance formations, unity and diversity of the movements of the dancers. Each dance formation is decorated to the accurate response to the rhythm of the music. The resultant body movements make the plump women the centre of attraction as they vibrate their rich fleshy, supple muscles. In the circle formation, soloist dance in the middle of the circle which is most advantageous position where they can be seen and well heard by dancers. It gives them opportunity to be in full control of the performance. The lead dancer also performs from the centre of the circle from where every dancer receives definite instructions on the new technique and movement that comes first. The instruments always stay together all the times for better coordination.

### **The Main Forms and the Basic Structural Features of the Song**

The musical cultures of the Nigerian tribes are quite rich and varied. It is directly associated with the socio-cultural, religion and political system and preserved by tradition (Agu, 1999, 1993, p.80). Like all Igbo songs, the Achalaugo songs have structural relationship with Igbo traditional vocal music. They possess strict lively tempo and complex rhythmic accompaniment. They possess the familiar communicative power which is the language of Ogidi people.

### **The Song and Music of Achalaugo Dance**

Solo	Onye kpalu ego nikolobia Na obu ya kanyi ma Na Igwe anyi akpa ego n'ikolobia Obodo yilu mu o Igwe anyi Biko, bia lee Na ala obodo anyi emebisigo Osisi nke mbara uru anwusigo
Chorus	Oga bu Kongo (trice) Obodo e yi lu go Mmanwu na-apu Chi e fo Oga bu Kongo Yi li mo] DC English translation
Solo	He who acquires wealth, In his prime, Is the one recognized

For our Chief has acquired wealth in his youth  
 And the village recognizes that  
 Our dance, a special one  
 Watch out!  
 The masquerade s out  
 Our big masquerade,  
 We have come with tears,  
 See, flood and erosion  
 Have washed away our economic trees

Chorus           The master is the boss,  
 And the village recognized that

### Concepts and Evaluation of Achalaugo Music

The concept of Achalaugo Music was well accepted by the people of Ogidi as a tool for environmental management. The studies as shown in the table below depicts the level of positive impact of the music and song

	<b>NAMES OF ACTIVITY</b>	<b>No OF PERSONS SAMPLED</b>	<b>No OF PERSONS IMPACTED POSITIVELY</b>	<b>No OF PERSNS INDIFFERENT</b>
1	New Yan festival	50	35	15
2	Ofala Festival	50	40	10
3	Mgba-Agbo Festival (premarital dance)	50	37	12

In summary, 50 persons who watched the Achalaugo dance were sampled during the Ogidi New Yam Festival, Annual Ofala and the Mgba Agbo. The result shows that 35, 40 and 37 persons respectively, who listened to the music, attested that the songs awakened their environmental consciousness whereas 15, 10 and 12 persons respectively were indifferent.

### Uses of Concept and Evaluation of Achalaugo for Creating Awareness and Sensitization

Ecomusicology as an aspect of music, social life and nature associated in relationship between music and environmental disasters such as floods. Music on the other hand, serve as an agent of



social change, advocating against the dumping of refuse in water ways which results in flooding, erosion and pollution. (Impey, 2013, 2018) notes that “sounds and performance may provide sweetness to situation thereby reminding people of a more positive way of living: songs by indigenous Ogidi women brought a cultural reminder to people of environmental causes and cure. Titus (2015) and Okafor (2002) acknowledged the world wide popularity and potency of music as a vehicle to carry educational and developmental messages to audiences. Despite this, very little of music’s potential has been used to promote environmental change in Nigeria. However, isolated attempts have been made to utilize as a part of integrated campaigns for communication to educate viewers and learners about social issues. Also, Feld (2004) asserts that the concept of cosmetology of sound combined with awareness of sonic presence constitute a powerful force in shaping how people interact and remember their experiences. Rehding (2011:414) while examining the approach that ecomusicology should take, numerate apolitically and nostalgic approached. He further notes that since the literary arts had mostly focused on the apolitically approach, ecomusicology should approach instead to the nostalgic mood of love. He notes “many in the narrative arts have taken the attention, grabbing the apocalyptic route to raise awareness by insisting that the most positive way forward; the ecomusicology will be to follow the alternative route”

Current situation of floods and environmental sustainability disagree with such an approach. In dealing with floods and erosion disaster in Ogidi, both apocalyptic and nostalgic to solving the current environmental crisis were involved. This was achieved through the musician’s reaction and singing both with a sense of urgency during performances and also by appealing to the memories of the experiences the citizens had enjoyed in the past. In his landmark research, a popular music and the edition of traditional ecological knowledge in Northern Brazil, Silver (2018) cited by rain prophets, and argues that commercially recorded songs, can give traditional ecological knowledge the qualities of comprehensibility, authority and autochthonism The paper extends the use of indigenous popular in creating awareness and a sense of responsibility among community members in Ogidi community. The current study, however differs in that it engages with human responses to environmental degradation and the process of cultural sustainability tat further helps on environmental sustainability and development.

### **Excerpts of Ogidi Environment Song**

Oga bu Kongo, Oga bu Kongo  
Ndi obodo anyi, na umu nwanyi  
Ndi Achalaugo na kpo ku gi na si  
Biko, ka g ti ye anya an ezigbo ala anyi

Maka ihe k anti bia ku tere nti  
Ka i were onodu a  
Chukwu nyere gi  
We dozie alanyi bu Ogidi  
Ka obi di kwanyi mma  
Oga bu Kongo eaaa

#### English Translation

The master is the boss  
The master is the boss  
And the village recognizes that  
Our well respected Chief  
Listen to the cry of Achalaugo women  
Erosion, floods, and pollution  
Have taken over our land  
We no longer plant, harvest  
Visitors are no longer visiting  
here are no more economic trees  
To sell and make our money  
Our children are hungry,  
Your people are lamenting  
Our dear chief  
Please use your office  
And help your people  
For this make your people happy  
May the gods of our land help you  
Watch out!  
The masquerade is out,  
It is dawn  
The masquerade, the gods and  
the village recognizes this.

From the study as shown in the table above, Achalaugo dance and music has created a positive impact in Ogidi and can be effectively used in creating awareness and sensitization mechanism.

#### **Recommendations and Conclusions**

- Musical documentations are metaphors for contemporary issues, and demonstrate how associated problems can be dealt with. Indigenous music and popular music have indeed and should be used to educate the general public, about the erosion disasters experienced in the city. Such as provision of information about flood disasters, their causes, as well as exposing people to their implications.
- Legislations, decrees and enactments that are disempowering should be reviewed and where necessary abrogated as they continue to serve as an impediment to peace and security.
- Development priorities should be set by local communities and leaders who are aware of natural environmental issues that hamper the existence of livelihood.
- Local community participation in the resource mobilization, management and allocation should be given the attention it deserves.
- The political process should be made transparent and fair for free entry and exit of those non-governmental agencies, local groups, and local government who have the desire to attain sustainability development through fight against environmental degradation.

Finally, Institutions of government and development interventionist agencies should, as a matter of urgency, fast track the process of environment remediation and ecosystem restoration. Adherence to these principles would make a substantial contribution towards the prevention of any future global environmental threat and the reduction of existing ones. As climate change processes already are underway, efforts also must focus on assessing current and future vulnerabilities and identifying necessary interventions or adaptation options.

Environmental degradation is often linked with process of development and therefore has effects on local, regional, as well as global levels. These effects which are the result of human activities have devastating consequences on the environment and so are harmful on human beings, animals and plants and can be passed on to future generations.

This paper extends the use of indigenous popular music “Achalaugo” in creating awareness and a sense of responsibility among community members in Ogidi. However, it differs in that it engages with human responses to the fight against environmental degradation in Ogidi through Achalaugo music and dance by Ogidi women and the process of cultural sustainability that further helps environmental sustainability. These indigenous Achalaugo popular songs are easily understood in the minds of Ogidi residents, constantly reminding them to avoid a reoccurrence of any kind of environmental degradation. If adequate educational and orientation programs and substantial actions are put in place, together with the instrumentality of ecomusicological ideals, environmental degradation may be prevented. Since this might be one of the first such

approaches focused on Nigeria, it will be a guide for other researchers examining other areas of connecting music and environmental sustainability among the Igbos and in Nigeria in general.

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