

Effectiveness of University Christian Unions in Promoting Environmental Stewardship: A Case of Select CUs under FOCUS Kenya

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Abstract

Amid the growing global and local environmental crises, the faith sector, particularly Christian youth in Africa, has a vital role to play in promoting environmental stewardship. Christian Unions under FOCUS Kenya serve as a critical platform for mobilizing and equipping Christian youth, particularly students, for transformative leadership and faith-driven impact through discipleship, mentorship, and community engagement. This study examines the effectiveness of university Christian Unions (CUs) in promoting environmental stewardship among students in Kenya. It assesses the effectiveness of CU-led initiatives in fostering environmental stewardship by exploring the perceptions and attitudes of Christian students towards creation care and the potential contours of a student-centered eco-theology. The study employs a mixed-methods approach to the research, and data were gathered from respondents by having them fill out digitally administered questionnaires. To ensure the study is theologically grounded, a Pastoral Circle was used to reflect on the findings. Findings indicate that while the CUs are engaged in environmental stewardship, their efforts are only moderately effective, as evidenced by a low frequency, low turnout, and a lack of variety in strategies. Apathy and lack of concern were identified as the key barriers to students' engagement in creation care. The study also revealed that theological misconceptions about the fate of the earth, the role of humanity, and gospel priorities are the leading obstacles to environmental stewardship among Christian youth. The study concludes that there is a need for more training, awareness, and funding in university Christian Unions towards creation care. Additionally, a student-centered theological proposition for environmental stewardship needs to build on the popular theological arguments while also developing a strong case for less popular ones, such as environmental justice.

Keywords: Christian Union, FOCUS Kenya, Environmental Stewardship, Climate Change, Ecology, Creation Care



Introduction

Climate change and environmental degradation are among the most pressing global issues in our day. Environmental-related crises, such as adverse weather conditions, ecosystem destruction, and food shortages, among others, threaten to wipe out humanity. A recent United Nations report on climate science found that the world is headed toward a tipping point, where irreversible physical changes in the climate system are expected. For example, cities are responsible for up to 70% of human-caused emissions and are predicted to experience so much climate change that it will intersect with the already existing socio-economic inequalities.¹ This has a monumental impact on the fate of third-world countries, which, despite being responsible for the least carbon emissions, bear the greatest threat and burden of climate change's impact. United Nations expressly states that "The populations of countries that have contributed the least to global warming are the most vulnerable to death and diseases brought about by higher temperatures."²

Kalemba Mwambazambi, in his article on environmental protection in Africa, observes that "As a developing continent, Africa contributes little to climate change, yet it will be the continent among the first ones to be hit quite hard by the impacts of various climatic turnovers. More than 180 million persons could be affected by the consequences of climate change in sub-Saharan Africa by the end of the century."³ These calls for an awakening of the African continent to arise and take necessary measures. In 2023, parts of Kenya experienced a severe drought that resulted in widespread starvation and the massive loss of livestock. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), more than 1.5 million Kenyans faced starvation, while over 3 million needed some form of assistance with food.⁴ This has been caused by the reduction of forest cover and the destruction of key water catchment areas, such as the Mau complex, among other reasons. These recent events in Kenya should serve as a wake-up call. There is, therefore, a need for more interventions to prevent our country from slipping so rapidly.

¹ Lauren Stuart, Laura Paterson, and Jürg Luterbacher, 'United in Science 2022' (Geneva: World Meteorological Organization, 2022), 4.

² United Nations, 'The Health Effects of Global Warming: Developing Countries are the Most Vulnerable,' United Nations (United Nations), accessed 31 March 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/health-effects-global-warming-developing-countries-are-most-vulnerable>.

³ Kalemba Mwambazambi, 'A Glance on Environmental Protection in Africa: Theological Perspective,' *Ethiopian Journal of Environmental Studies and Management* 2, no. 3 (2009): 1.

⁴ 'Kenya Drought Response Dashboard (January to December 2023) | OCHA', 15 March 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/kenya/kenya-drought-response-dashboard-january-december-2023>.



Environmental stewardship is deeply rooted in biblical principles, affirming humanity's responsibility to care for God's creation. Throughout the Bible, the earth is God's creation that is entrusted to humankind for sensible and faithful management. However, churches have struggled in the area of environmental conservation in areas such as "failure to offer environmental knowledge to the members, lack of educative environmental sermons, failure to co-ordinate her environmental vision with those of other stakeholders like NGOs, and failure to have a balance between spiritual and physical salvation of the human person in ecclesiastical endeavors."⁵

Youth, on the other hand, form a strategic group on matters of creation care because,

They will be around the longest, young people should have a special interest in the care of creation. This special interest of young people requires the development of a robust environmental apologetic to be made available to youth and youth ministries. Young Christians need not only to be equipped with evangelistic material but to be given practical teaching on the issue of lifestyle, as well as opportunities to express their care of creation in a meaningful way.⁶

The youth, particularly those in universities, are a highly strategic target for engagement related to environmental stewardship due to their vibrancy, intellectual abilities, and the enormous influence they have on their peers.

Having worked with university students for over fifteen years, the researcher observed that students have glaring gaps in their practices, attitudes, and awareness regarding environmental stewardship. Most universities had littered compounds, wasteful use of water and electricity, and wasteful use of paper, among other destructive practices. While that was the case, studies show that students are very effective agents of change if their potential is well utilized. This is because they have better access to information about the environment compared to older generations, partly due to exposure to environmental education in schools and on the Internet. They also have the advantage of having lived most of their lives in an era when environmental issues have been more highlighted than before and have not become accustomed to such harmful environmental behaviors. They are, therefore, more willing to welcome fresh ideas and new ways of doing things.⁷

⁵ Gitau, Samson Kamau, 'Toward a Kenyan African Christian Theological Basis for Environmental Conservation' (Nairobi, University of Nairobi, 1997).

⁶ Ken Gnanakan, *God's World: A Theology of the Environment* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1999), 205.

⁷ 'United Nations. <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/ch05.pdf>.



Problem Statement

Climate change is a major global concern, which is an existential threat to human life and the rest of God's creation. Christians, as followers of Christ, ought to be at the forefront of caring for God's creation as a biblical mandate. The faith sector has been making strides in addressing climate change, with mainstream churches leading the way. However, there is still much to be done, and as Kiarie (2019) observes, the faith sector has the potential to contribute significantly, especially in influencing changes in attitudes and behavior toward the environment.⁸ Despite growing awareness of creation care and increasing acknowledgment of the role of faith communities in addressing environmental challenges, a gap remains in understanding how effectively Christian student movements—particularly University Christian Unions (UCUs)—promote environmental stewardship in Kenya. Data from FOCUS Kenya indicate that students, regardless of their religious affiliation, remain less involved in environmental stewardship in Kenya.⁹ This is an alarming reality, especially in Africa, most specifically in Kenya, where the majority of the population is youthful.¹⁰ The Christian Unions are responsible for the spiritual formation of university students, yet very little research has been conducted to examine their effectiveness in promoting creation care among these students. This study aims to fill that gap by assessing CU initiatives, understanding student perspectives and attitudes, and examining the theological frameworks that influence their engagement with environmental stewardship. This study examined the effectiveness of University Christian Unions in promoting environmental stewardship among students in Kenya.

General Objective

To explore the effectiveness of university Christian Unions in promoting environmental stewardship

Specific Objectives

1. To examine the effectiveness of the existing initiatives and programs geared towards environmental stewardship.

⁸ George Kiarie, 'Environmental Degradation: What Is the Role of the Church in Environmental Conservation in Kenya from 1963–2019?' *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 46, no. 2 (2020): 12.

⁹ FOCUS Kenya, 'FOCUS Kenya 50th Annual General Meeting Report_2023' (Nairobi, 2023).

¹⁰ KNBS, '2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census,' Distribution of Population by Age and Sex (Nairobi, 2019).



2. To assess the attitudes and biblical perspectives of Christian Union students concerning biblical stewardship of the environment.
3. To develop a student-centered theological proposition for environmental stewardship in Christian Unions.

Literature Review

The term “environmental stewardship” encompasses a range of diverse actions, including replanting trees, creating protected areas, limiting harvests, restoring degraded areas, reducing harmful activities such as pollution, and purchasing sustainable products, among others, as well as the sustainable use and management of resources.¹¹ The term also describes three critical elements of environmental care: deliberate environmental conservation actions, active restoration activities, and the sustainable use and management of natural resources.

According to Bennett et al., local environmental stewardship is comprised of three essential components. First, it includes actions taken by individuals, groups, or networks whom they refer to as actors. For such actions to be effective, they need to be regular and, where possible, integrated into day-to-day life, such as daily, weekly, or monthly. A study by the Environmental Protection Agency on everyday opportunities for environmental stewardship observed that effective stewardship is most effective when it is sustainable and tied to daily choices.¹² Second, it is about the various motivations that lead them to take these actions, and third, it is about the levels of capacity the actors have to protect, care for, or use the environment responsibly. These three components — actors, motivation, and capacity — are therefore seen as what drives environmental stewardship.¹³

Many religious groups believe in the creation of the universe by a supernatural being. For Christians, the creation story in Genesis serves as the foundation for our relationship with the rest of God’s creation. This underpins the Christian theology of ecology, where God is acknowledged as the creator of the universe, and he is distinct from it. Also, the belief that creation is not divine is critical so that it is not worshipped. It is also crucial to note that creation is not meaningless or futile; otherwise, there would be no need to care for it. This belief is the foundation of the

¹¹ Nathan J. Bennett, Tara S. Whitty, and Elena Finkbeiner, ‘Environmental Stewardship: A Conceptual Review and Analytical Framework’ 02, no. 17 (2018).

¹² Stephen L. Johnson, ‘Everyday Choices: Opportunities for Environmental Stewardship’ (USA: Environmental Protection Agency, 2005).

¹³ Nathan J. Bennett, Tara S. Whitty, and Elena Finkbeiner, ‘Environmental Stewardship: A Conceptual Review and Analytical Framework’.



ecological doctrine of creation, on which Christians base their theology of environmental stewardship.

John Stott states three biblical principles that should guide Christian engagement with the environment. First, God has given us dominion over the earth, which is his creation. This dominion is only given to man to rule over all else that God made. The second principle is that our dominion is cooperative in that when exercising dominion, we are not to alter our nature and environmental processes. Instead, we are to cooperate with them as God has made them. The third principle is that our dominion is delegated dominion, which, therefore, should be exercised humbly and with utmost reference to the maker.¹⁴ These three principles encapsulate how we should relate to the creation responsibly and with reverence to God, who is the Creator. Christians, therefore, have an apparent biblical mandate to be involved in environmental stewardship. While this is the case, Christians, both locally and globally, appear to be missing from the conversation.

Role of Christians in Environmental Stewardship

The call for all Christians to environmental stewardship is anchored on the fact that the mandate to ‘bless, cultivate, subdue, rule, till, and keep, as recorded in Genesis 1:28—2:15, applies to all Christians. The creation mandate and the Great Commission are combined in the greatest commandment: to love God and our neighbors.¹⁵ In their commitment to what they refer to as environmental missions, Lausanne states, “We participate in Lausanne’s historic call to world evangelization and believe that environmental issues represent one of the greatest opportunities to demonstrate the love of Christ. We encourage the church to promote ‘environmental missions’ as a new category within mission work.”¹⁶ The recognition of environmental missions as an integral part of the church’s mission is a sign of continued realization of the role the church ought to play.

Faith actors are increasingly getting acknowledged as critical players in environmental stewardship. This is because, although policymakers and ecologists develop theories and policies, there must be fundamental changes in worldviews, values, attitudes, behaviors, and

¹⁴ John Stott, ‘Our Human Environment,’ in *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: HarperCollins, 1990), 113–29.

¹⁵ Lowell Bliss, ‘Environmental Missions: An Introduction’ (Lausanne Movement, Hendrickson Academic, 2016), 12.

¹⁶ Ibid.



culture. The truth is that religious communities play a critical role in such societal and cultural transformations, as they shape social imaginaries and people's values and act as agents of social, cultural, economic, political, and ecological change.¹⁷ This change can be achieved by condemning the environmental destruction of Mother Earth by urging church leaders to preach a green gospel, sensitizing society with regard to environmental conservation, speaking to issues of climate change, the emission of ozone-depleting gases, and advocating for environmental conservation measures at workshops, retreats, seminars, conferences and most importantly, Sunday sermons, monitoring how humanity treats Mother Earth and calling out environmental degradation as sin.¹⁸

Clarence Makamure, in his book *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, suggests that environmental injustice is a moral issue and, therefore, the church, as the moral conscience of a society, should be at the center of it. The church, thus, has a long way to go to bridge the gap in its engagement with environmental issues. First, the church needs to be conscious of present environmental injustice and condemn the environmental destruction of Mother Earth. Additionally, the church needs to raise its voice loudly to the political class about the importance of environmental conservation. Clarence proposes that the church should rediscover the use of the theological language of sin- call out sinfulness concerning the environment in the same way that it denounces murder, rape, robbery, adultery, and so forth. Lastly, there may also be opportunities for theological training in environmental theology, religion and environment, eco-theology, and environmental ethics, among other related topics.¹⁹

It has been argued that environmental crisis is “a theological problem coming from views of God and us that encourages or permits our destructive, unjust actions. Whether one is a Christian or not, the earliest understanding of humanity and its relationship with nature had a religious foundation and a theological base.”²⁰ The truth is that the Christian faith has a significant contribution to make to the environmental debate. When a nation lacks moral values or its moral consciousness is lost, the gospel is the surest solution.

¹⁷ Philipp Öhlmann, ‘Religion and Environment: Exploring the Ecological Turn in Religious Traditions, the Religion and Development Debate and Beyond,’ *The State of the Evidence in Religions and Development*, 2022.

¹⁸ Gottlieb, R. S, ‘Religion and Ecology: What Is the Connection and Why Does It Matter’, In *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3–24.

¹⁹ Makamure Clemence, ‘Environmental Justice for Sustainable Development: A Biblical Perspective’ 4, no. *Global Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* (2015): 6.

²⁰ Kalemba Mwambazambi, ‘Environmental Problems in Africa: A Theological Response,’ *Ethiopian Journal of Environmental Studies and Management* 3, no. 2 (2010).



Christianity, Youth, and Environmental Stewardship

Jacques Beukes, in a paper on youth, faith, and environmental consciousness in Africa, concludes that “the tripartite concern with the connection between youth, faith, and environmental consciousness has received insufficient attention in the domains of practical theology. Furthermore, the potential of youth, faith, and the significance of practical theology is underappreciated.”²¹ This is precisely the concern addressed in this paper. This is the case despite the youth demonstrating that they are informed, enthusiastic, and engaged. Youth are technologically inclined, view themselves as change agents, and are even comfortable being disruptive. Despite all this, Beukes observes that effective engagement and inclusion in climate-related policymaking platforms and processes remain a significant barrier for them. This is attributed to various factors, including a lack of sufficient capacity in environmental and climate change education, as well as an inability to contextualize global climate issues in relation to local concerns effectively. Youth continue to be on the periphery of climate conversations even when many reports indicate that they are invited and involved in the conversation. To conclude, there is a need for a proper mechanism, philosophy, and structure regarding youth involvement.

According to the UNDP, Youth and children are the most vulnerable to the lifelong environmental effects of climate change, both currently and in the future. A study done in 2021 by Marks et al., where 10,000 youth from across the globe were involved, found that over 50% of youth surveyed indicated that they felt sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and guilty about climate change, while 45% said that those emotions about climate change had negatively affected them in their day to day life.²² The concern is even more pronounced for youth in Africa, who comprise over 65% of the entire population. Yet, Africa will be more severely impacted by climate change than any other continent.

In an article by Caroline Kibii, she outlines possible ways in which university students can be involved in environmental stewardship. First, she suggests that students possess diverse knowledge and can mobilize and gather people, as well as disseminate information in a localized manner. Additionally, they can interpret biblical teachings in relation to traditional or scientific knowledge on the use of environmental resources. Students can also become environmental

²¹ Jacques W. Beukes. ‘Youth, Faith and Environmental Consciousness in Africa: A Practical Theology Research Imperative,’ *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 7, no. 2 (2021): 14.

²² Caroline Hickman1 et al., ‘Young People’s Voices on Climate Anxiety, Government Betrayal and Moral Injury: A Global Phenomenon,’ *University of Bath*, 2021.



activists or advocates, which provides them an avenue to identify environmental problems, propose potential solutions, and intervene. Students can meaningfully engage with literature on faith and the environment while simultaneously contributing to the creation of a new body of knowledge.²³ They also have the opportunity to conduct research projects that provide viable, environmentally friendly, contextual, localized, and applicable solutions. Finally, Students can contribute to faith-based environmental initiatives by creating and amending environmental policies and regulations to ensure they are just and fair.²⁴

In another study conducted in the Philippines on the role of student organizations in environmental protection, it was established that student organizations could be effective tools for environmental advocacy and protection.²⁵ With their ability to lead and make decisions, their dynamism and creativity together, and their access to information, students can bring fresh perspectives to the conversation and promote environmental advocacy. The study also revealed that students' initiatives have a positive impact, as participants indicated that they were helped to realize the importance of caring for the environment; some were even encouraged to start their own advocacy initiatives for environmental protection. It was also observed that knowledge and advocacy were transferred from student organizations to the community. Overall, the findings indicated the development of a positive attitude towards environmental protection, which is consistent with the learning principle that experience enhances learning and leads to a change in behavior.²⁶

Wonyoung Bong, in an article on the need for effective campus ministry, observes that students are a highly strategic group to reach due to their potential, ability to grasp more biblical content, and their influence on the wider society. He, however, decries the lack of a missional approach to student ministry, where most programs focus on fellowship and wellness, and there is little training and exposure to missions. Students' spirituality is commonly measured by their attendance at Sunday and mid-week services, yet many students do not demonstrate a missional

²³ Caroline Kibii, 'The Role of Students in Faith-Based Environmental Action,' *Faith and Environment*, 2021, <https://kabarak.ac.ke/feb/the-role-of-students-in-faith-based-environmental-action?tmpl=component&print=1&format=print>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ramona Isabel S. Ramirez, 'Student Leadership Role for Environmental Protection,' *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 5, no. 2 (2017).

²⁶ Ibid.



life. Spiritual formation for students, particularly in relation to social justice issues such as environmental care, is on a very low scale.²⁷

Environmental Stewardship in Christian Unions in Kenya

University and college Christian Unions in Kenya have been vibrant organizations that bring together Christian students from diverse denominational, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. It is a dynamic, interdenominational fellowship for university students. Christian Unions are the primary vehicle for spiritual formation among evangelical students, playing a critical role in shaping their beliefs, practices, and commitments. The Christian unions come together to form the Fellowship of Christian Union (FOCUS) Kenya. FOCUS Kenya collaborates with 215 Christian Unions, which collectively comprise approximately 64,000 students, as per their 2023 Annual General Meeting (AGM) report.²⁸

One of the areas of FOCUS through Christian Unions is integral missions, where they seek to “mobilize and equip students to bear witness to the transforming gospel through their personal and professional lives and challenge them to engage in advocacy, social service, and various social justice initiatives in society.” To achieve this, Christian Unions are encouraged to prioritize social transformation initiatives, one of which is environmental stewardship.

According to FOCUS Kenya’s Strategic Plan 2021–2025, Christian Unions are supposed to build the capacity of their members to engage in social transformation initiatives. They are also tasked with planning various initiatives aimed at transforming their campuses and the surrounding community. Specifically, they commit to mobilizing students for environmental stewardship initiatives. This suggests that the Christian Unions recognize the role of faith in shaping students’ perspectives and practices regarding environmental stewardship. Every Christian Union is expected to participate in environmental stewardship initiatives, such as tree planting, litter management, and clean-up exercises, among others. Additionally, they are expected to raise awareness of environmental stewardship by incorporating sermon topics on environmental care and hosting relevant training seminars.

According to the 2023 AGM report, FOCUS Kenya reported that 1,992 students participated in various environmental stewardship initiatives nationwide. This was data from 36 Christian Unions out of 215 that held initiatives towards environmental stewardship.

²⁷ Wonyoung Bong, ‘Toward Improving the Effectiveness of Campus Ministry at Universities’ 7, no. Asia-Africa *Journal of Mission & Ministry*, 2013.

²⁸ FOCUS Kenya, ‘FOCUS Kenya 50th Annual General Meeting Report_2023.’



Additionally, in 2023, students participated in tree-planting initiatives. The report indicates that 1,000 trees were planted as part of the presidential initiative to plant 15 billion trees by 2032. This was in line with FOCUS Kenya's target of planting 55,000 trees.²⁹ In the other annual National Students' Executive Committee report, prepared by leaders of various Christian Unions, it was observed that as of March 2024, only 2,387 students had participated in any environmental stewardship initiatives. This was only a \$ 395 increase from 2023 and accounted for 7.4% of their target. In the report, the leaders comment that "There is low involvement of CU members in environmental stewardship cutting across the regions. What could be the problem?"³⁰

From the various reports, it is evident that, although Christian unions under FOCUS envisioned a deliberate and active equipping and mobilization of students towards environmental stewardship, this has not been realized. The data, however, are not very comprehensive because they are based on only a few Christian Unions that have reported without necessarily employing any sampling technique. Other possible issues include the fact that the interventions put in place do not resonate with the students or that the initiatives taken are insufficient to raise enthusiasm among students for environmental stewardship.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed the Pastoral Circle method of theological research, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. This method is effective for Christians seeking to engage in social issues, as it enables a proper diagnosis of the issues and a suitable response.³¹ This approach suitably examines the effectiveness and prevailing perspectives of the Christian Unions regarding environmental stewardship, as well as the prevailing perceptions among young people on this topic.

Target Population

The target population consisted of university Christian Unions that are members of FOCUS Kenya, a total of 67 CUs. According to the data, each Christian Union was considered a single

²⁹ FOCUS Kenya. Diana Waruguru, 'FOCUS Kenya Environmental Care Concept, 2023.

³⁰ FOCUS Kenya. '2024 March NASEC Workbook,' Google Docs, accessed 29 March 2024, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Kp7EW_lx3_j4CWlhNOJBm3bFVpRHRBYYRC63UC1RCfo/edit?usp=s_haring&usp=embed_facebook.

³¹ Jose Holland and Peter Henriot. S.J., *Social Analysis; Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).



unit, and therefore, only one questionnaire was filled out jointly by the top leadership (executive committee). Additionally, a few FOCUS Kenya staff members were considered key informants to provide perspective on the feedback from the primary respondents.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

A sample size of 36 Christian Unions, representing approximately 54% of the total population ($N = 67$), was sampled for this study. These were select Christian Unions, according to FOCUS Kenya, where there was reasonable engagement and uptake of ministry programs.

Sampling Method

The researcher employed a purposive sampling method, selecting 36 Christian Unions that had a history of good uptake of ministry programs and were likely already making efforts towards environmental stewardship. Each questionnaire was filled out jointly by 3–7 officials of the Christian Unions. The remaining data was administrative and secondary data from FOCUS Kenya.

Sampling Instruments

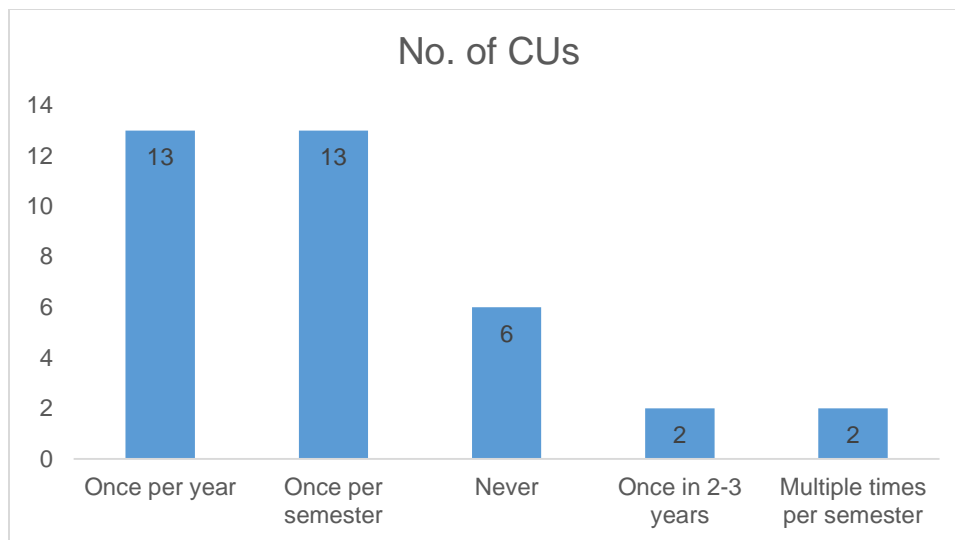
The researcher used online questionnaires to collect data from the identified respondents. The researcher formulated the questionnaires as clearly as possible to ensure the respondents understood the questions and gave the desired information. Most of the questions were closed-ended, with a few open-ended questions included to allow respondents to provide any additional information that might be helpful to the study.

Findings of the Study

Effectiveness of Christian Unions in Promoting Environmental Stewardship

Regarding the frequency of CU environmental stewardship, 72% of Christian Unions carry out environmental stewardship initiatives once or twice a year (36% annually, 36% semi-annually). Only 5% participated in such activities multiple times during a semester. Notably, 18% of respondents reported that they had never participated in an environmental stewardship activity, while 5% had only participated in a single event within a period of 2–3 years. Effective environmental stewardship involves regular activities that are integrated into day-to-day life, such as daily, weekly, or monthly tasks. This frequency, therefore, indicates that existing efforts are already underway but may not be effective due to their low frequency.





Tree planting was the most popular environmental stewardship activity at 45% (17/36 CUs). It was followed closely by litter collection at 36%, while clean-ups took third place at 30%. Awareness campaigns were the least popular at 15%. Tree planting, litter collection, and clean-up activities fall under the broader category of environmental restoration. According to Bennett, environmental stewardship has three critical elements: deliberate ecological conservation actions, active restoration activities, and the sustainable use and management of natural resources.³² The lack of a proper activity mix, where only restorative activities are conducted without a single conservation or sustainability initiative, points to less effectiveness in promoting environmental stewardship.

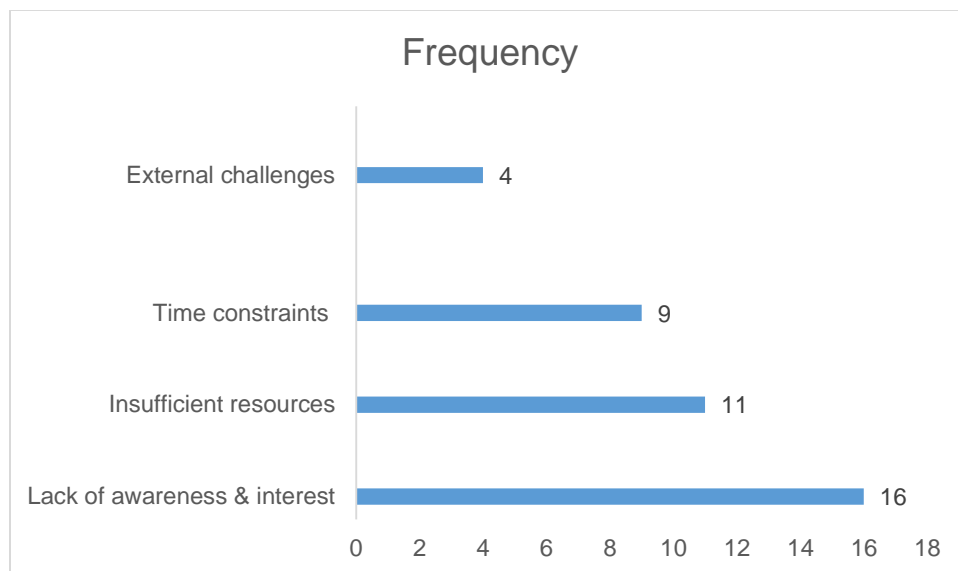
The researcher sought to determine whether the Christian Unions had made any decisions regarding environmental stewardship in their operations. Fifty-five percent of the Christian Unions had taken such decisions, while 44.4% (15 CUs) had not. Such decisions included reducing pollution by 41% through efforts to install dustbins, reducing noise pollution during meetings, and ensuring no littering. Another 35% of the decisions involved reducing paper use in the Christian unions, where they opted to use digital tools instead of printing, thereby saving on paper. There was only a single mention of energy conservation in all the responses. From this finding, it appears that dealing with environmental pollution resonates more with students. The absence of any decisions regarding energy conservation highlights a gap that needs to be addressed.

³² Nathan J. Bennett, Tara S. Whitty, and Elena Finkbeiner, 'Environmental Stewardship: A Conceptual Review and Analytical Framework.'



Regarding the adequacy of teachings on stewardship, 42.7% of the Christian unions confirm that they have not adequately taught their members about environmental stewardship. Closely related, 42.4% of the CUs believe they lack adequate initiatives for environmental stewardship. The Christian Union leaders, therefore, in a significant way, affirm that the efforts towards environmental stewardship are insufficient or inadequate.

When asked about the leading hindrances to the effectiveness of Christian Unions in environmental stewardship, most respondents ranked low awareness and lack of interest as the top challenge. The second most prevalent challenge was the lack of adequate resources to facilitate more environmental stewardship initiatives. Time constraints and external challenges were the last two challenges expressed by the Christian Unions.



Attitudes and Perspectives on Environmental Stewardship

A total of 82% of the CUs indicated that they were very concerned or averagely concerned about the environment. Additionally, 18% reported being somewhat concerned. In research conducted by the World Economic Forum in 2021, approximately 70% of African youth expressed concern about the environment and climate change.³³ Also, 100% of the respondents said that environmental stewardship is vital for every Christian. From the earlier data, however, this conviction is not expressed in action. This may be a pointer to a gap between belief and practice, where, though many students believe in the importance of environmental stewardship, they do not take as much action at a personal or community level. This finding aligns with a study by

³³ The World Economic Forum. 'This Is What Africa's Youth Think about Climate Change,' World Economic Forum, 9 December 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2021/12/climate-change-africa-eco-anxiety/>.



UNICEF in India, which observed a significant gap between ‘intent to act’ and ‘taking action’ among youths in addressing environmental issues, resulting in declining interest and motivation to engage in such initiatives.³⁴ This value-action gap is also observable among Christian students.

Christian Unions are most concerned about pollution, including air pollution, noise pollution, and littering, among other forms of pollution, at 46%. Extreme weather, characterized by very hot and very cold seasons, came in second at 18%, while the other factors (water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, and deforestation) followed at 12% each. From this finding, it appears that more attention is given to environmental issues that have present and immediate effects on the students. A study conducted at the University of Nairobi found that while students generally possess positive attitudes toward environmental conservation, their environmental initiatives are significantly influenced by their awareness of immediate and local environmental challenges. The research highlighted that students were more motivated to participate in environmental activities when they experienced and recognized the immediate effects of environmental degradation in their surroundings.³⁵

The leading motivators for environmental stewardship in Christian Unions are biblical beliefs and personal interests in the environment, at 29.23% each. The desire to help the community ranked third at 23.08%, while FOCUS Kenya initiatives ranked last at 18.46%. As previously observed, intrinsic motivators are more reliable for promoting sustainable pro-environmental practices. It is, therefore, a positive thing that Christian students are more internally motivated by their faith, personal interests, and desire to help others rather than external motivators like money and recognition.

Finally, 64.4% of the respondents consider ignorance and lack of awareness as the leading reasons why young people do not participate in environmental stewardship. Lack of concern and interest was second at 15.6%, while busyness can last. This finding aligns with another study conducted in Nigeria, where 81.8% of university students had heard of climate change, but 89% did not understand its causes, effects, or mitigation strategies. Additionally, 60.9% couldn’t explain how climate change affected them personally. Whereas such information

³⁴ Unicef India, ‘Engaging Youth on Climate Change & Environmental Sustainability’ (India: UNICEF, 2021).

³⁵ Waweru, L. M., ‘Factors Influencing Environmental Concern and Pro-Environmental Behavior among University of Nairobi Students’ (Nairobi: University of Nairobi, 2019).



could be readily available to them, the awareness and comprehension rates were that low.³⁶ This indicates a lack of sufficient awareness due to ignorance and lack of interest.

Student-Centered Theological Discourse for Environmental Stewardship

A total of 75% of the respondents consider the creation story in Genesis, and particularly God's command to man to care for and till the land, as the most compelling biblical text supporting environmental stewardship. Other biblical arguments mentioned included references from Psalms (referring to God's ownership of all creation) and Levitical laws, such as the command to leave the land fallow. The only New Testament narrative mentioned was about the collection of leftovers after the feeding of the 5,000. From this finding, the creation mandate is the most compelling theological discourse for young people.

Other top theological arguments supporting environmental stewardship, according to the respondents, were honoring God (30.2%) and compassion and love for others (15.28%). Justice and caring for the less privileged ranked last (11.11%). From these findings, there is a need for a deliberate focus on what resonates most with students while also exploring how to nurture other theological entry points to environmental stewardship. For example, justice and caring for the oppressed were ranked last as a theological argument for creation care, indicating a weak theology of environmental justice. A proper theology for environmental stewardship for students needs to capitalize on the already popular theological entry points (creation, Levitical laws, Psalms, etc.) while also developing other compelling arguments from less popular teachings, such as compassion and justice.

Respondents were asked about theological arguments used by some Christians against environmental stewardship. The most popular was about the ultimate destruction of the earth, where some Christians see no need to care for creation because, in the end, it will all be destroyed, as the Bible teaches. The second argument was that environmental stewardship is not a gospel issue and, therefore, it should not be a priority for Christians. In being not a gospel issue, some Christians see no need for the church to give it much attention. Others mentioned that some Christians consider environmental stewardship to be God's work, not a human responsibility. They argue that God, being the creator of all things, is also the sustainer and does not require any assistance from human beings. Another anti-environment theological argument

³⁶ E. D. Oruonye, 'An Assessment of the Level of Awareness of the Effects of Climate Change among Students of Tertiary Institutions in Jalingo Metropolis, Taraba State Nigeria,' *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning* 4, no. 9 (2011).



was the Old Testament narratives like God asking people to cut trees to build the temple, God cursing the earth, and God creating deserts, among other arguments. Lastly, some respondents mentioned how a wrong understanding of dominion makes some Christians justify over-exploitation and destruction of the environment. From these responses, a student-centered theological proposition for creation care needs to address all these counterarguments and demonstrate how they fall short of the whole counsel of Scripture.

Conclusions

The study noted that a range of initiatives by Christian Unions towards creation care are in place, as evidenced by activities such as tree planting, litter collection, clean-ups, and pollution prevention. However, the CU is averagely effective in promoting environmental stewardship due to a lack of adequate initiatives, improper strategies, low awareness, and a lack of interest among Christian students. The study also highlights the challenges faced by Christian Unions, which include a lack of sufficient awareness, inadequate teaching, and a lack of funding.

Regarding attitudes and perspectives, this study concludes that students are more likely to resonate with environmental stewardship initiatives that address the environmental challenges they face in their daily lives. There is less focus on environmental issues that may not have an immediate or close impact on them. The study also observed that students appreciate the biblical importance of environmental stewardship as a biblical command from God and as a mandate for all Christians. It is, however, clear that the practice does not fully align with the belief because despite having the belief in its importance, their involvement in environmental stewardship remains significantly low. Ignorance and a lack of awareness are the primary reasons why young people do not participate in environmental stewardship; therefore, addressing these issues should be a top priority in developing youth strategies. It requires intentional efforts to integrate environmental teachings into CU programs, leadership structures, and student-led initiatives.

Theological perceptions play a critical role in shaping attitudes toward creation care, with the Genesis creation mandate being the most compelling argument for stewardship among the students. It also needs to leverage the already appreciated theology for environmental care, such as the creation story, Levitical commands, Psalms, and New Testament lessons. However, counterarguments, such as the belief that the earth will ultimately be destroyed or the notion that environmental stewardship is not a core gospel issue, illustrate the need for a more robust theological framework. Other less popular theological propositions for creation care, such as



environmental justice, compassion, love for one's neighbor, and responsible dominion, need to be more emphasized among students.

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