

Article

Indigenous Econaming Practices in Ecosystems Conservation among the Rural Communities of Igbo, Southeast Nigeria

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Abstract

Important things have often been overlooked in environmental and conservation studies such as indigenous econaming practices which embed wisdom, cultural values, traditional knowledge and a deep understanding of local ecosystems useful in ecological and biodiversity conservation efforts in Igbo. In turn, there is lack of understanding of the paramount contributions of the indigenous econaming practices in conserving ecosystems and the impacts on rural communities' resources in Igbo, southeast Nigeria. The objectives of this study are to investigate: (i) the indigenous names that are tied to ecosystems in rural communities of Igbo, and the ways the econames and econaming practices reflect the history and cosmology of the geographical features such as rivers, mountains, flora and fauna in the areas; (ii) explore practical ways socio-cultural contexts and language have influenced the econaming practices, ecosystems preservation, and resources management in Igbo; (iii) investigate various ways the econaming practices have impacted ecosystems preservation and environmental resources enhancement in Nigeria in contemporary times. The study adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative research design. Data for the study was through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation and the native speakers' intuition. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. Sapir-Whorfian and socio-onomastic approaches, which have the potential of offering new analytical perspectives on econaming practices in ecosystems conservation, are employed in the study. The study opens up new opportunities for ecosystems conservation, environmental resources management, and future ecolinguistics studies.

Keywords: Econaming, ecosystems, conservation, Igbo, Nigeria

Introduction

Econaming – a term used to describe a person's name derived from or referencing ecosystems, and which significantly influences the relationship between human beings and their environment – is sparsely represented in the African academic literature. Communities in Igboland share a deep and enduring love for nature. We know that healthy, biodiverse ecosystems sustain us. Yet it is undisputable that nature is in trouble. The signs are clear, and biodiversity loss is accelerating at an alarming rate, threatening the foundations of human well-being and survival.

Academic debates regarding ecosystem conservation and environmental resources have addressed issues of conserving ecologies and enhancing environmental resources (e.g. Batame 2025; Khali et al. 2023; VijayKumar 2024; Mensah 2025; Rwodzi 2023; Agrawal & Gibson 1999; Miracle et al. 2025; Lord Ebow et al. 2024; Sangha et al. 2025). Despite these contributions, econames and econaming practices which reflect the history and cosmology of geographical features such as rivers, mountains, flora and fauna remain underrepresented, especially in Igbo, southeast Nigeria. Comparative, collaborative and interdisciplinary studies on indigenous econaming practices in ecosystems preservation (Khalil & Ulla 2023) are also sparse in African literature. There is a general absence of a

comprehensive effort to compare and measure objectively the contribution or roles of these practices in ecosystems conservation in rural communities of Nigeria (Khalil & Ulla 2023; Mensah 2025).

Other research on ecosystems preservation has focused extensively on death-prevention and gendered personal names, emphasising their factors and role in ecosystems preservation in Africa (e.g. Akung & Abang 2019; Mensah 2024; Doyle 2008; Mamvura 2021; Obeng 1998; Yakub 2024; Dautey 2025; Rwodzi 2023; Mensah 2023; Bazola 2023; Matiki & M. 2023; Cekiso & Meyiwa 2014). These studies created awareness of the factors and roles in ecosystems conservation, but a yawning gap remains regarding the practical ways socio-cultural contexts and language have influenced and impacted economising practices, ecosystems preservation and environmental resources enhancement in the rural communities of Nigeria.

Several recent publications have ventured into the study of ecology, environment and sustainability. Morrone et al. (2001), for instance, developed a metric to test general ecological ideas, but included neither knowledge of species nor other natural phenomena. Some scholars, through ecocriticism approaches, have investigated indigenous economising practices in ecosystems conservation in parts of Africa – Western Kenya and Ekegusi (Nyamira and Kisii habitats) in Kenya (e.g. Wakoko & Mudogo 2021; Nyakundi 2024; Khalil & Ulla 2023). However, the combination of socio-onomastic and Sapir-Whorf approaches in the study of indigenous economising practices in ecosystems conservation has been scarce in the extant literature.

There is no doubt that matters of linguistic and cultural diversity in relation to ecology and biodiversity are of acute importance in the Global South, and in particular in specific regions of Africa that are hotspots of linguistic diversity, biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services (Mori 2024; IKik et al. 2021). Beyond that, the insights available from socio-cultural contexts, language and transformation can provide effective means to achieve ecosystem conservation and undertake meaningful and impactful stewardship (Heller et al. 2023; Ransom & Ettenger 2001; Mensah 2025). The aim of this study also stems from the increased number of studies emphasising the need for more research on indigenous economising practices in ecosystems conservation in Africa and beyond (e.g. Nyakundi 2024; Wakoko & Mudogo 2021; Khalil & Ulla 2023; Mensah 2025).

Further, during the last West African Linguistic Society (WALS) / Société de Linguistique de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (SLAO) conference held in Senegal in October 2025, I was struck by the surnames of my conference colleagues – a Hausa lady "Tsauni", a Cameroonian "Nkôl", and an Igbo man "Ugwu". In one of our discussion sections, I inquired about the meaning, roles and significance of each of their names in their various communities. Each of them shook their head apologetically, and the Igbo man replied, "I'm busy with sustainable developments." Others gave different unproductive reasons for not knowing. Their responses not only stayed with me but also motivated the topic of this research.

In turn, the researchers aim to fill these yawning gaps through a qualitative, interdisciplinary research study on indigenous economising practices in ecosystems conservation in Nigeria, to increase indigenous economising practices, ecosystems conservation efforts, knowledge and policy production in the study areas and beyond.

This study will offer important scholarly discussions on the interplay between human populations and their environment in rural regions of Africa, especially Nigeria, and beyond. This article aims to investigate the ways indigenous naming practices are used to create awareness of environmental sustainability in Igbo, southeast Nigeria. In this regard, the paper examines: the motivations for the bestowal of indigenous names that reflect ecosystems in rural communities of Igbo; how econames and econaming practices reflect the history and cosmology of geographical features such as rivers, mountains, flora and fauna in the areas; the practical ways socio-cultural contexts and language have influenced econaming practices, ecosystems preservation and resources management in southeast Nigeria; and finally, how econaming practices have impacted ecosystems preservation and environmental resources enhancement in Igbo, southeast Nigeria in contemporary times.

Research Methodology

Data was generated through in-depth interviews, participant observations, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and the native speakers' intuition. Forty participants – men and women (with both formal and informal education) between the ages of 20 and 85 – were selected from each rural community using purposive sampling technique. They were selected based on their deep knowledge of environment-related names and their identities as either bearers, givers or users of econames. Informed consent was obtained from all participants for all interviews, observations and recordings.

The choice of these data collection methods is informed by the fact that the elicitation approach enabled the researchers to work with the participants' schedules and convenience. It also enabled the researchers to adjust questions and appreciate new information that could act as motivation for further enquiries. Participants were interviewed to understand the connection between their names and the natural environment, motivations, views and perceptions of econames, and how these names have been fulfilling their objectives of reflecting awareness about ecosystems conservation. Open-ended questions about the sources and origins of names were asked. Other questions focused on choices of names and their linguistic interpretations. The researchers also sought to understand the extent to which their languages serve as a filter through which they experience their ecological environment, enabling a more nuanced understanding and conservation of it. Questions were also asked to interrogate econames in relation to their socio-cultural contexts and their history in each culture.

A digital audio recorder and field notes were used for data collection. Data was coded into relevant categorical frames and translated. Aspects of socio-onomastic and Sapir-Whorf approaches were employed in the analysis. Descriptive and narrative methods were also employed in the analysis, interpretation and discussion of the data.

Indigenous Econaming Practices in Ecosystems Conservation among the Rural Communities in Igbo

In this section, we identify the relevant themes to frame the analysis of naming in the context of environmental conservation and sustainability, which reveals a broader

worldview of the humans about the importance they attach to ecosystems in the environment and the interaction between humans, culture and nature.

Names that Depict the History and Cosmology of Geographical Features

Topography has to do with the physical features of an area of land which are very important for human survival. Topography is composed of natural elements of the environment and shows how a terrain looks in terms of slope, elevation and drainage (Mensah 2025). In various parts of Igboland, topography has deep representation in names and naming practices. A major motivation for this category of names, according to our respondents, is to promote ecological resilience and foster an integrative relationship between community and nature. Names that depict geographical features within the topography are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Names that depict the history and cosmology of geographical features in local communities in Nsukka Igbo

S/N	Name	Gloss
i.	Úgwú	hill
ii.	Ikeagwu	tiring hilly pathway
iii.	Àladozi	earth pacifies
iv.	Nnamal	earth father
v.	Ogele	pond
vi.	Íyí	river
vii.	Oshimiri	ocean
viii.	Mkpúmé	rock
ix.	Okwute	stone
x.	Anyanwụ	sun
xi.	Ọnwa	moon
xii.	Ólà	gold / silver
xiii.	Ebonyi	river (also the name of a state)

The naming process broadens people's perception of the environment and the geographical features such as rivers, hills, valleys, topographies, rocks and stones. The names 'Ugwu', 'Ikeagwu', 'Aladozi', 'Nnamal', 'Ogele', 'Iyi', 'Oshimiri', 'Ebonyi' and 'Mkpume' confer positive impact on the people's view and perceptions of the environment. These cultural landscapes link culture to the physical environment where people live and work. Hills, valleys and stones are unique and valued cultural resources, which are also sites for water resources, pathways, quarrying and mining activities that are used to support the extractive industries.

The name 'Ikeagwu' ('tiredness' from the hilly pathway) depicts the deplorable state of the road which is hilly, and which is no longer healthy and sustainable due to the impact of human activities. It also portrays how people are getting tired and fed up with passing through the hilly path that connects the people in other villages. The name sends a message that there is an urgent need to protect and preserve the environment, and to

create an understanding of the need for action. Names such as 'Onwa' and 'Anyanwu' in Igboland depict beauty. According to our informants, children are named after natural things to show a great bond to nature. A child with a glittering face is often named after the moon or the sun – a beautiful face connected to pearl and beauty.

Names that Reflect Floral Resources

In Igboland, children are named after floral resources for a number of factors and motivations. Such names are used to appreciate the numerous benefits of plants in sustaining the survival of human beings. In Igboland, there is a symbiotic relationship between plants and humans, and names in this category are used by the indigenous people to maintain that affinity. Plants provide economic, biological, physical and psychological benefits to mankind, and humans, on the other hand, conserve plants by cultivating, storing and preserving them. Plants are an important source of agriculture and have played considerable roles in human life.

Table 2: Names that portray the importance of flora

S/N	Name	Gloss	Igbo Community
i.	Uroko	Mahogany plant	Nsukka
ii.	Ọ́fọ́	Justice plant	Obollo Nsukka
iii.	Ji	Yam	Nsukka
iv.	Ìrùré	Grass	Abakaliki
v.	Akpu	Cassava	Anambra
vi.	Ọ́jì	Tree species (iroko)	Nkanu
vii.	Úbé	Pear tree	Uhunowere Nsukka
viii.	Ákịrịká	Dried bamboo leaves	Udi
ix.	Òdòdó	Flower	Iheaka Nsukka
x.	Úkwà	Breadfruit	Anambra
xi.	Ósísí	Stick / wood	Enugu-Ezike Nsukka
xii.	Okorji	Solid <i>orji</i> tree	Anambra

The data in Table 2 (i-xii) demonstrates the conferment of names that underscore the symbiotic bond between plants and humans in the Igbo cultural area. The names show the important plant materials that are used to fulfil daily requirements of food, fibre, clothing, shelter and medicine for the Igbo people.

Names that Reflect Fauna Resources

Names that reflect animal resources in Igboland contribute greatly to the conservation of ecosystems in the area. They are signs of love, caring and compassion for animals. In Igboland, animals play significant roles as crucial components of the ecosystem. They have an interdependent relationship with human beings: they provide food, protein, leather and medicine to humans, and humans domesticate and care for animals. Table 3 gives details of Igbo names that are connected to animals.

Table 3: Names that reflect fauna resources

S/N	Name	Gloss	Scientific Name	Igbo Community
i.	Ágụ	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>	Nsukka
ii.	Òdòkó	Sparrow	<i>Passeridae</i> family	Akụ Nsukka
iii.	Ényí	Elephant	<i>Elephantidae</i> family	Nsukka
iv.	Òrjìányìnà	Title for a woman who has ridden a horse	<i>Equus ferus caballus</i>	Nsukka
v.	Ózò	Capuchin monkey	<i>Cebidae</i> family	Nsukka
vi.	Ènwé	Monkey	<i>Cercopithecidae</i> family	Nsukka
vii.	Éké	Python (African rock python)	<i>Python sebae</i>	Udi
viii.	Aguiyi	Otter / water lion	<i>Lutrinae</i> subfamily	Nsukka
ix.	Orjieshwu	Title associated with leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Nsukka
x.	Okwa	Parrot	<i>Psittacidae</i> family	Nsukka
xi.	Nwaugo	Eagle (lit. "child of eagle")	<i>Accipitridae</i> family	Nsukka

The names associated with animals in Table 3 play significant roles as crucial components of the ecosystem. Animals have a mutual relationship with human beings – they offer food, leather and medicine to humans, and humans domesticate and care for them. Names associated with animals are also used to index masculinity as well as femininity. 'Nwaugo' (eagle), for instance, is often conferred on females and depicts beauty and admirable attributes. In Igboland, animals such as *Eke* (python), *Agụ* (lion), *Ozọ* (monkey), *Aguiyi* (otter), *Orjieshwu* (leopard), *Orjìányìnà* (horse) and *Okwa* (parrot) carry sufficient symbolic values grounded in common beliefs. The crocodile and the lion, for instance, stand for strength or power. The eagle often represents beauty.

These econames align with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which states that the relationship between organisms and their environments encourages different ways of interpreting, classifying and interacting with the natural world through language. The hypothesis suggests that a language's lexicon reflects what is important to its culture. An ecological community that relies heavily on a specific environment (e.g., forests where monkeys are prevalent) will develop a more precise and detailed vocabulary for that environment, enabling a more nuanced understanding of it. In Igbo, the multiple terms for different animal species and their incorporation into personal names indicate that the natural world is not a background concern but a central organising feature of identity and social meaning.

Socio-Cultural Contexts in Econaming Practices and Ecosystems Preservation in Igbo

The socio-cultural context in this study constitutes the structure of society which plays a crucial role in the practice of conservation of ecosystems. According to Kazmi (2008), the socio-cultural environment consists of factors related to human relationship within the environment. The development, forms and functions of such a relationship are learned and shared behaviours of groups of human beings having a bearing on society. Biodiversity conservation is critical in the face of increasing environmental degradation, and alongside scientific approaches, traditional cultural practices offer profound strategies for safeguarding ecosystems (Rathoure 2024).

In Igboland, personal names are also used to create awareness about socio-cultural features and preservation from human degradation. Our respondents said that in most Igbo communities, certain measures were put in place by the community to improve the level of environmental behaviour and to reduce human activities that are hostile to human life and welfare. Our respondents narrated that official laws or new conservation agendas were contained in names as follows: *Àlà ágbá ọ́sọ́* (the earth cannot run – i.e., the earth is permanent and must be respected), *Nnamani* (my earth father), *Aladozi* (the earth resolves), *Onyeakpalaguaka* (do not kill or touch a lion). These socio-cultural names were meant to promote environmental literacy and change everyday behaviour toward sustainability. In an attempt to spread awareness about the urgency and importance of preserving the ecosystem, some of the wordings or expressions of local laws were adopted as personal names.

Cultural beliefs and practices have a significant influence on how individuals perceive and interact with their environment. For instance, in many culture areas in Igboland, sacred groves and forests – such as *Ekwu Ezemeegbala* of Obollo, *Ekwu Arikpo* Sacred Grove in Ezimo, *Amalla Egazi* sacred grove, and the ancient Nsude Pyramid – play a crucial role in preserving the biodiversity of the communities. According to our informants, sacred groves and sacred forests serve as biodiversity hotspots, conserving rare species of plants, animals and ecosystems that would otherwise be susceptible to exploitation. Sacred groves (Rathoure 2024) represent cultural respect for nature, preserving ecological systems through traditional beliefs.

The recognition of indigenous econaming practices in biodiversity frameworks underscores the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage into biodiversity conservation policies. This approach acknowledges that indigenous econaming practices and biodiversity protection are mutually reinforcing. The symbiosis between cultural heritage and biodiversity protection showcases how indigenous practices not only preserve cultural identity but also serve as crucial elements in sustaining the planet's natural resources (Rathoure 2024). Our informants highlighted that the motivation behind ecosystem econaming practices stems from the recognition of diverse ecosystem services such as protection, medicinal, provisioning, spiritual and informative benefits. The participants attribute the perpetuation of these benefits to keeping strong ties with their ancestors – a system that requires them to maintain their traditional ecosystem conservation through econaming practices.

Discussion

This section addresses each of the three research objectives in turn and reflects on the broader implications of the findings.

How Econames Reflect the History and Cosmology of Geographical Features

The first objective was to investigate the indigenous names tied to ecosystems in rural Igbo communities and how these names reflect the history and cosmology of geographical features such as rivers, mountains, flora and fauna. The data in Table 1 demonstrates that topographical features are not merely physical landmarks in Igbo cosmology – they are deeply embedded in personal identity. Names such as *Úgwú* (hill), *Íyí* (river), and *Mkpúmé*

(rock) are not simply descriptors; they carry historical narratives about settlement patterns, the challenges of terrain (as with *Ikeagwu* 'tiring hilly pathway'), and the spiritual value attached to the earth (as with *Àlādozi* 'earth pacifies' and *Nnamal* 'earth father').

This finding aligns with Mensah's (2025) observation that topography has deep representation in African naming systems. However, the Igbo data adds a distinctive dimension: several of these names encode both appreciation and critique of the environment. *Ikeagwu*, for instance, simultaneously acknowledges the hill's existence as a geographical reality and registers community frustration with its degraded condition – a form of environmental commentary embedded in a personal name. This dual function – celebration and warning – is a notable feature of Igbo econaming that has not been highlighted in previous studies on African onomastics.

Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Influences on Econaming and Preservation

The second objective was to explore the practical ways socio-cultural contexts and language have influenced econaming practices, ecosystems preservation and resources management. The findings reveal that econaming in Igboland is not a random or merely aesthetic practice; it is a deliberate cultural mechanism tied to conservation ethics. Names like *Onyeakpalaguaka* (do not kill or touch a lion) and *Àlā ágbá ósọ́* (the earth cannot run) function as verbal taboos or prohibitions encoded in personal identity. When a child bears such a name, the name becomes a constant social reminder of the community's conservation values – every time the name is spoken, the ecological principle is reinforced.

From a Sapir-Whorfian perspective, these findings suggest that Igbo language structures – specifically, the lexicon of nature-derived personal names – may shape how speakers perceive and interact with their environment. While the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (linguistic determinism) has been largely discredited, the weaker version (linguistic relativity) is supported by the data: the prominence of nature-derived names in Igbo correlates with community practices of environmental stewardship. Our informants' reports that sacred groves and forests are protected through cultural taboos, and that names serve as reminders of these taboos, provide evidence for the claim that language (naming) and ecological behaviour are interconnected.

The socio-onomastic framework further illuminates these findings. Naming is a social act that positions the named individual within a web of cultural meanings and obligations. In Igbo, a person named *Ugwu* (hill) carries a symbolic connection to that geographical feature – and by extension, to the responsibility of respecting and preserving hills and the ecosystems they support. This reflects what Rathoure (2024) describes as the mutual reinforcement of cultural heritage and biodiversity protection.

Contemporary Impacts of Econaming on Ecosystems Preservation

The third objective was to investigate how econaming practices have impacted ecosystems preservation and environmental resources enhancement in contemporary times. The findings indicate that econaming continues to function as a conservation strategy, though with changing dynamics. Older informants (aged 50–85) demonstrated a much deeper

awareness of the ecological meanings behind names than younger informants (aged 20–35), suggesting that the transmission of econaming knowledge may be weakening. This is consistent with global trends in which indigenous knowledge systems face erosion due to urbanisation, formal education and religious change.

Nonetheless, the study found that econames remain prevalent in rural communities and continue to serve as vehicles for environmental messaging. The persistence of names like *Nnamani* (my earth father) and *Aladozi* (the earth resolves) in contemporary Igbo communities suggests that ecological consciousness is still encoded in naming practices, even if the explicit awareness of this function is diminishing among younger generations.

The contemporary impact of econaming on conservation can be observed in at least three areas: (1) intergenerational transmission of ecological knowledge – when elders explain the meaning of a child's name, they simultaneously transmit information about the environment; (2) community identity and belonging – names tied to local geography (e.g., *Ebonyi* after the river, *Ugwu* after a hill) strengthen place-based identity, which correlates with greater willingness to protect local ecosystems; and (3) symbolic conservation – names that reference animals (e.g., *Agu* 'lion', *Ényí* 'elephant') maintain the symbolic presence of these species in the cultural imagination, which supports conservation attitudes even when the species themselves are declining in the wild.

Conclusion

This study has investigated indigenous econaming practices in ecosystems preservation in Igboland. Econaming practices have been age-long traditional conservation strategies among the Igbo people of southeast Nigeria, yet the practice has been largely neglected in the literature of environmental conservation and sustainability.

In Igboland, personal names are mainly used to create awareness about geographical features and their preservation from human degradation. Our respondents reveal that in most Igbo communities, certain measures were put in place to improve the level of environmental behaviour and reduce human activities that are hostile to human life and welfare. The cultural landscapes link culture to the physical environment where people live and work. Hills, valleys and stones are unique and valued cultural resources, which are also sites for water resources, pathways, quarrying and mining activities used to sustain extractive industries. A name such as *Ikeagwu* ('tiredness' from the hilly pathway) depicts the deplorable state of the roads which are hilly and no longer healthy and sustainable due to human activities. The name sends a message that there is an urgent need to protect, preserve and create an understanding of the need for action.

The study reveals that in Igboland, there is a symbiotic relationship between plants and humans, and names in this category are used by the indigenous people to sustain that affinity and what they believe in (Mensah 2025). Plants provide economic, biological, physical and psychological benefits to mankind, and humans, on the other hand, conserve plants by cultivating, storing and preserving them. The natural environment in Igboland is endowed with enormous animal resources that contribute greatly to the conservation of ecosystems in the area. Names referencing animals are signs of love, caring and

compassion for animals. In Igbo, animals play significant roles as crucial components of the ecosystem, sharing an interdependent relationship with human beings.

Employing Sapir-Whorfian and socio-onomastic approaches – which have the potential of offering new analytical perspectives on econaming practices in ecosystems conservation – this study reports the ways the Igbo people of Nigeria utilise personal names as strategies for environmental protection and conservation. We have seen the cultural, occupational, historical, geographical and situational domains in which names are used to heighten awareness about the physical environment as a basic principle of socio-onomastic reading of names. Historically, there are different traditional natural resource conservation practices that Igbo people have adopted to protect their landscape, forest, water bodies, plants and animals. Some of these approaches include sacred sites, topography, flora and fauna.

This study reveals that indigenous communities of Igboland have adopted nature-centric perspectives to control environmental degradation. Igbo cultural and traditional practices offer a wealth of knowledge for ecosystems conservation. Through econaming conservation initiatives, these practices provide invaluable lessons for modern environmental management.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Based on the findings, the following concrete recommendations are offered:

1. **Documentation and archiving.** Government and environmental agencies should partner with linguists and community elders to document econaming practices in Igboland before this knowledge is lost among younger generations. This documentation should include the meanings, ecological significance and conservation functions of nature-derived names.
2. **Integration into environmental impact assessments.** When environmental impact assessments are conducted in Igbo communities, local econaming knowledge should be consulted as part of the baseline data. Names that encode ecological warnings (e.g., *Ikeagwu*) may point to existing environmental stressors.
3. **School curricula.** Primary and secondary schools in Igbo-speaking areas should incorporate lessons on the ecological meanings of indigenous names into their social studies or environmental science curricula. This would strengthen intergenerational transmission of econaming knowledge.
4. **Community-level conservation programmes.** Traditional rulers and community leaders should be engaged to use name-based conservation messaging in local by-laws and community awareness campaigns. Names like *Onyeakpalaguaka* (do not kill a lion) could be revived and promoted as part of wildlife conservation efforts.
5. **Further research.** Comparative studies across other Nigerian and African linguistic communities should be conducted to test whether the patterns observed in Igbo are found elsewhere, and to develop a typology of conservation-oriented naming practices.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the data draws from specific Igbo communities (Nsukka, Obollo, Abakaliki, Anambra, Nkanu, Udi, Enugu-

Ezike) and may not be generalizable to all Igbo-speaking areas. Second, the sample size – forty participants per community – though appropriate for qualitative research, limits the statistical generalizability of the findings. Third, the study relies partly on self-reported data about the conservation function of names, which may be subject to social desirability bias – informants may overstate the conservation awareness embedded in naming. Fourth, the study did not include quantitative measures of conservation outcomes (e.g., comparing deforestation rates in communities with strong econaming traditions versus those without), which would strengthen causal claims.

In sum, the interconnection between naming and ecosystems conservation is vital for creating sustainable environmental practices. As demonstrated in this study, econaming practices exemplify how indigenous knowledge systems can foster ecosystems while preserving cultural identity. These practices offer actionable insights and strategies for contemporary environmental challenges. By recognising and integrating these cultural approaches into modern conservation efforts, we can enhance ecological resilience and ensure that both nature and culture thrive.

The lessons emerging from this study are that there is an existential, inseparable connection between people and ecosystems, which is important in guiding successful ecosystem-based adaptation initiatives in indigenous settings. The local people's maintenance of ecosystems is largely motivated by two lines of understanding: first, that ecosystems are a warehouse of services that define all forms of their existence – from physical provisions, protection and survival knowledge to spiritual requirements; and second, that the ecosystems are home for their ancestors (Chanza & de Wit 2016), whom they believe have powers to provide them with ecosystem services, including powers to influence the biodiversity system. By conserving econaming practices, we not only safeguard the natural environment but also ensure that future generations inherit a world rich in both ecosystems and cultural diversity. The path to conserving nature and culture is intertwined, offering a sustainable and inclusive approach to environmental stewardship in Nigeria and beyond.

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