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Influence of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church's Teachings in Understanding Creation Care in Central Rift Valley Conference, Kenya

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Abstract

This study examined the Seventh-day Adventist Church's environmental teachings and their influence on its members' awareness and understanding of creation care. The Central Rift Valley Conference theological affirmation of creation care among religious adherents does not necessarily translate into measurable ecological awareness and practice, and this problem remains unexamined among SDA Church Christians in the ecologically stressed Central Rift Valley Conference (CRVC), Kenya. Guided by Structural Functionalism, the study adopted a convergent research design in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analysed independently, and triangulated during interpretation. Daniel's (2012) finite population correction was used to determine a sample of 381 respondents from a target population of 45,104 Adventists. Stratified random sampling was used to proportionately distribute the sample across the 12 stations, with lay Christians selected by simple random sampling within each stratum, while cluster sampling ensured geographical coverage. Purposive sampling was used to select 22 pastors, 19 district elders, and 19 stewardship leaders for interviews. The response rate comprised 315 (98.1%) lay Christians, 16 (84.2%) stewardship leaders, 18 (94.7%) church elders, and 15 (68.2%) pastors. Data were collected using questionnaires, observations and interview schedules. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively, and qualitative data thematically. The results showed strong theological affirmation but weak behavioural translation. Biblical teaching on creation care was accepted by respondents, yet awareness remained abstract. The study concluded that the Church effectively discharged its pattern-maintenance role, but its integrative function remained underdeveloped. The study recommended institutionalising creation care to translate moral consensus into measurable environmental action

Key words: Adventist, central Rift Valley conference, creation care, environmental crisis; environmental stewardship; Seventh-day Adventist Church.



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INTRODUCTION

This study examined the SDA Church's environmental teachings and their influence on its members' awareness and understanding of creation care in the CRVC. The persistent gap between theological affirmation of creation care and its translation into measurable ecological practice among religious adherents constitutes the central problem that has not been adequately addressed. White's (1967) review of the "greening of religion" thesis established that religious teachings can affect environmental concern, but this impact varies across contexts (Hitzhusen & Tucker, 2013; Taylor et al., 2016). Social-scientific research also shows that different religious groups translate commitments into congregational life differently (Veldman et al., 2013). This engagement, however, is not confined to doctrine alone but also involves leadership priorities and organisational structure (Koehrsen et al., 2025). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC] (2022) now considers the environmental crisis an institutional, governance, social-norms, and technological issue. Whether religious adherents receive environmental teachings within their context, and whether this affects their ecological thinking and behaviour, remains underexamined.

African churches are well suited to respond to the continent's increasing ecological degradation, as they are among the most trusted and accessible institutions. However, little empirical evidence examines how their environmental teachings play out at the congregational level. Existing literature suggests that African environmental ethics emphasises community well-being rather than extraction (Kaoma, 2017). Churches can have an impact on environmental awareness, but must be provided with intentional leadership structures and context-sensitive implementation; otherwise, their impact on attitudes is not reliable (Børresen et al., 2023). Although ecological degradation is linked to life-threatening challenges like poverty and corruption (Kagama, 2012), religious circles often give environmental issues little priority. As a result, denominational discourse often fails to make intermediate decisions that would facilitate local implementation (Ndiritu & Muricho, 2021). The literature makes clear that African churches can act. Still, it does not establish how often they actually do so, nor does it identify which elements of their teaching make the difference. This capacity–enactment disparity calls for intervention where possible. According to Børresen et

al. (2023), pedagogical content is what matters, not just presence, for the shift from awareness to enactment. Teaching without a focus on communal flourishing will not mobilise behaviour, regardless of how theologically sound it may be (Kaoma, 2017). Therefore, the question is not whether African churches teach environmental stewardship, but how and in what ways they teach, contextualise, and institutionalise it to achieve measurable results.

In Kenya, churches are seen as environmental awareness agents, both in their moral influence and, in some instances, programmatic structures, but the processes by which their teachings are delivered to and shape ordinary members have not been explored. Kiarie (2020) identifies the Christian Church in Kenya as a key player in influencing ecological consciousness. Warui and Kairu (2018) opine that contextualised eco-theology messages enhance active participation of the congregations in the practice of environmental stewardship. Moyer (2015) examines the motivations behind conservation efforts, and Muriithi et al. (2022) explore how churches implement sustainability plans. Kathambi et al. (2024) reveal that institutional support affects the effectiveness of environmental education in the churches. This literature shows the platforms and infrastructure Kenyan churches use to address environmental issues, but each study focuses on one denomination, organisation, or programme.

Existing studies have failed to map how official denominational teaching is passed on to members' knowledge and understanding. As Kiarie (2020) notes, the church's voice on environmental issues has been selective, low-key, and of limited impact. He suggests inadequate teaching is not the problem, but rather the quality, frequency and institutionalisation of such teaching. No systematic study has examined how structural factors in a denominational system shape members' knowledge and understanding. This study is designed to fill this gap, looking at the frequency, channel and content of environmental education in a particular denomination, and how this relates to the awareness and understanding of the members of the denomination.

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church has a unique case for examination about how its theological understanding of creation care is translated into congregational awareness and practice. This is anchored

in the Adventist theological framework of creation care (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 1992, 1995, 1996), formal Adventist teachings on environmental stewardship, and the Church's overall creation-Sabbath-health-redemption structure (Knight, 2024; Standish, 2024; Vasconcelos & Neto, 2024). However, this theological and educational scholarship lacks measurable results at the congregational level and does not test the transmission chain from official teaching to member awareness and understanding. The Central Rift Valley Conference (CRVC) in Kenya sets the empirical background, where the members are confronted with deforestation, mismanaged waste, agrochemical contamination and ecological disruption. Vegetation cover in the Eastern Mau Forest Reserve has declined from 52 per cent in 1984 to 36 per cent in 2002 (Passiany & Kiema, 2026), while the ecological value of the Southwest Mau Forest has decreased from US\$62.96 million in 1976 to US\$51.54 million in 2023 (Akinyi & Langat, 2025).

Pesticide residues and high heavy metal levels have polluted Lake Naivasha due to intensive flower farming (Njogu, 2011), and the Giotto dumpsite in Nakuru has contaminated water sources through surface runoff into Lake Nakuru and the Njoro River (Government Advertising Agency, 2026). In 2025, the number of waterbirds at Lake Elementaita dropped from 208,712 in 2023 to 5,360 (The Standard, 2025). While the SDA Church performs the pattern-maintenance function by articulating shared values, an empirical question remains: whether it also performs the integrative function by translating values into coordinated practice. Because the existing literature does not adequately answer this question, this study sought to investigate how Adventist teachings influence members' awareness and understanding of creation care in the CRVC.

The literature review above reveals no empirical evidence quantifying the correlation, among SDA members from a CRVC in Kenya, between exposure to the Church's environmental teaching and members' awareness and understanding of creation care and sense of moral responsibility to act. This study fills this gap in the CRVC by exploring how SDA environmental teachings affect members' awareness and understanding of creation care. The study was guided by three research questions: How and how often are CRVC members educated about the environment? Do they have a good grasp of the biblical and denominational principles of

creation care? To what extent does this teaching lead to moral responsibility and environmentally responsible practice?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Christian Church Teachings on Environmental Stewardship

Although Christian creation-care teaching is theologically well established, little evidence suggests it reaches ordinary church members or shapes their understanding. The concern is sharper where ecological degradation is acute, like in CRVC, where the Church's moral voice could matter most. Existing literature reveals that modern Christian environmental thinking is based on a rethinking of dominion, where human control over creation is done in a responsible way, rather than extraction. Bauckham (2010) argues that the Bible canon does not place humanity above creation but within it. The call to "rule" in Gen. 1:26–28 is limited by the call to "till and keep" in Gen. 2:15 and the statement that "the earth is the LORD's" in Ps. 24:1. Moo and Moo (2018) build on this by arguing through biblical theology that Romans 8:19-22 and Revelation 21:1-5 teach redemption of creation, not abandonment. Conradie et al. (2014) demonstrate the diversification of eco-theology into retrieval, critique and reconstruction. Together, these scholarly works challenge the notion that Christian teaching allows ecological apathy and provide a hermeneutical basis for denominational teaching on ecological awareness. However, they are normative and academic because they address what Scripture means, not what congregation members learn or understand. These works provide the theological framework for measuring Adventist members' awareness for this study. However, they cannot show whether that content reaches the pew, so the question of transmission remains debatable.

Denominational teachings have implemented these foundations in various ways, but literature showing how tradition has empirically demonstrated whether official doctrinal clarity translates into member awareness and understanding is inadequate. Pope Francis (2015) views environmental degradation as harm to relationships with God, neighbour, and earth. DeWeese (2023) and Tatay-Nieto (2020) see the synthesis of anthropology, ethics and ecology as its distinguishing contribution. The Lutheran tradition is based on a theology of caring as a responsibility in God's ongoing creation (Horrell et al., 2020), which is formally expressed in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (2023). The Presbyterian

Church USA and the Anglican Communion have linked creation care with eco-justice, with the latter incorporating it into the Fifth Mark of Mission (Anglican Communion, 2023; Presbyterian Church USA, 2025). Hampton and Hedley (2022) provide helpful analytical distinctions between anthropocentric reading and stewardship-oriented readings. They account for the practical implications of similar texts across denominations. These sources are primarily doctrinal and confessional. They assume authority rather than test it, and none measures whether a member who hears the teaching comes to understand it. Churches have taken up environmental responsibility on biblical grounds, as Donozo et al. (2019) record, but that is institutional rather than congregational uptake. The inference for the present study is that official declaration is necessary but not sufficient for member awareness. As with Adventists and other traditions, official doctrinal teaching does not, by itself, guarantee that members are aware of or understand it.

The first systematic warning is drawn from empirical research on the relationship between church doctrine and behaviour. Clements et al. (2014) examined trends in U.S. General Social Survey data and found that rank-and-file Christians have not become significantly more green in their attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours. However, more religious Christians were more likely to engage in private pro-environmental behaviours like recycling and reducing driving. Arbuckle and Konisky (2015) also find that the link between religion and environmental attitudes depends on how religion is measured: affiliation, belief, or practice. In a broader literature review, Jenkins et al. (2018) find that religion's effects on environmental involvement are real but contingent, and that institutional and congregational processes remain under-researched. These studies are methodologically sound in terms of sample size and statistical control. Still, they all consider "religion" as an independent variable and do not focus on the content, frequency or channel of teaching. They also draw on overwhelmingly North American and European congregants whose institutional experiences differ from those of Kenyan congregations. They contribute to this study in two ways. They support a design divorced from general religiosity and warn that theological assent does not equal behavioural change. However, they also do not explain how denominations pass on and interpret teaching within a particular congregational context.

African scholarship shifts the argument from doctrine to worldview and, in doing so, exposes a tension Western literature misses. African environmental ethics, according to Behrens (2010) and Chemhuru (2019), is relational and communitarian, in which moral value is found in networks of persons, ancestors, and land. African Christianity, which is a result of missionary westernisation, has often adopted a subject-object approach to nature that is at odds with these indigenous commitments. Kavusa (2021) suggests a localised, ubuntu-based hermeneutic of sustainability. This literature is of value for contextualisation. It helps explain why foreign stewardship language may not have a strong impact and why instruction that does not focus on community well-being can feel abstract. However, this literature overgeneralises concepts across societies and prioritises philosophical argument over data.

The risk of idealising pre-colonial ecological harmony is also present. Njeru and Nzengya (2022), in a systematic review of religious attitudes and pro-environmental behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa, offer a corrective. They argue that Western scholars have conducted most of the research, which has relied primarily on two theories: the White thesis and resource mobilisation. They also claim that theological education has been linked to increased environmental values, suggesting that the manner and extent of members' education are important. The review is constrained by its reliance on previous studies, some of which are descriptive. The African literature indicates that teaching evaluation should be guided by contextual relevance and theological accuracy, and it confirms the general inadequacy of empirical studies in the African context, and denominationally in particular.

Kenyan studies share a similar setting but are limited in scope and design. Gichiri (2022) found that contextualising environmental theology in Anglican churches in Kenya has been linked to greater awareness of, and engagement in, conservation, often through community-based projects. This is good news for the teaching profession, but it also speaks to another tradition with a theology unlike Adventism's. The vision, sermons and programmes of the Parklands Baptist Church are explored by Maseno and Mamati (2021) and how they engage young people in creation care. The study is informative about the relationship between the pulpit and practice but, by its own description, it was descriptive, using one urban congregation for participant observation and literature review. Therefore, it cannot estimate how

teaching is received. In Chuka, Gitonga (2024) observed that pastors did not strongly emphasise environmental care, church teaching was uncommon, and member involvement was low. This is the most directly relevant evidence on the frequency. However, this is a Master's thesis in one sub-county and does not distinguish between awareness and understanding. Studies of the Full Gospel Churches in Embu (Rubiri et al., 2024) and the Catholic Church in Chuka Gitonga (2024) also show that awareness of conservation measures influences practice. They also found that some members were not aware and did not engage with official teaching content and channels. Rather, they engaged with church activities and conservation measures. Kenyan literature suggests that teaching is important but not always effective, though awareness sometimes leads to practice. These studies do not describe the dynamics of these relationships in a denominational context or address the Central Rift Valley.

Taken together, the reviewed literature shows that Christian theology has articulated what creation care should be, but no research follows how official denominational teaching reaches members and shapes their understanding. Surveys indicate that theological assent does not lead to action, and Kenyan studies show that teaching is uneven, even though awareness likely influences practice (Clements et al., 2014; Arbuckle & Konisky, 2015; Gitonga, 2024; Maseno & Mamati, 2021). They do not articulate how that awareness is created through the content, frequency, and channel of teaching. Kenyan evidence is also limited to Anglican, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, and Full Gospel settings (Gichiri, 2022), and the impact of Seventh-day Adventist teaching in the Central Rift Valley Conference, which is experiencing high levels of ecological stress, remains undetermined. Existing studies are descriptive, single-site, or review-based and cannot show the extent to which members receive or understand the teaching. This study addresses these gaps by measuring Adventist members' exposure to environmental teaching, their awareness of the biblical principles and denominational concerns behind it, and their sense of moral responsibility within one particular denominational system and documented local ecology. In doing so, it moves the conversation from doctrine to teaching for understanding.

The Teachings of the SDA Church on Environmental Stewardship

Adventist environmental thought is theologically coherent, but it is built on doctrinal coherence. The most systematic statement is Hayes and Hayes (2013), which recognises creation's intrinsic value as God's intentional act, defines dominion as responsible stewardship, sees Sabbath observance as a weekly statement against consumerism, and links human wholeness inextricably to ecosystem health. This doctrinal approach is designed to produce certain behavioural outcomes: a protective, not an exploitative, attitude to nature should result from a belief in the intrinsic value of creation; an attitude of dominion as stewardship should translate into active care of land, water and biodiversity; and Sabbath observance should be a counter-cultural practice of restraint, contentment and reduced consumption.

Hayes (2016) and Tonstad (2024) build on this by seeing healthful living, vegetarianism included, as a spiritual practice that is closely tied to ecological action. In practice, this health-ecology connection should lead to dietary decisions and lifestyle choices that reduce an individual's ecological footprint, and to the belief that personal health and planetary health are interconnected. In the Adventist creation–redemption narrative, Sharma et al. (2023) suggest an Adventist eco-theology. In this story, redemption is not just a future promise but a present call to participate in redeeming a fallen creation, encouraging believers to take part in remedial environmental action as an expression of their expectation of a new creation. The best thing about this collection is its approach of weaving Sabbath, health, and eschatology into a single moral framework that sets Adventism apart. The downside is that it asserts this rather than examining it. None of these authors explores whether ordinary members encounter, interprets, and internalises the framework. The literature also assumes that a coherent doctrine produces coherent practice by linking ecological ethics to lifestyle. In this study, these works provide the doctrinal framework for assessing members' understanding, even though they do not indicate how much of the content reaches the congregation.

Although Adventist environmental stewardship has theological roots, it has been recognised as a peripheral concern by scholars in and out of the Adventist tradition. Still, these recognitions have been programmatic rather than empirically based. Garner (2021) notes that while

environmental stewardship is less institutionalised than tithing, health, or family life, ethnographic and congregational studies remain limited. Timm and Nix (2018) conclude that Adventist environmental action is primarily indirect, expressed through lifestyle, and that they see it more as learning than activism. To have environmental progress that can be measured, it must be done in the local congregation, as White (2015) observes. Woodhead (2016) argues that environmental action has taken precedence over empirical research. Legrants and Pasuhuk (2024) further note that few studies compare stewardship enactment across socio-economic contexts. These authors are useful because they view the problem from within and outside the tradition. However, they present little systematic data for the diagnosis, which is largely programmatic and based on observation or argument. Their agreement is analytically significant because it suggests that the intensity of Adventist teaching is not evident in its doctrinal content, but must be treated as a variable. This study responds by measuring how often, and through which channels, members are taught.

Of the few empirical studies, Cha (2011) is the clearest precedent for this inquiry. He studied pastors and members of Adventist churches in Korea through focus groups and found that an eco-stewardship ministry should focus on raising environmental awareness. The study's conclusions relied on knowledge and experience. It recommended a pathway that grounds education in the Church's own messages. This study matters because it situates the intervention at the point of awareness. However, its qualitative, small-scale design cannot determine prevalence, and its ecology and church structure differ markedly from sub-Saharan Africa. It thus supports the present study's thesis that awareness and understanding must be the initial links in bridging teaching and action, but it does not offer African evidence for this.

Conceptual literature on Africa is limited, and literature on the African Adventist Church and its role in creation care is inadequate. In the article, *'Ubuntu and the Sabbath: An Ecological Ethos for the Adventist Church in South Africa'* published in the *Africa Theological Journal* (2025), Mqhayisa proposes to engage the Sabbath and the health message in dialogue with ubuntu, and to suggest an ecological ethics for the Adventist Church in South Africa. This is a valuable contribution because the literature worldwide does not localise

Adventist theology within Africa's communal ethics. But the argument is systematic-theological, not empirical. It does not examine how Adventist members understand the Sabbath or the health message ecologically in any African context. The broader African literature on church response confirms that context resonance determines whether teaching is received. According to Njeru and Nzengya (2022), studies on religion and environmental conservation in sub-Saharan Africa have largely been conducted by Western scholars and have rarely examined denominations' actual teachings. This affirms Adventist teaching in Africa, which has been theorised but rarely empirically contextualised.

Adventist environmental teaching in Kenya is mostly programmatic. According to Tobias and the Faith and Science Council (2025), the campaign to plant one million trees was launched by students, teachers and churches throughout the East-Central Africa Division, and the number of Adventist schools and churches that registered was 705 within four months. These reports reflect the organisation's activity but say nothing about members' understanding or the teaching that preceded participation. Studies of other Kenyan denominations are more analytical and show why the question matters. Rubiri et al. (2024) found that some conservation activities among members of Full Gospel congregations in Embu were effective, some had limited impact, and some members were degrading the land. In Catholic churches in Chuka, Gitonga (2024) discovered that pastors rarely highlighted the moral value of caring for the environment and that environmental care was rarely taught. Both studies indicate that congregations in Kenya may lack a well-taught creation-care ethic, but each focuses on a different sub-county and denomination. It is unclear whether similar patterns exist among Adventists, whose teaching is particularly rich in doctrine.

The reviewed literature leaves a single unified gap, which can be divided into three sections. Theory of Adventist environmental thought is well developed, but adequate contextualised research is lacking to quantify how much environmental thought Adventists receive and understand. Available empirical and programmatic accounts are limited in scope, largely qualitative or descriptive, and fail to measure the frequency, channels, and content of teaching, as well as members' awareness and moral responsibility. Finally, no action has been taken for Adventists in Kenya, especially in the Central Rift Valley Conference, where forest degradation, water

and soil degradation are severe. This study addresses these gaps by exploring how the Church's environmental teaching affects awareness and understanding of creation care in the CRVC. It integrates the survey and interview data to connect understanding/exposure to teaching with sense of responsibility, so that Adventist environmental thought is tested at the congregational level rather than assumed.

Structural Functionalism Theory and its Application to the Study

This study took a sociological perspective on Structural Functionalism Theory, developed based on Spencer's (1898) organic analogy of society and systematised by Durkheim (1893). The theory states that society is an organised system of institutions with specialised functions that ensure its stability. In this view, religious organisations, as institutions, control actions, transmit shared values, and activate collective action. The two core functional imperatives that are relevant to this study were the Church's creation-care commitments: pattern maintenance, which relates to how the Church sustains and transmits its creation-care commitments over time; and integration, which relates to how the Church mobilises members around its creation-care commitments (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2021; Turner, 2013). The theory was chosen because it helped investigate the SDA Church's effectiveness in conveying its environmental messages and how members internalise them as awareness and understanding.

The theory was operationalised through Durkheim's (1895) concept of social facts, which refers to moral norms, beliefs, rituals, and collective practices that influence individuals' behaviour. In this study, the social facts expected to affect members' awareness and understanding of creation care are the church's teachings, as found in its official statements, sermons, stewardship programmes, and Sabbath observances. This operationalisation enabled the study to measure the strength of Adventist teaching as a variable, rather than assuming it was constant, and to test the chain of transmission between official teaching and member awareness in the CRVC.

The theory was applied to the study's objective, the Church's pattern maintenance function, and evaluated in terms of members' exposure to environmental teaching, their knowledge of biblical and denominational principles, and their familiarity with official statements. The integration function was measured by the extent to which teaching becomes a shared moral responsibility and a collective duty to act. The difference between transmitting values and mobilising them in coordinated practice is the difference between transmitting values and mobilising them in the individual's mind, which is the direct object of the study's central question: does doctrinal clarity produce coherent awareness and understanding at the congregational level?

The theory also aided interpretation by defining what counted as systemic dysfunction. A functionalist view of environmental crises sees them as symptoms of institutions that fail to coordinate effectively (Catton & Dunlap, 2018; Dunlap & Brulle, 2015). A value-practice gap is a type of systemic imbalance that occurs when a religious institution's values are clearly stated but not consistently demonstrated. The study thus saw any contradiction between high theological affirmation and low behavioural translation as evidence of underdeveloped integration. It attributed the problem not to the theological content but to the institutional transmission process.

Lastly, the theory supported using the local congregation as the unit of analysis, as functionalists believe equilibrium is realised when an institution's parts function in a coordinated way (Turner, 2013). The SDA Church coordinates at the congregational level, where official teaching is explained, understood and absorbed. The study assessed the Church's functional performance at the point of transmission by examining members' awareness and understanding in the CRVC. The theory thus provided the conceptual language and analytical framework for assessing the effectiveness of SDA environmental teachings in shaping members' awareness and understanding in the Central Rift Valley Conference.

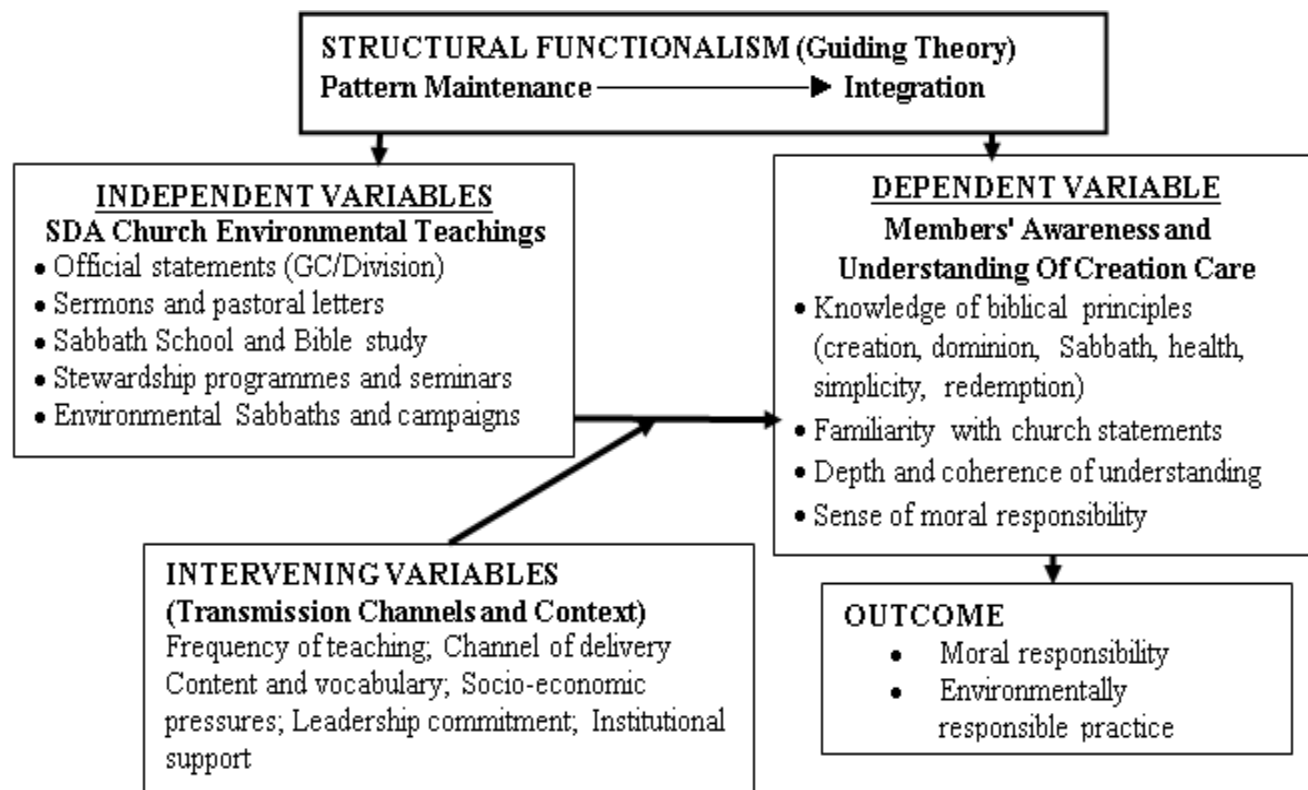


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Structural Functionalism underpins the conceptual framework. The theory assumes the SDA Church is an institution that shapes behaviour, transmits shared values, and fosters collective action. This study was guided by two functional imperatives. Pattern maintenance: the Church's ongoing and future practice of sustaining and passing on its creation-care commitments; and integration: how the Church engages members with those commitments. The framework assumes that an active Church that does both will produce members who know, understand, and act on creation care. When integration is weak, a gap emerges between values and practice. The independent variable is the SDA Church's environmental teachings. These are the social facts the Church uses to transmit creation care to its members. They contain official statements from the General Conference and Division level. They also include sermons, pastoral letters, Sabbath School and Bible study lessons, stewardship programmes, seminars, and environmental Sabbaths. These teachings include the Adventist environmental teachings: creation, dominion as stewardship, Sabbath, health, simplicity and redemption. The framework does not treat these teachings as equally

intense; rather, it treats them as variables. The study therefore quantifies the frequency, channels and content of the teachings to members.

The intermediate variables are located between the teachings and the awareness of the members. They shape how members receive and internalise the teaching. Frequency relates to awareness: sporadic teaching yields shallow awareness, while regular teaching yields deep understanding. The channel matters because members are reached in different ways through sermons, seminars, and print and digital media. Content and vocabulary matter, as creation care language must relate to real-life issues in the area, such as deforestation and water pollution. Context also matters. Socio-economic pressures can compete with environmental commitment. Transmission may be bolstered or undermined by leadership commitment and institutional support. The following variables account for differences in awareness levels among congregations regarding the same doctrine. Members' awareness and understanding of creation care is the dependent variable. It consists of 4 parts. The first is knowledge of biblical principles, such as creation,

dominion, Sabbath, health, simplicity, and redemption. The second is the knowledge of denominational statements. The third is depth and coherence of understanding, that is, whether members link biblical texts together to form a coherent theology or quote isolated verses. The fourth is moral responsibility, that is, whether members feel obligated to act. This is the variable the study aims to target directly. Coherent awareness should result from strong pattern maintenance through effective channels. Shallow and uneven awareness is created with weak transmission.

The result is translating awareness into moral responsibility and responsible practice. The framework does not assume this is the outcome. This happens only if the dependent variable is strong and the intervening variables support action. When integration is underdeveloped, members can be theologically committed to creation care but not act consistently. This is the value gap this study examines. The framework lets the study follow the process from official teaching to member awareness to responsible practice. It also enables the study to identify where the chain fails, in terms of content, channels, context, or institutional support.

In brief, the framework helped the study move from theory to teaching; from teaching through channels of transmission and context; from transmission to awareness and understanding; and from awareness to responsible practice. Structural Functionalism holds that the Church's two functions are pattern maintenance and integration. The independent variable reflects the Church's teaching. Intervening variables reflect how the teaching is mediated to members. The dependent variable records what members know and understand. The result reflects members' actions. This flow directly addresses the study's goal of investigating the impact of SDA environmental teachings on the awareness and understanding of creation care in the Central Rift Valley Conference.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a convergent mixed-methods research design; both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to collect data from SDA Christians in CRVC. The convergent design enabled simultaneous collection and independent analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The data were then triangulated during interpretation, allowing the questionnaire findings on members' awareness and understanding to be compared with the

lived experiences and perspectives of pastors, elders, and stewardship leaders. This integration increased the validity of the findings, as qualitative accounts explained and contextualised the numerical patterns. All 45,104 baptised SDA Church members in the CRVC, Kenya (SDA Yearbook, 2025) were targeted in the study since baptism is the criterion for official membership in the Church. CRVC is in the central Rift Valley area and is divided into five stations with 75 Church districts, each with a pastor, a first-district elder, and other leaders such as stewardship leaders. There were 89 Pastors, 75 District Stewardship Leaders, 75 District Church Elders, and 44,865 lay Christians from 48 Church districts. This population was suitable because of the environmental problems they face, namely deforestation in the Mau Forest, pesticide contamination of Lake Naivasha, and waste pollution in Nakuru, among other effects. The study targeted the SDA Church for its theologically rich creation-care approach and increasing membership in the area. Stewardship leaders were included because they are directly responsible for creation care, while pastors and elders oversee church plans, practices, and budgets. The study applied the formula suggested by Daniel (2012), who advocates using the finite population correction (FPC) when determining sample sizes.

Calculation of the initial sample size for an infinite population

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 \times P \times (1 - p)}{(e)^2}$$

Where:

Z = Z-score for the desired confidence level (1.96 for 95% confidence)

p = Estimated proportion of the population (use 0.5 for maximum variability)

e = Desired margin of error (0.05 = 5%)

Calculation:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2}$$

$$n_0 = 384.16$$

The initial sample size is 384.

Applying the finite population correction (FPC)

Since the study population is finite (N = 45,104), the sample size is adjusted downward using the following correction formula,

$$1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{N}$$

Where:

n_0 = Initial sample size (384.16)

N = Total population (45,104)

$$1 + \frac{384.16 - 1}{45,104}$$

$$n = 381$$

Population (N) = 45,104

Confidence Level = 95% (Z = 1.96)

Margin of Error (e) = 5% (0.05)

Estimated Proportion (p) = 0.5

Final Sample Size (n) = 381

Using the finite population correction formula as recommended by Daniel (2012), the required sample size for a population of 45,104 was calculated to be 381 respondents. This was based on a 95 per cent confidence level, a 5 per cent margin of error, and a conservative population proportion estimate of 0.5. This calculation followed a two-step process: first determining the sample size for an infinite population (384), and then applying the finite population correction to adjust for the actual population size, which yielded the final adjusted sample of 381.

Table 1. Summary of Population Characteristics of CRVC

Stations	Districts	Population	Sample Size	Total Sample
Nakuru West	5	6,284		
	Pastors	5	1	
	Stewardship Leaders	5	1	
	Church Elders	5	1	
	Lay Christians	6,269	50	53
Molo	6	5,429		
	Districts/Pastors	6	2	
	Stewardship Leaders	6	2	
	Church Elders	6	2	
	Lay Christians	5,411	40	46
Olenguruone		2,463		
	Pastors	4	1	
	Stewardship Leaders	4	1	
	Church Elders	4	1	
	Lay Christians	2,451	18	21
Nakuru East		9,160		
	Pastors	12	2	
	Stewardship Leaders	12	2	
	Church Elders	12	2	
	Lay Christians	9,124	68	74
Baringo South		1,559		
	Pastors	2	1	
	Stewardship Leaders	2	1	
	Church Elders	2	1	
	Lay Christians	1,553	10	13
Naivasha		4,346		
	Pastors	8	2	
	Stewardship Leaders	8	2	
	Church Elders	8	2	
	Lay Christians	4,322	31	37
Laikipia		1,721		
	Pastors	4	1	
	Stewardship Leaders	4	1	
	Church Elders	4	1	
	Lay Christians	1,709	12	15
Narok		4,531		

	Pastors	12	12	3	
	Stewardship Leaders		12	3	
	Church Elders		12	3	
	Lay Christians		4,495	29	38
Nyahururu			2,717		
	Pastors	6	6	2	
	Stewardship Leaders		6	2	
	Church Elders		6	2	
	Lay Christians		2,699	17	23
Rongai			4,077		
	Pastors	7	7	2	
	Stewardship Leaders		7	2	
	Church Elders		7	2	
	Lay Christians		4,056	28	34
Njoro			2,803		
	Pastors	9	9	2	
	Stewardship Leaders		9	2	
	Church Elders		9	2	
	Lay Christians		2,776	18	24
Administration	Pastors	14	14	3	3
Total			45,104	381	381

Source: Seventh-day Adventist Church Yearbook, 2025

Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representativeness and accuracy, with the natural strata broken down into homogeneous groups of pastors, district stewardship leaders, district church elders and lay Christians. The study identified the 12 Church stations as the main clusters, as each station is already a geographical and administrative unit within the CRVC. The 12 stations were chosen as clusters to cover the geographic area as widely as possible, including peripheral counties in the CRVC area. We used simple random sampling within each cluster, with the number of Churches sampled from each station corresponding to the station's size. We then proportionately allocated the 381-respondent sample across the 12 stations, with larger stations receiving larger sample sizes and smaller stations receiving smaller sample sizes (for example, Nakuru East had a sample size of 74, and Baringo South had a sample size of 13). We allocated a proportionate number of Christian respondents from each selected church based on church membership relative to station population, as shown in Table 1.

Lay Christians were then randomly selected within each stratum; all baptised Christians in the selected Churches were listed, and a respondent was selected at random, with each Christian having an equal chance. The three criteria used for purposive sampling of pastors, district elders and district stewardship leaders were: (a) having direct administrative responsibility for Church plans, budgets and programmes; (b) having direct oversight of

the environmental stewardship and creation-care activities in their district; and (c) length of service and familiarity with the Church's environmental teachings, to include those with the most relevant knowledge and experience.

Cluster, stratified, and purposive sampling enabled proportional representation, minimised sampling error from within-stratum homogeneity, allowed meaningful comparisons between stations on creation-care practices, and was administratively practical and cost-effective, using the SDA Church CRVC's existing organisational structure. The overall response rate was high (91%), with 315 of 321 questionnaires distributed to lay Christians filled out and returned. Stewardship leaders, Church elders, and pastors had response rates of 16 (84%), 18 (95%), and 15 (68%), respectively. This high level of engagement among leadership and membership helps ensure the findings are representative, credible, and reliable, particularly regarding environmental awareness, SDA creation care teachings, and ecological issues in the CRVC. Baruch and Holtom (2008) consider response rates of at least 70 per cent as satisfactory in social research.

A questionnaire was sent to 321 lay SDA Christians. The first part gathered demographic information such as age, gender, occupation, baptismal tenure, length of residence in the CRVC, education level, Church responsibility and environmental training. The second section assessed

exposure to environmental teachings and used closed-ended items on a Likert scale (Never, Sometimes, Not Sure, Frequently, Always). These included how often participants received teachings about caring for the environment, heard sermons on creation care, and knew denominational policy statements. The third part assessed awareness and understanding. The closed-ended questions covered biblical principles of the environment, the perceived relationship between faith and the environment, perceived change, and knowledge of the Christian responsibility to protect creation.

22 Pastors, 19 District Elders and 19 Stewardship Leaders were interviewed using the interview schedules. Only two of these themes are relevant to this study. The first was the impact of SDA Church teachings on environmental awareness. It included teaching methods and practices for creating awareness, the biblical and doctrinal bases for stewardship, how teachings have been adapted to local environmental issues, and how members have responded to environmental messages. The latter focused on applying SDA environmental teachings in practice. It included discussions of how leaders think about denominational policy statements; member attitudes and behaviours toward the environment; practical activities undertaken by the Church; member engagement in environmental activities; and institutional structures that enable stewardship. Background information on age, gender, years of service, education and Church district was also collected.

The observation checklist only included items relevant to the purpose of this research. It found signs that environmental education was entering the congregation's life, including environmental themes in Church and Sabbath School resources. It also documented tangible evidence of learning about creation care, such as tree planting, waste separation, and clean-up. Where possible, photographs were taken. The questionnaire and interview findings were supplemented and validated with observation data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical procedures were followed throughout the study, especially in getting approval from all authorities, including the Department of Humanities of Chuka University, the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), the CRVC office, and county officials. All participants gave consent, were informed of the study's purpose, and were

treated with respect and courtesy to encourage honest responses. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and data were used solely for academic research. The researcher cross-checked the accuracy of data encoding to ensure verifiability, and all data were kept under lock and key; the processing computer was password-protected.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristic of the Respondents

The respondents were mainly mature and established members of the SDA Church in CRVC. Nearly half (46.7%) were aged 41 years and above, with 30.2 per cent aged 31–40, 18.7 per cent aged 21–30, and only 4.4 per cent under 20. Gender was relatively balanced (54.9% women, 45.1% men), indicating inclusive perspectives, as women are more vulnerable to environmental degradation and central to Church life. Occupationally, farmers dominated (49.2%), followed by business (19.0%), employed (18.4%), and students (13.3%). This agrarian profile suggests that environmental stress directly threatens most members' livelihoods, so it is important to tie creation-care teaching to the realities of the agrarian world.

Baptismal tenure was high, with 57.8 per cent having been baptised for 11 years or longer, reflecting the deep entrenchment in Church teachings, and 14.0 per cent having been baptised less than two years ago, reflecting some exposure to the newer emphases. Likewise, 52.4 per cent reported living in CRVC for 11 years or longer, indicating strong place attachment and experiential knowledge of ecological change. Educationally, 44.1 per cent had a degree or higher, 25.1 per cent secondary, 22.5 per cent a diploma, and 8.3 per cent a primary school education, suggesting the sample was largely well-informed and able to engage with the theological and scientific aspects of creation care. High involvement in the Church, with more than half (67.6%) having some responsibility, likely provided good exposure to environmental initiatives. In contrast, 32.4 per cent had no responsibility, reflecting diverse views. Lastly, 63.2 per cent had been trained on environmental issues, and 36.8 per cent had not.

Key informants were mature and highly experienced. Most interviewees were aged 41 or over (61.2%), 30.6 per cent were aged 31–40, and 8.2 per cent were aged 21–30. The male-to-female ratio was high, with 89.8 per cent of participants male and 10.2 per cent female.

Theologically, practically and socio-economically, 34.7 per cent were in ministry, 26.5 per cent were employed, 20.4 per cent were in business, and 18.4 per cent were farmers. Baptismal tenure was strong: 71.4 per cent were baptised 11 years or more ago, and only 6.1 per cent in the past 5 years, suggesting a deep, historically rooted understanding of Church teaching. Likewise, 75.5 per cent had resided in CRVC for more than 11 years, and no respondent had been there for less than 2 years, suggesting a stable, context-rich sample sensitive to long-term ecological change. Educationally, 71.4 per cent had a degree or higher, with none having only primary education, indicating good analytical skills to consider theological and environmental issues. Notably, 91.8 per cent had received environmental training, indicating strong leadership awareness and the capacity to apply SDA creation care teaching to mitigation, making leaders key agents for sustainable practice in CRVC.

The demographic profile places the SDA Church in CRVC in a pivotal role in environmental socialisation,

with high education levels, long tenure, and high training levels, indicating pattern maintenance. However, the gender gap in leadership, along with the low number of youths in leadership interviews, indicates structural dysfunction in integrating women's ecological knowledge and the perspectives of younger generations. The agrarian nature of the lay profile urgently calls for contextualising creation-care teaching to local livelihood realities. In contrast, inconsistent training among lay members calls for standardising EE to restore systemic equilibrium and strengthen the Church's integrative role.

The Teachings of the SDA Church on the Care of the Environment

This study examined how SDA Church environmental teachings influenced members' awareness and understanding of creation care in the CRVC. Lay Christian respondents were asked whether their Churches were creating awareness concerning environmental conservation.

Table 2. Creating Awareness on Environmental Matters

Demographic Item	Item Label	Frequency	Percent
Creating Awareness	Yes	245	77.8
	No	70	22.2
	Total	315	100.0

Table 2 shows that a substantial majority, 245(77.8%), affirmed that such efforts are made, while 70 (22.2%) reported that they are not. However, further probing revealed that this awareness is shallow and limited to general stewardship lessons in the Bible, rather than to scientific or policy-based approaches. Many members felt a moral commitment to care for creation, but mixed feelings and competing priorities prevented them from acting consistently. From a Structural Functionalist perspective, this pattern suggests that the Church transmits shared values reasonably well, because most members say awareness is created. However, the shallow nature of that awareness suggests the transmission is not deep enough to support the integrative function, which involves internalising shared values and mobilising them into coordinated practice.

CRVC interviewees were divided on the SDA Church's role in the environment. Some leaders, such as ELDCRVC2 (O.I., 2025), praised the Church's initiatives, including Green Sabbath (sustainable living), organic farming, tree planting, and ADRA sustainable

land-use programs. He attributed their limited impact to community apathy and slow government response.

Others noted significant problems. For instance, PSTCRVC2 (O.I., 2025) reported that members are overwhelmed by survival during economic stress and that environmental action is not a priority. Theological vacuum (PSTCRVC11, 2025) reported an inadequate theological commitment around creation care; that is, creation care is not seen as a spiritual responsibility. PSTCRVC10 (O.I., 2025) highlighted challenges in implementing the teachings in the church due to survival issues, and PSTCRVC1 (O.I., 2025) noted low institutional follow-up and training, despite regular discourse on creation in the Bible.

Together, these views suggest that awareness of the CRVC is real but thin. It is a theological rather than an ecological approach, not one that is morally motivating or technically enabling. The results corroborate the literature, which has consistently highlighted the need for local context and an ethical-ecological understanding in

religious environmental work (Bouma-Prediger, 2023; Bock, 2024). The research shows that although the SDA Church in CRVC has made some real efforts to educate itself, it has not done enough to overcome socio-economic barriers, theological deficiencies, or institutional follow-through to sustain engagement.

Theological Teachings on Stewardship

Lay Christian respondents were asked whether the bible contains any teachings about human beings caring for God's creation. Those who answered affirmatively were then asked to briefly explain what the Bible teaches about caring for the environment.

Table 3. Biblical Teaching on Creation Care

Demographic Item	Item Label	Frequency	Percent
Creation care, Those who cited	Yes	312	99.0
	No	3	1.0
Genesis		128	40.6
Psalms		76	24.1
Romans		34	10.8
Eschatological texts		61	19.4
Other bible verses		75	23.2
	Total	315	100.0

As shown in Table 3, 312 (99.0%) strongly agreed that the Bible has something to say about caring for creation. The response was almost unanimous, with only 3 (1.0%) respondents disagreeing, showing strong acceptance among the Adventist laity that Christian scripture supports environmental care. Lay Christian respondents were further probed to explain briefly what the Bible teaches about creation. In the study, 128 (40.6%) respondents highlighted that God created the earth, as mentioned in Genesis 1-2, where God is the source of all life, including plants, animals, humans, and ecosystems. On the other hand, 76 (24.1%) respondents cited Psalm 19:1, while 34 (10.8%) cited Romans, especially chapter 1, verse 20. In these verses, nature is depicted as a vehicle that reveals God's power and nature. In this context, environmental conservation goes beyond social and economic responsibility to become a spiritual responsibility.

Further, 61 (19.4%) respondents commented that biblical eschatology is relevant to God's command to stewards to care for the environment, citing several prophetic verses about the end times. They cited Colossians 1:19-20 and Revelation 21:1, anticipating the salvation of humanity and all of God's creation. Beyond these major passages, 75 (23.2%) participants pointed to other verses in the Bible. These uncovered a deeper theological foundation for "creation care. They cited Leviticus 25:23-24, Hosea 4:1-3, Isaiah 24:4-6, Job 12:7-10, and Deuteronomy 20:19-20—hermeneutically disjointed and theologically deep texts. God's high sovereignty over the land is

confirmed in Lev. For Hosea, moral failure and environmental deterioration are closely linked. Deuteronomy offers a practical way to save resources even amid disagreements. As an instructor of sacred knowledge, work promotes creativity. Revelation speaks of judgment for environmental damage. These passages include law, prophecy, wisdom, and apocalyptic literature. This suggests that the participants spontaneously grasp the breadth of Scripture's overall message on creation. However, taken out of context, these quotations reveal an undigested method. This risks proof-texting rather than thoughtful theological analysis. Functionalism would argue that the near-universal acceptance of this statement proves the Church's success in making creation care a social fact, a shared moral norm with a powerful coercive force over its members' beliefs. However, the misplaced, out-of-context quotations suggest that pattern maintenance occurs at the level of value consensus rather than through coherent doctrinal formation that could integrate into practice.

Most of the cited teachings focused on Psalm 24:1, which emphasises humanity as tenants and responsible managers. ELDCRVC17 (O.I., 2025) reported that the Church has been educating members on stewardship, which goes beyond the tithes and offerings to caring for the land, water and trees. But many felt that environmental care was a governmental issue, not a spiritual one. STDCRVC11 (O.I., 2025) understood that the theme of the earth's destruction in eschatological interpretations might deter people from sustainable

living. Indeed, Bauman et al. (2024) noted that un-evangelistic environmental theology, focused on eschatology and with limited interest in action, often goes nowhere. PSTCRVC11 (O.I., 2025) echoed many members' sentiments: pollution affronts God's will, and stewardship extends beyond tithes and offerings to caring for the environment.

Members were reminded that God made everything good and that they were responsible for caring for creation by not introducing non-biodegradable garbage or chemicals

into it; PSTCRVC2 (O.I., 2025) added. The analysis showed that theological awareness was high but shallow in depth of understanding and in applying it to practical environmental questions. The CRVC findings indicate that the integrative aspect of linking Adventist creation theology with local ecological realities remains underdeveloped, despite Kagema (2015) showing that religion can be integrated with other religions for mutual coexistence.

Table 4. Influence of SDA Church Teachings on Environmental Awareness

Item	Never	Sometimes	Not Sure	Frequently	Always
Understanding biblical environmental principles	10(3.2%)	46(14.6%)	34(10.8%)	90(28.6%)	135(42.9%)
Moral guidance, advocacy and responsibility	47(14.9%)	54(17.1%)	46(14.6%)	89(28.3%)	79(25.1%)
Christian duty to protect God's creation	20(6.3%)	41(13.0%)	17(5.4%)	90(28.6%)	147(46.7%)
Sense of moral responsibility	14(4.4%)	28(8.9%)	27(8.6%)	100(31.7%)	146(46.3%)
Teachings on caring for the environment	35(11.1%)	87(27.6%)	16(5.1%)	81(25.7%)	96(30.5%)
Sermons on creation care	20(6.3%)	83(26.3%)	22(7.0%)	86(27.3%)	104(33.0%)
Perceived link between faith and environment	12(3.8%)	22(7.0%)	19(6.0%)	109(34.6%)	153(48.6%)
Change in environmental perception	22(7.0%)	51(16.2%)	39(12.4%)	80(25.4%)	123(39.0%)
Aptitude, community and ecological consciousness	62(19.7%)	77(24.45)	48(15.2%)	82(26.0%)	46(14.6%)
Encouragement toward eco-justice practice	14(4.4%)	103(31.7%)	21(6.7%)	68(21.6%)	109(34.6%)
Familiarity with denominational policy statements	22(7.0%)	29(9.2%)	68(21.6%)	84(26.7%)	112(35.6%)

Understanding Biblical Teachings Related to Environmental Stewardship

Lay Christians were asked whether they understood the biblical principles related to environmental stewardship. Of the 315 respondents, 135 (42.9%) said they always understood these teachings, and 90 (28.6%) said they understood them frequently. This indicates that practical environmental engagement in theology has laid the groundwork. However, 10 (3.2%) respondents reported never understanding these teachings, and 34 (10.8%) were unsure, meaning 14 per cent of participants may lack exposure to and clarity on the SDA Church's theological environmental principles. Another 46 (14.6%) said they sometimes understood them, indicating

inconsistent understanding of religious education or creation care theology. The response profile indicates a strong presence of creation-care theology in CRVC, but understanding and internalisation vary. The “sometimes, unsure and never” category suggests limited, inconsistent theological formation, linked to varying exposure to teaching and varying levels of translating theology into local ecological realities. This suggests the underlying issue is not a poor biblical foundation but poor formation, where a value-practice gap persists despite affirmation of creation care. This variation shows that pattern maintenance is not uniform among congregations, so integration is weak. If the social fact is transmitted inconsistently, it cannot exert uniform coercive power

over members, and the religious subsystem's equilibrium is disturbed.

The interview data showed that stewardship leaders and pastors had a biblically based environmental theology. However, a wide gap existed between their theological convictions and what they saw happening around them. For instance, ELDCRVC13 (O.I., 2025) cited Psalm 24:1 as a basis for the people's tenancy and accountability, but ELDCRVC14 (O.I., 2025) noted that such teachings are episodic and occur in special campaigns rather than in daily life. This deficiency was exacerbated by eschatological fatalism, which led members to believe there was little reason to take conservation measures when they thought destruction was imminent. PSTCRVC10 (O.I., 2025) and PSTCRVC15 (O.I., 2025) tried to overcome this determinism by emphasising Genesis 2:15 not as a theoretical concept, but as a practical guide for agriculture, waste management, and natural resource use.

Pastors such as PSTCRVC11 (O.I., 2025) and STDCRVC8 (O.I., 2025) framed stewardship as a challenge and commitment, seeing environmental damage as sinful and neighbourly harm as a matter of community responsibility. For them, environmental care is both worship and a matter of community responsibility. However, ELDCRVC17 (O.I., 2025) noted that many currently view environmentalism as a secular, not spiritual, issue. PSTCRVC2 (O.I., 2025) admitted widespread member apathy, arguing that climate change is an international problem that cannot be solved by individuals. Yet, PSTCRVC11 (O.I., 2025) and ELDCRVC14 (O.I., 2025) were frustrated by rising pollution, which they attributed to weak enforcement by the Church and the State. They suggested that doctrinal instruction is not enough without corresponding accountability systems or contextualised practice.

The findings indicate that creation-care theology had become part of the broader fabric of the SDA Church in CRVC. However, its internalisation was still in its early stages and had not yet been consistently reinforced through pedagogy, nor had it been properly translated into locally appropriate ecological practice. This resulted in a persistent value-practice gap despite general doctrinal affirmation. The findings align with Bauman (2014), who notes that these differences often stem from unequal access to religious education, inadequate ecological contextualisation in sermons, and insufficient

theological focus on ecology. The results emphasise the need for more purposeful pedagogical approaches, such as those promoted by Gonzalez-Socoloske (2019), who suggests that simply incorporating environmental ethics into everyday religious practices is necessary to enhance awareness and environmental action.

The Promotion of Moral Guidance, Advocacy, and Responsibility

To appraise whether the SDA Church teachings have helped the Adventists to view environmental stewardship as a moral, ethical and spiritual duty, lay Christian respondents were asked three questions: Has the SDA Church increased my awareness of the environmental crisis in CRVC, does the SDA Church emphasise the Christian duty to protect God's creation, and have SDA Church teachings made me feel morally responsible to act on environmental issues? Regarding awareness of the ecological crisis, 89 (28.3%) respondents said that teaching had caused their awareness to be very high, 79 (25.1%) respondents said that teaching had increased their awareness of the ecological crisis, 47 (14.9%) respondents said that there was no increase in awareness of the ecological crisis caused by teaching and 54 (17.1%) respondents said that the awareness of the ecological crisis had only slightly increased. There was a much greater sense of consensus about the Church's emphasis on the Christian responsibility to care for God's creation: always 147 (46.7%) and frequently 90 (28.6%) were the responses from more than two-thirds of the churches, while only a small minority, 20 (6.3%), never. When asked about their sense of responsibility to act as a result of teaching, 146 (46.3%) replied always, 100 (31.7%) frequently, and 14 (4.4%) never.

The importance of doctrinal affirmation and moral sentiment for getting agreement far outweighs perceived awareness of the crisis. That is, members feel they should care more than they are told what is happening to their environment. This is the hallmark of a formation system with strong normative content and weak empirical content. This explains the absence of diagnostic literacy and civic engagement in the CRVC. This is a successful establishment of a moral responsibility, a normative social fact, without the cognitive content that is required for integration. The Church has reached consensus on duty, but not on diagnosis. This is exactly what a good pattern-maintenance system should not produce, if integration is to follow.

The theological centre of importance was confirmed by pastoral accounts. PSTCRVC2 (O.I., 2025) taught creation care as worship grounded in Genesis, reminding people of the Sabbath message and Ellen G. White's writings (2010). PSTCRVC3 (O.I., 2025) viewed the Sabbath as a rhythm that warned against exploiting the land without rest. PSTCRVC4 (O.I., 2025) emphasised environmental responsibility in readiness for the Second Advent. He added that it is coherent and theological, but largely symbolic, and it rarely describes the practices by which the norm would be discharged in specific contexts. This aligns with Valderrama et al. (2024) and Deopa and Rinaldo (2024), who note that moral motivation must be accompanied by ecological knowledge and embedded in community practice to produce action.

The most common restriction leaders noted was material, not doctrinal. PSTCRVC11 (O.I., 2025) found that members listen but cannot act because of poverty and survival pressures. He added that young and urban members can easily access kitchen gardens, waste separation, and solar energy, and that education, participation, and environmental literacy go hand in hand, as Thomas (2017) found. According to ELDCRVC17 (O.I. 2025), members ask themselves the question: Our leaders talk about the environment all the time, but some members have asked, 'How am I supposed to look after the land if I do not have any land? While people want to protect the environment, they also need food, water, housing, and education. Many members also feel detached from environmental messages. They listen to the sermons, but applying them in everyday life is difficult. Others report that, even if they want to, they cannot do so because they lack the necessary resources and support.

PSTCRVC4 (O.I., 2025) provides a counterweight by framing degradation as an injustice. He noted that it is as if ecological degradation is an act of injustice against the poorest, as it is a case of injustice against God and humankind. In the process, the teaching's moral dimension is materially extended, as Kaoma (2017) describes African Christian environmentalism as part of community wellbeing. The findings indicate that environmental stewardship is a morally convincing ethic but structurally impoverished: strong in theology, weak in socio-economic contexts, and weak in institutional follow-up, with inadequate connections between motivation and sustainable action. This points to systemic dysfunction, as the Church has produced the

values. Still, the social and economic system into which it has been placed is not able to convert the values into coordinated action, preventing the subsystem from achieving equilibrium.

Theological Addresses on Environmental Issues by Church Leaders

The study asked lay Christian respondents if the SDA Church teaches about the importance of caring for the environment. The study found that 96 (30.5%) respondents said it was always, and 81 (25.7%) said it is frequently, indicating that 56.2 per cent of respondents had regular exposure to this topic in the Church. Another 87 (27.6%) said they were exposed on an "occasional" basis. In comparison, 35 (11.1%) said they were not exposed at all, and 16 (5.1%) said they were unsure, for a total of 16.2 per cent outside the teaching ministry on this matter.

This distribution reflects a legitimate but not institutional pattern. The fact that half the congregations are instructed in creation care regularly and a quarter occasionally, and the sixth did not at all, means that although it has been established as a doctrinal priority in the CRVC, it is not a mandatory part of all congregations' curricula. This variation likely reflects different ministry priorities and the lack of a consistent environmental curriculum, as Tiwari and Shri (2021) and Sharma et al. (2023) note. In this regard, Bauman et al. (2024), Chitando and Conradie (2022), and Moyer (2015) all emphasise the importance of regular, clear, and consistent EE from religious institutions to achieve good outcomes in faith-based advocacy and the development of congregational environmental ethics. Conversely, Moyer (2012) warns that this pedagogical incongruity, as seen in CRVC, may lead to less ecological awareness and less practice among believers.

How teaching flows and reaches the various communities were described as through Sabbath sermons and pastoral letters (STDCRVC11, O.I., 2025), announcements (STDCRVC3, O.I., 2025), seminars and stewardship emphasis days (ELDCRVC3, O.I., 2025) and periodic educational events on climate change, conservation and sustainable living through environmental days and community outreach (STDCRVC4, O.I., 2025). STDCRVC7 (O.I., 2025) agreed that incorporating environmental awareness into spiritual healing has not been uniform. However, PSTCRVC11 (O.I., 2025) reported that some members were inspired by teachings

on creation care to participate in tree planting, water conservation, and organic farming initiatives, which, in turn, promoted faith in action. Some Churches have stepped up their efforts to promote environmental education to youth, as noted by PSTCRVC10 (O.I., 2025), to raise the next generation of stewards of creation.

PSTCRVC4's (O.I., 2025) observation is important and should be highlighted for its conceptual implications. He said his congregation speaks of God's creation rather than the environment, and he suggested switching from the former to the latter. The comment reveals a real distinction in meaning: a division between the words of creation care and environmental responsibility that can lead members to assent to the former and remain indifferent to the latter. According to Gnanakan (2022), faith institutions extend their ecological reach when they adopt their community's cultural vocabulary. I argue that this vocabulary gap is not just an accident of the CRVC; it's one way a robust theology languishes as environmental agency. Functionally, this represents a failure of the transmission channel: the social fact is expressed in a language unrelated to the ecological context in which members live, reducing its integrative potential.

Incorporating Environmental Themes into Worship

The study asked lay Christian respondents whether they had ever heard sermons or lessons on creation care at their local Churches. Data revealed that 104 (33.0%) said always, 83 (26.3%) said sometimes, 20 (6.3%) said never, and 22 (7.0%) were unsure. The teaching ministry, then, is not the best one to encounter creation care, though in CRVC, 60.3 per cent said they encounter it regularly. However, worship stood out as a single ministry that was more consistently given as a vehicle for the formation of the environment. Qualitative evidence indicated the liturgical repertoire. STDCRVC9 (O.I., 2025) highlighted that SDA Church teachings celebrate creation care as a God call and emphasise members' strong sense of responsibility, safeguarding God's creation as a God calling. This instils a strong sense of responsibility. In rare instances, stewardship education will incorporate practical lessons on sustainable land use, organic farming, and reforestation as applications of biblical stewardship.

The themes of caring for and protecting the environment and Christian ethics were addressed in STDCRVC13

(O.I., 2025), when the sermons were recorded, and in ELDCRVC17 (O.I., 2025), which reminded its members that they are caretakers, not exploiters, of their environment. For both ELDCRVC13 (O.I., 2025) and ELDCRVC2 (O.I., 2025), Nature Sabbaths are important moments of reverence for the environment. PSTCRVC10 (O.I., 2025) highlighted the value of ecological prayer as a way of placing the earth before God, and thus giving ecological responsibility a place in the devotional life. This aligns with Mbaria's (2017) view, which names spiritual practice as a main source of environmental awareness in the African Christian context.

The practices considered analytically significant here can make ecological obligation sacred, and their absence, as PSTCRVC11 (O.I., 2025) wails, is the very conversion they mourn. Bouma-Prediger (2023) is right, however, to argue that ecological formation works best when creation care is not an add-on to a regular worship service, but part of the regular worship service. The CRVC evidence is right on the edge: themes of the environment have infiltrated worship but have not yet become integral to it, and the formative power of liturgy is largely untapped.

Faith-Based Eco-Theology and Christian Education

The study asked lay Christian respondents whether they believed faith and the environment were linked. The study established that 153 (48.6%) respondents responded always, 109 (34.6%) frequently, and 83.2 per cent in total; 22 (7.0%) sometimes, 19 (6.0%) unsure, and 12 (3.8%) never. This is the highest rating on any ordinal item in the study, suggesting that for the overwhelming majority of CRVC Adventists, concern for the environment is not a secular concern but part of their religious identity.

Leaders explained that this internalisation stemmed from an ongoing focus on stewardship. ELDCRVC15 (O.I., 2025) credited structured teaching at Church meetings and in stewardship programmes. ELDCRVC14 (O.I., 2025) highlighted that environmental care was an intra-ecclesial, not external, responsibility. STDCRVC14 (O.I., 2025) stated that regularly incorporating ecological themes in meetings, Sabbath School, and Bible study, with the creation harmony of Genesis as the frame, was an effective step. As with Gonzalez-Socoloske (2019), who advocated early environmental sensitisation, and Thomas (2017), who presented a religious commitment-ecological behaviour framework, youth and Pathfinder programmes were consistently cited as the most effective

context for formation (ELDCRVC15, O.I., 2025; ELDCRVC17, O.I., 2025).

Any triumphalist reading is limited by two qualifications. STDCRVC7 (O.I., 2025) noted that members understand the crisis theoretically. Still, socio-economic circumstances hinder sustainable practice, and ELDCRVC15 (O.I., 2025) noted an awareness–practice gap, driven by limited environmental concerns in most congregational programming. The CRVC's eco-theology is therefore at an advanced stage of moral development. It is formative on the one hand, underdeveloped on the other. The remedy is ecological education as part of scriptural education, supported at the community level, as both Vasconcelos and Neto (2024) and Moyer (2015) argue.

Community Role Modelling and Leadership

Interview data showed that role modelling was the key way the CRVC's commitment to the eco-theological message became visible in the public domain. The Church was described by PSTCRVC2 (O.I., 2025) as an institution that has the potential to set a baseline for the church to fulfil its obligation to care for creation. STDCRVC8 (O.I., 2025) said the Church acts as a resource for the community by setting a standard for its role in demonstrating that the church and the environment are inextricably linked. STDCRVC7 (O.I., 2025) and PSTCRVC4 (O.I., 2025) documented the practices in which this continuity is modelled. This is through rain gardens and tree planting on Church sites, waste reduction at Church events, rainwater collection via reservoirs and tanks, and the use of solar and biogas in Church buildings and households. As early adopters have seen their household energy bills lower, imitation has been learned, as reported by ELDCRVC14 (O.I., 2025). He added that evidence shows modelling through demonstrated feasibility, as well as moral persuasion.

Partnership is another mechanism, as highlighted by PSTCRVC1 (O.I., 2025), PSTCRVC4 (O.I., 2025) and PSTCRVC10 (O.I., 2025). They noted that ecological responsibility extended beyond the congregation and became a shared civic responsibility through intermittent collaboration with schools, environmental non-governmental organisations, and government agencies on tree-planting and clean-up campaigns. Exactly this sort of inter-organisational collaboration is described by Chitando and Conradie (2022) in African faith settings. PSTCRVC11 (O.I., 2025) also noted the integration of

stewardship into worship and churches' use of environmentally responsible building materials, following a General Conference (1996) policy on creation care.

The restrictions are structural, however. PSTCRVC2 (O.I., 2025), PSTCRVC5 (O.I., 2025), and PSTCRVC6 (O.I., 2025) identified financial limitation as the main constraint on afforestation and solar installation. Member scepticism and competition for immediate socio-economic needs also constrained implementation. The same attenuating effect of theologically based effort by resource scarcity is noted by Børresen et al. (2023). The findings indicate that CRVC leadership is genuine, visible, and generative, but not sufficiently concentrated to form a programme. To become systemic, it must be institutionally resourced and sustained, moving beyond individual leadership and passion.

Spiritual Reflection and Simplicity

The lay Christian respondents were asked whether Church teachings have changed their perceptions of environmental protection and whether they have fostered an aptitude, a sense of community, and a conscious desire to engage in environmentally friendly practices. Responses showed that nearly two-thirds of respondents reported these perception changes as always 123 (39.0%) or frequently 80 (25.4%). This indicates that environmental awareness and perception are high and are continually reinforced for most participants. Smaller proportions sometimes 51 (16.2%) or were not sure 39 (12.4%), and only a limited number reported never experiencing such a change 22 (7.0%). Overall, the distribution indicates that Church teachings helped respondents change their perceptions of environmental protection. By contrast, responses to questions about aptitude, sense of community, and consciousness were more moderate and mixed. The combined figure of 82 (26.0%) for "frequently" or "always" is lower than the figures for environmental perception. A substantial proportion indicated "sometimes" 77 (24.4%) or "not sure" 48 (15.2%), and nearly one-fifth reported "never" 62 (19.7%).

The study found a significant quantitative difference between whether Church teachings changed members' perceptions of environmental protection and whether they fostered an aptitude, sense of community, and ecological consciousness. This gap captured the edge of the Church's initial penetration. Changes in how

members see the environment occur more effectively through teaching than through acquiring the skills, socialisation and habits of action that sustain conservation behaviour. Ecological formation requires perceptual change first. Without organised participation, leadership and context-sensitive programming, it is symbolic (Hayes & Hayes, 2013; Magezi, 2024). However, leaders spoke of spirituality's true simplicity. STDCRVC9 (O.I., 2025) interpreted walking as 'worship' and organic cultivation and reduced consumption as 'worship'; PSTCRVC10 (O.I., 2025) noted that spiritually mature members recycle and conserve, and avoid polluting, 'as worship'. Of all the statements, ELDCRVC15 (O.I., 2025) captured the ethic most clearly.

This matters in the context of our members' spiritual life of reflection and simplicity, which are necessary to understand and respond to God's call to care for His creation. We often remind them that every action they take with food, water, and waste is a stewardship decision. Living simply is a way of life, but it is also a moral and spiritual discipline that helps preserve the earth and is good in God's sight. Conversely, ELDCRVC17 and PSTCRVC10 (O.I., 2025) found a large knowledge-practice gap among younger members, where their media-driven idea of convenience and material gain directly conflicts with the gospel of simplicity. Both Deopa and Rinaldo (2024) show how religious environmental teaching is more effective in shaping attitudes than lifestyle, particularly among groups that are growing up in the globalised consumer culture, as well as Bouma-Prediger (2023) and Moyer (2015), who both argue that people's lives need to be shaped morally, with the support of congregational norms, to resist the pull of the globalised consumer culture.

Encourage Environmental Justice with Campaigns and Initiatives

When Lay Christian respondents were asked whether the Church encourages its members to conserve resources. 109 (34.6%) said they were encouraged always, 68 (21.6%) frequently, 103 (32.7%) sometimes, 21 (6.7%) were unsure, and 14 (4.4%) said the Church did not encourage conserving resources. The defining characteristic of this item is the size of the intermediate category: nearly a third of respondents report conserving as episodic, similar to the campaign's delivery model described in the qualitative data.

The structural deficiency of that model was admitted by pastors. PSTCRVC6 (O.I., 2025) said that environmental days and tree planting are not yet scheduled in the Church calendar. In many congregations, environmental activity relies on one or two dedicated people and can suffer when those leaders leave. PSTCRVC13 (O.I., 2025) identified the issue as an institutional priority. He noted that environmental programmes are overshadowed by evangelism and welfare programmes. Worse still, they are not included in the budgets or planning meetings, and there is no structured follow-up or coordination. The interpretive corollary that PSTCRVC14 (O.I., 2025) found was:

Participation in environmental campaigns is lower because some members still see them as optional community service rather than part of the Church's spiritual mission. Members still need to be educated that caring for the environment is part of Christian discipleship, not just a social activity. If it is not emphasised theologically, members may only join in with conservation activities when they are convenient or when they are organised elsewhere. A sense of spiritual duty for environmental stewardship will likely remain irregular until it is understood as such.

PSTCRVC9 (O.I., 2025) reported good progress with youth and Pathfinder groups. While he recognised that continuing activity can be challenging beyond one-off events, PSTCRVC1 (O.I., 2025) and PSTCRVC10 (O.I., 2025) encouraged moving environmental justice from campaign to the regular life of worship, education, and service. PSTCRVC11 (O.I., 2025) added one of the most salient contextualisation arguments. He argued that generic creation-care messages must be translated into the environmental crises facing the CRVC region to be actionable.

The literature agrees on a diagnosis. Paseggi (2018) shows that the more religious environmental education is linked to real local action, the more effective it is. Kathambi et al. (2024) indicate that without institutional support, youth and community activities lose their impact. Vasconcelos and Neto (2024) assert that leadership succession, financing, and the adaptation of the ecological environment are decisive variables. This study therefore concludes that the CRVC's theological imperative is valid, but its delivery architecture is not. This is because participation depends on individual initiative, as the Church lacks institutional support. This

supports the functionalist diagnosis because the Church has achieved value consensus but has not developed institutional structures, such as planning, budgeting, organisation, and accountability, that could turn that consensus into coordinated environmental practice.

Knowledge of the Global Church Statements on the Environment

Lay Christian respondents were asked whether they were familiar with the SDA Church's position on environmental responsibility. In the study, 112 (62%) reported being always aware, 102 (35.6%) were sometimes aware, and 84 (26.7%) were occasionally aware of the denomination's official environmental stance. However, 68 (21.6%) were not sure, the highest level of uncertainty on any part of the instrument; 29 (9.2%) reported occasional exposure, and 22 (7.0%) reported no exposure. Notably, over one-fifth of members could not identify their denomination's position on a subject they strongly believe is scripturally required.

This anomaly was explained by pastoral testimonies through interviews. PSTCRVC10 (O.I., 2025) asserted that members knew the Church's message but did not know exactly what it had said. Some had to ask Church leadership for translations of formal documents when they were mentioned during a Church sermon or workshop. ELDCRVC2 (O.I., 2025) made note of continuing problems with the language of stewardship being dominated by tithes, offerings and time management, and that the language for environmental policy is only mentioned indirectly and occasionally. The key difference PSTCRVC1 (O.I., 2025) made was that its members' awareness is experiential rather than doctrinal. This means they see environmental responsibility as a Christian issue and do not tie it to denominational policy. Statements formulated at the General Conference and Division level rarely enter congregational vocabulary, as PSTCRVC9 (O.I., 2025) noted. He added that environmental messages need to be deliberately included in Church manuals and Sabbath School and stewardship guides.

However, some testimony showed that things are improving slowly, but outside the pulpit. PSTCRVC4 (O.I., 2025) echoed that awareness had been weaker among older and rural members. Younger, better-educated members use the internet to read articles in Adventist Review and share what they find on denominational websites. This needs to be communicated

differently to older and rural members. PSTCRVC6 (O.I., 2025) affirmed that Environmental Sabbaths were carried out, with sermons and songs focusing on nature followed by tree planting and cleaning of local markets and shopping centres. This aligns with Mbaria's (2017) call to shift the congregation from reflection to action and with the community-centred eco-theology proposed by Børresen et al. (2023).

As Lai and Lee (2025) describe, the pattern in CRVC is best understood as a gap between proclamation and pedagogy: the policy is present, but it is not taught systematically. Børresen et al. (2023) report the same in African Churches, where statements are made at the international and regional levels, but local members are rarely involved in implementation; Gnanakan (2022) recommends intentionally including policy in liturgy, Bible study, and community involvement. The CRVC evidence suggests that there is no institutionalisation; hence, leadership and occasional environmental actions are what is needed for transmission to occur.

The CRVC results describe a religious subsystem that performs well on one of its main functions and poorly on another. The pattern-maintenance function is clearly active: a massive theological framework has produced value consensus that few secular environmental communication strategies could match, with 99.0 per cent affirming biblical creation care, 83.2 per cent acknowledging the faith-environment relationship, and 78.0 per cent reporting increased moral responsibility. Whatever criticisms are levelled at the Adventist Church in the CRVC, it has been theoretically successful in making environmental care a common and sacred value shared by the church. The integrative function, which mobilises shared values into coherent, institutionally and behaviourally regulated practice, remains underdeveloped. Limited integration can be seen in episodic programming, uneven congregational teaching, lack of accountability, reliance on discretionary leadership and socio-economic stressors that frequently out-compete ecological commitment. This is reflected quantitatively in formative capacity 40.6 per cent and policy uncertainty 21.6 per cent. Without normative regulation, value consensus produces exactly what the CRVC has: a community that agrees on what is right and acts only from time to time.

This study's analysis of the impact of SDA environmental teachings on SDA members' awareness and

understanding of creation care in the CRVC was conducted within the framework of Structural Functionalism. The Church's pattern-maintenance role was evident in the near-universal endorsement of biblical creation care and the high level of moral responsibility, suggesting that creation care has become a common social fact. However, the integrative function was weak. Teaching quality was uneven, scriptural citation knowledge was shallow, and knowledge of official statements was episodic. So, no consensus had been translated into coherent awareness and understanding. This functionalist reading focuses on the institution's transmission process, not on the content of theology. It provides a rationale for the inadequate strong, cohesive congregational awareness that can be found in a doctrinally rich tradition, which is precisely the issue addressed in this study.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concludes that the Church has a solid theological basis for environmental stewardship, found in its scriptural texts, official policy statements, and the writings of Ellen G. White. Most affirmed the biblical mandate for creation care, pointing to various biblical texts. This suggests regular exposure to stewardship teaching, which helps explain why most felt a connection between faith and environmental responsibility. However, doctrinal clarity does not seem to translate into corresponding ecological practice.

Environmental education remains superficial and generic, rarely addressing the pathologies facing CRVC regions. Meanwhile, socio-economic constraints limit capacity, and institutional integration remains shallow, resulting in fragmented (not congregational) responses. The degree of familiarity with denominational statements is not well known, which means that the transmission of the pedagogical message is interrupted between policy and

the altar. The study unearthed an important aspect of CRVC: the difference between belief and practice is neither theological nor moral, but hermeneutical and institutional. The Church has built an impressive eco-theological structure. However, it has not provided its members with the tools for doctrinal practice and biblical theology for creation care. A selective, decontextualised approach to scriptural citation; insufficient communication; limited leadership training; and no organised environmental programming prevent conviction from turning into competence.

Recommendations: The study recommends that the CRVC administration needs to move beyond one-off campaigns and build intentional discipleship, weaving ecological responsibility into worship, education, and community action. This includes formation in the hermeneutical sense, so that isolated texts can be joined to form a coherent theology of creation. The CRVC Sabbath School and Stewardship Departments should contextualise curricula to the region's real ecological situation and embed denominational statements in the content of the Sabbath School, stewardship, and Church manuals. Moreover, the CRVC executive committee and treasury should arrange budgets and calendars that allow for the environmental work to be done without relying on the enthusiasm of individual members. Finally, the CRVC administration, in partnership with ADRA and county governments, should establish partnerships that provide members with the material and capacity to do what they already agree they are obliged to do. In the end, the integrity of the Adventist witness in the CRVC will be based on the synchrony of the witness and the practice, because creation care is not only an environmental responsibility, but a theological one as well.

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