

SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION PRACTICES: THE MEANS TO
ACHIEVING SAFE ENVIRONMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Man's activities in the environment have great impacts on the abiotic and biotic elements including human beings. This paper presents an overview of the concepts involving environmental protection practices in Nigeria. The study maintains that sustainable environmental protection in Nigeria is far from being achieved in view of the persistent exploitation of the natural resources, for profit, to the detriment of the environment. The study suggests an inclusive nationwide monthly environmental sanitation coupled with aggressive afforestation campaigns, among others, as means of ensuring the environmental protection of our country. The study concludes that the country can be sustainably protected if great attention is given to the environmental sanitation and conservation in line with the environmental best practices recommended by the United Nations.

Keywords: Environment, Environmental Protection, Sustainability, Environmental Management, Environmental Sanitation.

Introduction

The environment is the surroundings of man, comprising the land, water, air and the biotic components in them. According to Ayorinde, Omolola and Olugbenga (2015), the environment is the complex of physical, chemical and biotic factors that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately deteriorates its form and survival. The environment had been given by nature for man to enjoy. Regrettably, man has exploited the environment to his peril, which necessitates environmental protection. Environmental protection, therefore, is the practice of protecting the natural environment by individuals, organisations and governments (Verissimo, Rolla, Vedoveto and de Furtada, 2011). Its objectives are to conserve natural resources and the existing natural environment and where applicable, to repair damage and reverse trends in the society.

Environmental protection is guided by laws. Environmental law is the collection of laws, regulations, agreements and common law that governs how humans interact with their environment (Knox, 2015). The purpose of environmental law is to protect the environment and create rules on how people can use natural resources. All biological life depends on a wholesome

and well-functioning ecosystem and the earth has no limitless supply of resources which must be proportionately shared by all living things (Okueso, 2008). Man's continuous exploitation and exploration of the mineral resources, for profit, has led to the degradation of the environment. This calls for sustainable environmental protection.

Sustainability is the ability to exist constantly. It refers to the capacity to meeting the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The concept of sustainability is anchored on three pillars namely; economic (for profit), environmental (planet) and social (people) considerations. Sustainability emerged as a component of corporate ethics in response to perceived public discontent over the long-term damage caused by a focus on short-term profits (Grant and Kenton, 2019). To ensure that the environmental protection practices are sustainable, there is need for proper environmental management.

According to Uchegbu (2009), environmental management is the process of putting together those items of environmental nature where man exists so that man's penetration and exploitation do not have adverse effect on the environment. This is aimed at ensuring that the environment is free from abuse, and misuse that may result in pollution and degradation. It is also aimed at promoting the developmental compatibility, balance urban land use value and upgrade the environment for present and future generation. It is pertinent to note that sustainable environmental management can only be achieved through environmental sanitation. Environmental sanitation as defined by the National Environmental Sanitation Policy is the principle and practice of effecting healthful and hygienic conditions in the environment to promote public health and welfare, improve quality of life and ensure a sustainable environment. The purpose of this paper therefore, is to seek the means of ensuring sustainable environmental protection in the country.

The Environment

The environment can be viewed as the surroundings, conditions, circumstances and influences affecting people's lives and the ecosystem. The environment entails the totality of the land planning, construction industries, transportation, preservation of public amenities, control of air, water and land pollution. The environment is the complex of physical, chemical and biotic factors that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately deteriorates its form and survival. The Environmental Impact Assessment Act of 1992 defined the environment as:

- i. Land, water and air, including all layers of the atmosphere.
- ii. All organic and inorganic matters and living organisms on it, and below the earth's crust.

The Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) Act (1988) viewed the environment to include "water, air, land and all plants and human beings or animals living therein and the interrelationship which exist among these or any of them." According to Omuojine (2005), the environment include the ways in which the environmental media interacts with one another and the ways in which they interact with man-made environment and the fauna and flora which inhibit them. The Nigerian environment, therefore, can be viewed to cover the natural environment with the abundant minerals and other natural resources provided by nature for man's use and the built environment designed and developed by man.

Sustainable Environment

An environment is sustainable when the use and management of the environment meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The exploitation of our solid minerals and the exploration of oil and gas in Nigeria, for instance, has led to the degradation of the ecosystem to the detriment of the communities. These had led to the massive pollution of the land, sea and air in the affected communities. The Nigerian environment is, not yet sustainably developed because it has not achieved a high quality of life as the activities of man degrade the environment (Ayorinde, Omolala and Olugbenga, 2015). According to Okueso and Adekoya (2006), Nigeria can be said to be sustainably developed if attention can be positively focused at addressing problems in the following areas of environmental sanitation:

- i. Housing and urbanisation
- ii. Adequate potable water supply
- iii. Management of urban drainage system
- iv. School sanitation
- v. Noise pollution
- vi. Energy and environmental sanitation
- vii. Pest and vector control
- viii. Disposal of the dead (human and livestock)
- ix. Control of reared and stray animals
- x. Hygiene education and promotion
- xi. Partnership
- xii. Improved governance
- xiii. Municipal solid waste management
- xiv. Medical waste management
- xv. Excreta and sewage management
- xvi. Food sanitation
- xvii. Market and abattoir sanitation

Environmental Protection

Environmental protection is the practice of guarding the natural environment by individuals, organisations and governments. Its objectives are to conserve the natural resources and the existing natural environment and where applicable, to repair damage and reverse trends in the society.

Due to the constant pressure of over-consumption, population growth and technology, the biophysical environment is being degraded, sometimes permanently. This has been recognized and governments have started placing restraints on activities that cause environmental degradation in developed nations. In recent times, environmental movements and some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have created more awareness of the various environmental problems arising from man's activities in the environment.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is an independent public body under the aegis of the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment established under the Environmental Protection Agency Act of 1992. According to Karamanos (2011), the EPA has a wide range of functions to protect the environment, with its primary responsibilities to include:

- i. Environmental licensing
- ii. Enforcement of environmental law

- iii. Environmental planning, education and guidance
- iv. Monitoring, analyzing and reporting on the environment
- v. Regulating the greenhouse gas emissions
- vi. Environmental research development
- vii. Strategic environmental assessment
- viii. Waste management and
- ix. Radiological protection.

Approach to Environmental Protection

Due to the dynamic nature of the society, efforts should be geared toward adapting to the needs of all living species and resources while exploiting and exploring the environment. Key concepts of conservation pertain to sustainability of resources and species, the longevity of individuals and the concerned domino effects that reckless usage of resources is creating. Sustainable developments, ecological restorations alongside animal welfare are not only all important aspects when discussing conversation and change but it also provides a valid reason as a topic of concern and awareness. By educating current and upcoming generations, and equipping them with the necessary knowledge, and tools, change to help replenish the environment and a healthier living style as a society is bound to reap great results. There are several approaches to environmental protection. These include; voluntary environmental agreements, ecosystems approach and international environmental agreements.

Voluntary environmental agreements often provide a platform for companies to be recognised for moving beyond the minimum regulatory standards and thus support the development of best environmental practices. In developing countries, such as Latin America, these agreements are more commonly used to remedy significant levels of non-compliance with mandatory regulation (Blackman, 2008). The changes that exist with these agreements lie in establishing baseline data, targets, monitoring and reporting.

An ecosystem approach to resource management and environmental protection aims to consider the complex interrelationships of an entire ecosystem in decision making rather than simply responding to specific issues and challenges. Ideally, the decision-making processes under such an approach would be a collaborative approach to planning and decision making. This will involve a broad range of stakeholders across all relevant governmental departments, representatives of industry, environmental groups and the community. Thus, this approach supports a better exchange of information, development of conflict-resolutions strategies as well as improved regional conservation. According to CIPA (2001) religions also play an important role in the conservation of the environment.

International environmental agreements are signed by multiple governments to prevent damage to the environment and/or provisions for the management of impacts created by human activities on natural resources. This can include agreements that impact factors such as climate, oceans, rivers and air pollution. These agreements are sometimes legally binding documents with implications when they are not followed strictly as codes of conduct. A well-known international agreement is the Kyoto Protocol (Harding, 2006).

Financial Needs for Environmental Management in Nigeria

The financial needs for environmental management in Nigeria is enormous. The unachievement of sustainable environmental management in Nigeria is partly due to poor

funding. Environmental protection, particularly in the developing countries, has been grossly underfunded. In Nigeria, financing environmental management was seen as the primary responsibility of the government. However, in recent times, government has been unable to shoulder this responsibility solely due to the increasing financial demand from other sectors of the economy (Ayorinde, Omolola and Olugbenga, 2015). The Federal Government Ministries and agencies involved in environmental management are: Federal Ministry of Environment, Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA), and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). At the state level we have State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources while at the Local Government level we have the Department of Community Development and Department of Agriculture and Forestry. Often, these government agencies have laudable plans and programmes but many of the programmes fail because of problems of finance and its management (Ayorinde, Omolola and Olugbenga, 2015). According to these authors, government sometimes has not placed priority attention to the activities of these agencies in the areas of environmental protection. Instead, government seems to channel substantial financial resources to targeted popular programmes such as poverty alleviation and home-grown schools' feeding programme, to mention but a few.

In Nigeria, government is yet to regard environmental management as a priority in national development. Often, political attention on environmental problems comes only after a catastrophic event. For instance, serious attention on environmental protection started in Nigeria shortly after the "koko toxic waste dump" in 1988. Massive oil spillage in Ogoni and at various other locations in the Niger Delta region has been recurring events over the years. The Federal Government sets policies, provides funds and supervises states and local government councils on environmental protection projects. In Nigeria, urban social waste management is a statutory responsibility of the local government. Often times, the local authorities are fiscally incapacitated. In most case, the state governments have taken up the responsibility. Yet, the state governments failed much like the local government authorities (Uchegbu, 2009). State and local councils can contribute significantly to finance environmental protection in Nigeria through direct funding using Internally Generated Revenue (IGR).

Alternative funding of environmental protection could be sought from: (i) pollution abatement – the argument is that polluters should be made to bear the cost of the pollution they create. (ii) Forestry rent – rent and taxes from the forestry sector could help to reduce forest loss as well as provide fund for environmental tax protection (iii) Environmental taxes – environmental tax if fully introduced in Nigeria could help to generate huge fund from many areas including; mining, oil exploration, forestry, urban industry and transportation (iv) Fund from Corporate Organisations - oil companies operating in Nigeria spend heavily annually on community programmes. Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in a five year plan spent N12.6 billion on environment and community issues (Ayorinde, Omolola and Olugbenga, 2015). Other oil firms like Exxon Mobil, Agip, Elf, Pan Oceans and Chevron has been making some financial commitments to the protection and management of the Nigerian environment. However, much need to be done by ensuring that these companies spend those fund directly on community environmental protection projects without interference by the dishonest politicians. (v) Fund from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) – Environmental NGOs are primarily involved in mobilizing funds for environmental programmes and projects. International agencies such as the World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO and UNICEF should consult with these NGOs on environmental projects in Nigeria. Despite the efforts of the three tiers of government so far in

the country, sustainable environmental protection is yet to be achieved in Nigeria. This is because government is yet to regard environmental protection management as a priority and also the paucity of government funds coupled with the fact that environmental protection in Nigeria is not yet regarded as everyone's business.

Human Rights Law and Environmental Protection

The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the human environment, the first United Nations environmental conference, proclaimed that "both aspects of man's environment, the natural and the man-made, are essential to his well-being and to the enjoyment of basic human rights – even the right to life itself. A few years later, countries began to add a right to a healthy environment to their national constitutions (Boyd, 2012). According to Knox (2012), more than ninety countries have adopted a constitutional right to a healthy environment. The rights have also been included in regional human rights instruments in Africa, the Americas and elsewhere (Knox, 2012). According to the same author, regional human rights tribunals have applied generally acknowledged human rights, including rights to life, health and property, to environmental protection issues.

Environmental harm can and does interfere with the full enjoyment of many human rights, including: the rights to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the right to an adequate standard of living and its components, including the rights to food, water, and housing; the right to property; and the right to respect for private and family life. Human rights bodies have also identified obligations of states to protect against environmentally related interference with the enjoyment of human rights. These obligations fall into three categories namely; procedural duties; substantive duties and duties relating to the protection of those particularly vulnerable to environmental harm.

Sustainable Development Goals and the Environmental Human Rights Law

The 2012 United Nations conference on sustainable development emphasized that every state has the responsibility "to respect, protect and promote human rights and that democracy, good governance and the rule of law, etc. are essential for sustainable development" in each of its three dimensions: economic growth, social development and environmental protection (UN, 2012). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include goals and targets that promote environmental protection. However, the targets were often written in language that is neither concrete nor closely linked to existing human rights obligation (Knox, 2015).

The United Nations set out four building blocks for sustainable development agenda. These are: a far-reaching vision of the future firmly anchored in human rights; universally accepted values and principles, including those encapsulated in the charter; the universal declaration of human rights; and the millennium declaration (Knox, 2015). According to the author, the SDGs were rearranged, in a more focused and concise manner, according to six essential elements of; dignity, people (ensuring their healthy lives and the inclusion of women and children), prosperity, protection of ecosystems, justice and partnership for development.

The three categories of human rights obligations which affect environmental protection namely, procedural obligations; substantive obligations and obligation relating to those particularly vulnerable to environment harm. These human rights examined targets relating to eight goals of; (i) health; (ii) water; (iii) economic growth; (iv) human settlements; (v) sustainability; (vi) climate change; (vii) marine resources; and (viii) terrestrial ecosystems.

The SDGs could be of immense importance to sustainable development in general, and in particular to the ongoing development of the relationship between human rights and the environment. However, most of the goals and targets are too general and vague to provide much practical guidance to those working to promote human rights and environmental protection.

Conclusion

Despite governments' present commitment to ensuring that our environment are sanitized, sustainable environmental protection is yet to be achieved in Nigeria. This is because government is yet to regard environmental protection as a priority and also due to paucity of funds. Again, environmental protection in Nigeria is not yet regarded as everyone's business. The study concludes that a better approach to environmental protection would involve the government, the private sector and the organized civil society, in an integrated manner.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are deemed necessary:

1. As a matter of policy, the monthly environmental sanitation exercise should be nationwide and inclusive, involving all people irrespective of status, political and religious affiliations.
2. The clearing of gutters, drainages and waterways should be done collectively involving the government and the residents in the different communities.
3. Government should encourage intensive nationwide tree planting exercise to enhance afforestation and to check desert encroachment in the north. The Cross River State Government has launched massive tree planting campaign tagged: "Green Carnival, 2019" by providing inputs and logistics to enhance afforestation.
4. Government should ban the use of chemicals such as aerosols which are known agents that can deplete the ozone layer of the atmosphere, and other chemicals which are not environmental friendly.
5. Drilling of boreholes should be closely monitored and supervised by relevant governmental agencies to ensure clean and safe potable water supply.
6. Government should build modern dumpsites in each state of the federation, for proper solid waste disposal.
7. Government should prohibit gas flaring in the country. This will help to reduce the rate of air pollution in the Niger Delta region.

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