

Some aspects of environmental pollution in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

There has been persistent hue and cry against the rate at which our environment is being abused. This outcry of alarm is global in nature which demands sincere comments and contributions from well meaning individuals towards achieving possible remedies. This paper examines how poverty is seen to be one of the greatest factors inducing environmental degradation in Nigeria. Some of the socio-economic exigencies vis-à-vis their econo-environmental factors and aspects of human activities that endanger our surroundings are considered. It is verified that the bulk of environmental problems we have here is poverty-driven and can be minimized appropriately. Solutions are proffered towards our earth safe for life.

INTRODUCTION

In most of the developing countries where excruciating economic hardships are severe such as ours, some of the phrases in common parlance include: poverty reduction, poverty alleviation, economic crunch, capacity building, dividends of democracy, global economy, etc. It is not a bogus statement to say that in our incessant quest for better socio-economic standard, we have all degraded our world's treasure of natural resources through population growth, high consumption levels, ever-compassing and never-ending industrial and commercial development (Maler, 2002). This applies to air, water and land to the extent that the cost of maintaining clean air, water and other common goods and services we all depend for our economic and social well-being is very high.

Undoubtedly, poverty creeps in under these prevailing circumstances. This short paper aims at high-lighting the significance of some of the poverty-driven causes/effects and their relevance in the third world countries with particular reference to Nigeria.

Reminiscence of Poverty

Poverty is a state of being poor, a condition of lacking the necessary ingredients that make life worth living. It affects the environment in many ways, more especially, in the developing countries. Before delving into the effects let me reminisce a little about poverty. A country whose economic base cannot support her population food and other needs is poverty-stricken. This is common in most African countries. Here in Nigeria, more than 70% of the populace (mainly within the rural set-ups) cannot afford three square meals a day; consequently, this gives rise to poor health where we already have dwindling poor Medicare delivery system.

Certainly, poverty must manifest. Another aspect of our impoverishment stems from illiteracy or near-illiteracy in our midst.

Many youth refused or did not have opportunity to be formally educated preparing them as capacity builders in future. We do know that any development without education is a ruse. Due to our value and materialistic system, education was thrown to the dogs by our youths (mainly the males) and opted for the “get-rich-quick” activities. From mid and late 80's the get-rich-quick syndrome metamorphosed into 419, OBT, drug pushing and the likes. For nearly two decades, we have been crying against male-school drop-outs. The enormous corruption and crimes we witness today in our society have some links to our life pattern a few decades ago among other factors (NEEDS, 2004). Hostage taking, oil pipeline vandalization, daylight armed robbery, tricksterdom, etc took their roots there from.

SOME CAUSES/EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ABUSE

One cannot talk about poverty without considering the socio-economic exigencies vis-à-vis the prevailing econ-environmental factors and activities. Our natural environment is one that has not been tempered with by biotic and abiotic components of nature. Through man's insatiable desire for better living, he goes about changing his environment (Areola, 1983; NTI, 1990).

Some of these changes are wholesome and harmless while some are unnecessary (or necessary) but harmful. For purposes of space and time, let me briefly dwell only on the latter – the activities and changes in our environment which are necessary or unnecessary but have adverse effects on the over-all ecosystem. These are outlined as follows.

Deforestation

The state of poverty motivates illegal felling of trees which gives way to global warming, erosion and flood problems, situation of water bodies, destruction of wild-life habitat, valuable tree species and depletion of the ozone layer.

Excavation and Quarrying Activities

Poverty also facilitates human activities associated with excavation and quarrying which enhances disturbance of the edaphic factors, fragility of the earth's crust, destruction of the edaphic micro-organisms and vegetation, pollution of the atmosphere with dust as well as enhancing erosion and flooding.

Bush Burning and Hunting

Poverty encourages bush burning and hunting of mild animals which adversely affect our environment by destroying the fragile web of life, world's animals and plants species to the extent of making some of them extinct in addition of soil micro-organisms and mineral contents. This also increases the carbon content of the atmosphere and enhances pollution. Cases of environmental radiation due to industrial activities have been reported (Avwiri and Ebeniro, 1998).

Air Pollution

The inevitable use of automobiles, generators/plants, heavy-duty machines, industrial operations, etc produce fumes which degrade the environment. As the fumes contain poisonous gases like sulphur dioxide, hydrogen sulphide and carbon monoxide, it is obvious that the air we breath within the polluted environment is dangerous. In a bid to curtail this menace a person's spendable income will continue to rise thereby impoverishing ones bank account the more. Substances like cassava effluent, rotten animal, refuse dumps, waste photographic processing materials constitute environmental abuse if not well managed.

Acoustic Pollution

This is another aspect of environmental degradation – a social malaise which many people do not give thought to. Due to the inability of the Nation's Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) to maintain reliable energy supply systems for domestic, commercial and industrial use (Animalu, 1981); individuals and groups resort to personal electric generating sets for their power requirements. In consequence, the purported solution to a problem gives rise to another which I term "acoustic pollution". Traffic noise apart, the generators in addition to producing poisonous gaseous by-products also produce great noise and vibrations that are highly injurious to human and animal habitation (Onuu, 2000). This is very rampant in our cities and the cost-effectiveness of this practice cannot be ignored.

Dumping of Toxic Materials

For economic or other reasons, people have connived with some industrialists within and outside the country to dump toxic industrial wastes in our geographical territory. A typical example is the one

dropped at Koko in Delta State all the way from Italy some years ago.

A good amount of cash (I guess) must have exchanged hands before it was made possible. Our waters are not exempted. People drop certain substances in rivers/streams and all the aquatic life is gone. For instance, a group of young men poured a gallon of gremlin as a fishing method into the only perennial stream my community uses as water supply source; behold it was a great disaster. Apart from rendering the water unfit for human consumption, all the aquatic resources died. Assorted types of fishes, crocodiles, alligator frogs, etc. were all gone instantly. Even those who ate the "harvested fishes" were having some health disorder (Ogugbue and Oranusi, 2006). There are many other examples.

Depletion of the Ozone Layer

There are four main vertical divisions of the atmosphere from the surface of the earth viz: Troposphere (0 – 18km), Stratosphere (18 – 50km), Mesosphere (50 – 80km) and Thermosphere (80 – 400km) (Scheidegger, 1976). The ozone layer is located between the troposphere and the stratosphere, which acts as a protective shield over our earth's biotic components against the lethal ultra-violet (uv) radiation from the sun. In recent past scientists from National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) discovered that the ozone layer is being depleted. This is because emissions from man-made activities within the earth produce some chemicals known as fully-halogenated chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) which is responsible for the depletion. The consequences are that with time the ozone would be completely phased off allowing uv rays to devastate life on the earth surface. It is a global problem. The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) has taken steps to fight this problem. This led to the Vienna (Austria) "Convention for the Protection of the ozone layer" and "Protocol and substances that deplete the ozone layer" held in Montreal, Canada (DU Pont Magazine, 1988).

DISCUSSION

According to Callister (1997) our modern technologies and the manufacturing of their associated products impacts our societies in a variety of ways – some are positive, others are adverse. Further more, these impacts are economic and environmental in type and international in scope because the resources required for a new technology often come from many different countries; also, the economic prosperity resulting from technological development is global in extent and environmental impacts may extend beyond the boundaries of a single country. From this discourse there is need to proffer remedies to reduce (to its bearest minimum) the activities that endanger our environment. This will help to ameliorate the state of our impoverishment.

Indiscriminate felling of trees should stop forthwith. If necessary let any tree be felled have a species replacement of five to ten trees in its place. Illegal mining for minerals excavation and quarrying activities should be strongly condemned and discouraged. The idea of burning the bush for farming purpose has to be de-emphasized. And moreover, to burn a bush as a method of hunting or bush-clearing is not good at all. There is no profit in burning a whole bush to get four rabbits but in the process have destroyed a vast amount of bush/forest resources. Air and acoustic pollution should not be regarded as harmless. There is a level of noise that the human beings (even animals) can tolerate (Onuu, 1992; Onuu and Menkiti, 1996).

It is not very easy to know when the air is polluted because a little amount of say, carbon monoxide in the air can cause death. Therefore, we must be careful using equipment or gadgets that can produce dangerous fumes while functioning. The way toxic industrial wastes are being dumped by foreigners should be disallowed in its entirety no matter the degree of poverty that is stirring in our face. Our refuse dumps should be well monitored and disposed appropriately. Any one who indulges in polluting rivers/streams/lakes should be regarded as committing murder or genocide. The law must surely take its course. As for the protection of the ozone layer, Nigeria should endeavour to contribute her own quota since the issue is of global dimension. On the whole, appropriate and necessary legal framework is highly needed to protect our surroundings. Public awareness to educate the masses will go a long way to help matters.

CONCLUSION

Attempts have been made to discuss some of the prevailing poverty-driven causes/effects emanating from indiscriminate degradation of our environment. Most of these are man-made and can be avoided. All the environmental degradation activities have direct or indirect connection with poverty-fighting development under-tone behind them, though some are not necessary. Extreme poverty notwithstanding, the actions are propelled by ignorance and illiteracy. By making and implementing desirable social, economic and environmental policies our environment could be better and less degraded.

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