

# **THE RELEVANCE OF SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL STABILITY IN NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The primary aim of this study was to assess the relevance of sustainable environmental education for national stability in Nigeria. The need for greater awareness across-the-board, that is, the citizenry, industry, State and Federal Environmental Protection Agency was explored. From the review, the objective of environmental education programme was seen as the twin need to erase prevalent false notions pertaining to the environment while instilling and inspiring a greater sense of respect for the biosphere in our quest for development. It was observed that such education will enable all from the grassroots, through the relevant agencies to the leaders to understand the stakes, the urgent need for action, and the necessary steps that must be taken towards sustainable national environmental protection. On this note, it was noted that environmental education, though indispensable yet invaluable must be implemented together with other environmental measures for effective national stability in Nigeria.*

*Keywords: Ecology, ecosystem, green house and ozone layer*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The term "Environment" is a very broad concept and it is essential to perceive it in terms of its various sub-systems. Abrams, (1971) in Sada, (1988) defines environment as "the sum total of all external conditions influencing the growth and development of an organism". Sada went further to explain that "the environment is considered abused when injurious or corrupting elements are introduced whereby fouling it, reduces the satisfaction derivable from growing and developing within it". The elements that pollute the environment are many and varied but most commonly they manifest as wastes. Matter is categorized into three, namely; gaseous, liquid and solid (Savas, 1976 in Sada, 1988). Social sensitivity to these forms of pollutants tend to vary depending on differences in the levels of awareness, technology, socio-economic, developmental ideology and philosophy.

Environmental education therefore means the education of members of the society about their immediate surrounding (environment), its physical characteristics, climatic nature and other natural phenomena. Environmental education programme should motivate the public to participate in activities for maintaining and improving the quality of the environment. It also helps people to develop skills for the prevention of environmental degradation and prevention of environmental pollution. Environmental education enlightens the government on how ecology relates to issues of trade, security, economic development, and other traditional matters of the state. It will also let government know that environmental crusades are not anti-

development. A successful environmental protection programme therefore requires widespread public participation in all fronts. Environmental education programme needs to be clear, consistent, and on-going to avoid confusing the target populace, or reducing their confidence in such efforts. Such programme should create awareness and interests and possess a variety of incentives to maintain and increase participation.

The call for sustainable environmental protection and preservation cannot be over-emphasized. The undesirable effects of an abused environment with its deteriorating ecosystem, become more and more obvious across the globe. Considering the sustained increase in global temperatures generally attributed to the increased burning of fossil fuels such as coal, wood and gasoline (release of carbon (iv) oxide and other green house gases to the atmosphere) or the ozone layer depletion or food shortages caused by irregular climatic patterns attributed to the disruption of the ecosystem by human activity, it becomes obvious that the time to act is now. Previous efforts to grapple with the problems have resulted in the setting up of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), passing of environmental laws, inauguration of earth days, organization of conferences/seminars on environmental and sustainable development and other such measures. Despite all these laudable efforts, the decline of our environment has continued more or less unabated. While this is partly attributed to lack of commitment, implementation of the necessary laws and resolutions, it is evident also that the welfare of our environment does not depend on professionals or an educated minority (these have been the target of most previous efforts). This paper highlights the need to arouse the entire citizenry and to create adequate environmental awareness and responsibility.

### **OBJECTIVES OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

The primary aim of Environmental education is to free minds of people from the various myths and misconceptions surrounding environmental degradation and to present the true state of affairs and in particular to:

- (1) Secure for all Nigerians quality environment adequate for their health and well-being.
- (2) Conserve and use the environment and natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations.
- (3) Restore, maintain, and enhance the ecosystems and ecological processes essential for the functioning of the biosphere to preserve biological diversing and the principle of optimum sustainable yield in the use of living natural resources and ecosystem.
- (4) Cooperate in good faith with other countries and international organizational agencies, to achieve optimal use of trans-boundary natural resources and effective prevention of trans-boundary environmental pollution.
- (5) Develop public awareness through environmental groups, educational system and news media.
- (6) Introduce environmental education into the secondary school curriculum.
- (7) Make education responsive to the needs of the Nigerian society.
- (8) Help the youths to understand the Nigerian society and the people.

## STRATEGIES OF ENVIRONMENT EDUCATION

Public involvement is the development of an effective environmental education programme capable of helping people to acquire concern or have an awareness of the environment. One of the strategies used to achieve the environmental policy is problem solving through holistic and systematic view of the environmental issues: the establishment of adequate environmental standards as well as the monitoring and evaluation of change in the environment; the publication and dissemination of relevant environmental data; outlining prior environmental cases and some proposed activities which may affect the environment or the use of national resources, and detailing strategies for implementation in the area of : human population; land use and land tenure; soil conservation.

Effective environmental management policy leads to a coordinated, comprehensive and government planning which, combined with adequate legislation, adequate fiscal allocation, public involvement and awareness, could be expected to improve the quality of lives and landscape. Some Basic Environmental Issues of concern are:

- Slums
- Solid wastes
- Floods
- Land erosion hazards
- Industrial wastes and pollution
- Mine and water pollution
- Environmental degradation arising from mining
- Agricultural development and environment
- Noise pollution
- Rural development and environment
- Drought and desertification

Many of the problems of environmental degradation resulting from various forms of development in Nigeria stem not so much from the intensity of activities but also from lack of environmental education. The motive of profit making among private and public developers pervades the practice of development to the extent that environmental consciousness is relegated to the background. There is therefore the need to improve public awareness and support for environmental quality and conservation. The Nigerian people are hardly cognizant of the importance of ecology and conservation with the result that degradation processes like erosion, vegetation changes, population pressure and poor environmental attitude and practices which can only be solved by spreading awareness and incorporating ecological principles in resource use and after development undertakings.

It is common to think of population as something big corporation alone are responsible for, or as a remote problem whose causes and effects concern the developed countries only. These are both gross misconceptions while it is true that most people are not engaged in agricultural or timber business, those that drop

hazardous waste such as Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBS) into the river, or rum power plants that produce huge amount of green house gasses, are still contributing to the decay of our environment. Participation in such routine activities as driving cows, use of refridgerators and air conditioners, and even use of products made from virgin materials make us all guilty.

More recently, rural development has experienced some increase; this is a result of growing realization of the important role rural development has to play in the overall development of the nation. Earlier, rural areas were disregarded in the perspective, and the functionalists have argued a case for the value of slums. Slums are viewed as contributing to capital formation, as demanding imports from the urban centre, and as supplying important qualities of unskilled and semi-skilled labour to the urban centre. Agricultural Development and Environment has the factor.

- The ability to maintain soil fertility
- Increase in the use of artificial fertilizers
- Use of insecticides
- Establishment of research stations and good agricultural education for farmers
- Credit facilities
- Agricultural subsidies from the Government
- Raw materials from food and agricultural processing

### **PRESENT LEVEL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND RESPONSIVENESS**

Environmental awareness is at a dismally low level priestly among the citizenry. One can easily verify this by going into the streets and seeking public opinion on such issues as environmental -protection, global warming, deforestation, and air and water pollution. The only significant knowledge possessed by many related to the environment is closely tied to environmental sanitation. Forests regulate local temperatures and rainfall, and influence climate by a complicated interaction between ground water, air and trees that is not still fully understood. This in the national context means manual clean-up of one's immediate surroundings and is characterized by cutting of overgrown grasses and transfer of dirt from gutters to the roads. The Environmental Protection Agency is merely seen and known as refuse collectors. The agency is responsible for the provision of public waste bins and removal of municipal solid wastes. The Nigerian public is therefore not yet environmentally enlightened.

In the industrial sector, the multinational and large corporations are more environmentally aware than the medium and small-scale counterparts. Though the amount of waste generated by small and medium corporations are comparatively smaller, yet they are still hazardous and should be disposed properly. Lack of awareness coupled with lack of compliance, result in discharge of all manners of effluent into the environment. Industrial environmental responsibility requires not just a show of willingness to sustain our environment but also voluntary compliance

to environmental standards by installing pollution abatement facilities as integral parts of their plants. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency was established by degree 58 of December 30, 1988 with the statutory responsibility of protecting and developing the environment in general and environmental technology, including initiation of policy in relation to environmental research and technology (Omotola, 1989). While the agency and its parastatals can be assumed sufficiently enlightened, there is still need for continued environmental education to keep abreast with current global trends. Also vital to Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) is education geared towards effective implementation of its guidelines.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is pertinent to note that environmental education, though indispensable for environmental protection is not by itself omnipotent. Its adoption should be done alongside with other measures such as formulation and implementation of necessary environmental laws, and provision of adequate backup facilities to expedite the on all fronts, swift public and private sector actions, and sound environmental decision. These would have a greater impact on the health of the people than even the most determined individuals efforts. It is expected that the knowledge gained through a properly executed environmental education programme will translate into action in all levels. Some of the expected results are enumerated below:

- Government should redirect its focus, funds and existing subsidies away from environmentally dead-end technologies like coal and nuclear power to clean renewable sources such as solar and wind.
- Recycling and use of properly designed landfills should be integral parts of municipal solid waste collection and disposal by Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA).
- Regular environmental audit and assessment studies should be conducted by Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA).
- Our industries will seek to minimize waste via process optimization, hazard and operability studies, product stewardship reviews and such other tools for managing risks with environment, health and safety in view (Bond,1994).
- Renewed research efforts at the transformation of waste to useful products should be intensified.
- The enlightened citizenry will act as environmental watchdogs to ensure that government and corporations meet environmentally pollution control targets.
- The citizenry would embrace such measures as car-pooling and use of public transportation. Use of material/energy efficient means of communication, reformation, separation of recyclable from non-recyclable waste and stoppage of indiscriminate logging and bush burning.

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