

Poverty-Driven Causes and Effects of Environmental Degradation in Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

There has been a persistent hue and cry against the rate at which our environment is being abused. This outcry of alarm is global in nature and 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 exigencies vis-à-vis their econo-environmental factors and aspects of human activities that endanger our surroundings. It is verified that the bulk of environmental problems witnessed across society are poverty-driven and can be minimized appropriately. Solutions are proffered towards making our earth safe for sustained life.

(Keywords: environmental pollution, poverty, ozone-layer, toxicity, CFC)

INTRODUCTION

In most of the developing countries where excruciating economic hardships are severe, such as in Nigeria, 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, and ever-encompassing 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 well 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 highlighting 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's 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 areas) cannot afford three square meals a day; consequently, this gives rise to poor health where we already have a dwindling and poor Medicare delivery system. Certainly, poverty is manifest in these conditions. Another aspect of our impoverishment stems from illiteracy and near-illiteracy in our midst.

Many youths within our society refused or did not have the opportunity to be formally educated, preparing them as capacity builders in future. We do know that any development without education is a social ruse. Due to our value and materialistic system, education was disregarded by our youths (mainly the males) and many opted for "get-rich-quick" activities.

From the mid- and late- 80's the get-rich-quick syndrome metamorphosed into "419" (con-artistry), "obtaining by tricks" (OBT), drug pushing, and the likes. For nearly two decades society has been crying out against male school drop-outs.

The enormous corruption and crimes we witness today in our society have some links to our life pattern of a few decades ago, among other

factors (NEEDS, 2004). Hostage taking, oil pipeline vandalism, day-light armed robbery, con-artistry, etc. took their roots from there.

SOME CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ABUSE

One cannot talk about poverty without considering the socio-economic exigencies vis-à-vis, the prevailing econo-environmental factors and activities. Our natural environment is one that has only seen natural change on geologic time frames by biotic and abiotic components of nature. Through man's insatiable desire for better living, we have now gone about changing our environment on a much more accelerated basis (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 include the following:

- i) **Deforestation:** The state of poverty motivates illegal felling of trees which gives way to global warming, erosion, and flood problems. The condition of water bodies, destruction of wild-life habitat, removal of valuable tree species, and depletion of the ozone layer are also tied to this activity.
- ii) **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.
- iii) **Bush Burning and Hunting:** Poverty encourages bush burning and hunting of wild animals which adversely impacts our environment by destroying the fragile web of life and the world's animal and plant species to the extent of making some of them extinct. This can also increase the carbon content of the atmosphere and

enhances pollution (Avwiri and Ebeniro, 1998).

- iv) **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 breathe within the polluted environment is dangerous. In a bid to curtail this menace, a person's daily expenses will continue to rise, thereby impoverishing one's bank account even more. Substances like cassava effluent, rotten animal biomass, refuse dumps, and waste photographic processing materials constitute environmental abuse if not well managed.
- v) **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 a reliable energy supply system 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 problem 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.
- vi) **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 can be seen at Koko in Delta State where waste was imported all the way from Italy some years ago. It has been publicly conjectured that a good amount of cash must have exchange hands before this

enterprise was made possible. Our waters have not been exempted from the dumping outfall. People drop certain substances in rivers/streams harmful and measurable impacts on aquatic life. For instance, a group of young men poured in a gallon of "Gamalin 20" (Lindane) 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 of the aquatic resources died. Assorted types of fishes, crocodiles, alligators, frogs, etc. were all gone instantly. Even those who ate the "harvested fishes" were having some health disorders (Ogugbue and Oransi, 2006). There are many other examples throughout the countryside.

- vii) **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 (90–400km). The ozone layer is located between the troposphere and the stratosphere, and acts as a protective shield over our Earth's biotic components against the lethal ultra-violet (UV) radiation from the sun (Scheidegger, 1976). In recent decades scientists from US 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. With time, the ozone layer could be completely phased off, allowing UV rays to devastate life on the earth surface. This 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/RECOMMENDATIONS

According to Callister (1997), our modern technologies and the manufacturing of their associated products, impact our societies in a variety of ways – some are positive, others are adverse. Furthermore, these impacts both are economic and environmental in nature and are 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 the barest minimum) the activities that endanger our environment. This will help to ameliorate the state our impoverishment.

Indiscriminate felling of trees should stop forthwith. If necessary, let any tree to 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 purposes 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 and in the process destroying a vast amount of bush/forest resources. Air and acoustic pollution should not be regarded as harmless. There is a threshold level of noise that human beings and 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. The Stockholm convention should be followed across all nations, our refuse dumps should be well monitored, and our hazardous waste be disposed of appropriately. Anyone who indulges in polluting rivers/streams/lakes should be regarded as committing murder or genocide.

The law must surely take its course. As far the protection of the ozone layer, Nigeria should endeavor to contribute her own quota since the issue is of a global dimension. On the whole, an 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 and effects emanating from the indiscriminate degradation of our environment. Most of these are man-made and can be avoided. All the environmental degradation activities have direct or indirect connections with poverty-fighting and development under-tones 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 more sustainable and suffer less environmental degradation.

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