

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AS A PANACEA FOR POVERTY REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This discourse is hinged on the theoretical assumption that the attainment of poverty reduction and sustainability of the environment in Nigeria is tied to the introduction of environmental education, which will instil genuinely environment respecting moral values and awareness among all users of the environment as means of livelihood. The paper examined the concepts of poverty and environmental degradation. The writers view these concepts as positively and proportionately related and noted that both concepts are causes and effects of one another and the introduction of environmental education in schools' curriculum is indeed a panacea for the attainment of poverty reduction and environmental sustainability in Nigeria. It was acknowledged, that successive governments in Nigeria have introduced various programmes to eradicate or reduce poverty and sustain the environment, yet the situation is exacerbating. The paper therefore, notes that the fight against poverty and environmental degradation must be systematic through environmental education.

Keywords: Poverty, Environmental Degradation, Environmental Education, Environmental Sustainability, Poverty Reduction.

There is now a wide appreciation of the damage been done to the environment through human activities. This damage is sometimes global, as the case of the depletion of the ozone layer mainly due to the increase in the rate of greenhouse gas emissions. Often, the damage is regional, as with pest destruction of native forests, or the erosion of river. Often too, the damage is local with pollution from motor vehicles, contamination of soil by chemicals, sewage discharges; these

and hundreds of other human activities stress the environment. Human beings and the environment affect each other; the effect of one on the other can be positive and negative. The economic well being of many (especially rural) households directly depends on the quality of the environment and on the availability of natural resources. Environmental degradation is both a cause and consequence of poverty. The nexus between poverty and environment is very strong in developing countries particularly, Nigeria. Poverty is a major cause and effect of environmental problems, many poor people are forced to overuse environmental resources to survive from day to day and the impoverishment of the environment further impoverishes them. (Agariwa, 1985; World Commission of Environment and Development, 1987; Anijah-Obi, 2001; Akinola, Ekpo,& Haruna, 2012).

Environmental problems in Nigeria include soil degradation, water contamination, deforestation, gully erosion, fishery, wildlife and biodiversity losses, pollution and the invasion by water hyacinth. However, there is often a mainstream belief that for a poverty-ridden country like Nigeria to develop, environmental concerns have to be given attention when poverty is being alleviated.

Poverty and Environmental Degradation

Poverty is a multifaceted concept and has been described by many writers in many ways, differs from place to place and across time (World Bank, 2008). Sen (1999) defined poverty as the failure to achieve basic capabilities such as being adequately nourished, healthy living, and possession of skills to participate in economic and social life and community activities. World Bank (2001) saw it as pronounced deprivation in well-being. Anijah-Obi (2001) viewed poverty as conceived by the World Bank and classified it into two broad categories: “Absolute poverty” which to him means extreme inadequacy in the essentials such as food, clothing, and shelter. This situation according to him means starvation, chronic health, low life expectancy, living in rags and slums. The other category he called “Relative poverty”, has to do with questions of equitable allocation of resources to enable the greater number of people to have access to environmental resources. This second category poses minimum adverse impact on the environment.

In Nigeria, the issue of poverty has been a major concern of economic analysts, government, writers and the public (Dike, 2009; United Nations, 2001). Writers in their various opinions have lamented on the alarming rate of poverty in Nigeria. The National Bureau of Statistics (2012) in its report stated that 112.5 million Nigerians live in relative poverty condition. This figure represents 69 percent of the country’s total population. Apart from the relative poverty index, the absolute measure puts the country’s poverty rate at 99.2 million or 69.9 percent; the dollar per day measure puts the poverty rate at 61.2 percent and subjective poverty measure puts the poverty level at 93.9 percent (NBS, 2012). According to Kale (2012), the poverty

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measurement rate, which was 54.4 percent in 2004, has risen to 69 percent in 2010 and continues to increase to 71.5 percent in 2011. Kale (2012) further stated that in 2004, Jigawa State had the highest poverty rate of 95 percent while Anambra had the least rate of 22 percent. However, in 2010 of the 36 states, Sokoto had the highest poverty rate of 86.4percent while Niger had the lowest of 43.6 percent. These estimates confirm the submission of NBS (2012) that, poverty in Nigeria is a paradox. Despite the abundance of natural resources in Nigeria; despite the annual growth of Nigerian economy by 7 percent and despite the various government programs to reduce poverty, Nigeria is suffering from an illusion of affluence, with few Nigerians enjoying from the collective patrimony while majority are excluded.

Section 38 of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency Act (2009) defines the environment as including water, air, land and all plants and human beings, animals living therein and the inter-relationships that exist between and among them. Degradation means reducing the quality of a thing (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary). Environmental degradation can thus be described as the processes of reducing the quality of the environment. Environmental degradation is a fundamental subject matter in the discourse of environmental issues.

Since a number of environmental problems stem from human and industrial activities, both their causes and effects are relevant to Nigeria's development (Babanyara, Usman, and Saleh, 2010). Urban environmental degradation in Nigeria is associated with households and businesses that are not served by sewers, drains and solid waste collection facilities. Lack of or improper sewage treatment plant is contributing to the water pollution problem. Sources of air pollution are uncontrolled emissions from industries and increasing number of motor vehicles, which are often without catalyst converters and have poorly maintained engines.

The basic reasons for persistence of poverty can be traced to environmental degradation in rural and urban areas. The urban poor are usually the most exposed to weather condition and thus, most affected by environmental pollution. Attempts to tackle poverty without addressing environmental problems are likely to fail. Poverty reduction and effective environmental management are mutually dependent. Poverty is both cause and effect of environmental degradation. Poverty and environment are inter-linked through four main ways: livelihood, resilience to environmental risk, health and economic development.

This relationship between poverty and environmental degradation is of course an extremely complex phenomenon. Inequalities and lack of opportunities, social exclusion, lack of access to essential utilities foster un-sustainability among a section of population which results in environmental degradation because they do not find any available alternatives e.g. drains for toilet, live in a place which is already

polluted, use contaminated water, generate waste vitiating the environment further. Poverty puts pressure on people to engage in unsustainable and environmentally unfriendly practices.

The activities of man in the environment in his search for basic and personal needs have resulted into a continuous and serious degradation and pollution of the ecosystem. This poses a threat to the present and future living. Ndahlahwa (2005) identified three basic ways in which man use the environment, they include a resource bank that supplies raw materials needed to maintain existence; habitat for habitation and sink for wastes. He went further to state that the more people use the environment, the greater the impact of the environment and pressure on the resources.

Measures Taken to Alleviate Poverty in Nigeria

The environment of man is being polluted by poverty and other pollutants leading to such environmental problems like deforestation, desertification, drought, and erosion/flood among others. These are indeed various threats to man's survival and continuous existence. This situation has made several people, government, and international organizations to formulate policies and programs that can help to ameliorate the hazards. The fact however, is that the purposes and contents of those policies of poverty alleviations/eradication and environment protection sound good but they have not been able to solve the problems. In reality, poverty eradication and environmental protection are multi-sectional and interdisciplinary actions in nature and these consist of several mutually beneficial strategies for examining all the factors, events, and parameters that have caused the vicious cycle of poverty and environmental degradation in the entire universe (Oyekole, 2001).

Successive governments in Nigeria have attempted to alleviate poverty in Nigeria. These, according to Garba (2006) can be grouped into pre-Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) period, (1962-1985) and SAP/post-SAP periods from 1986 till date. The pre-SAP periods of poverty alleviation and environment initiatives according to Obadan (2001) were ad-hoc, which focussed more on growth, basic needs and rural development approaches. Before the introduction of SAP, government sought to fight poverty through certain institutional mechanisms. These include: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)(1976); Universal Primary Education (UPE); Green Revolution (GR)(1979); Integrated Agricultural Development (IAD)(1975); River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA)(1976); Land Use Decree (1978). Others include the World Bank Assisted Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs)(1980); Low Cost Housing, Rural Electrification Scheme (RES), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) (1990) and Rural Banking Programme (RBP) (Garba, 2006; Omotola, 2008). The pre-SAP programmes according to Garba (2006) were designed mostly to address issues relating to unemployment, rural-urban migration, low agricultural outputs and low income, which contributed greatly to poverty.

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The SAP era witnessed the introduction of various programmes to reduce poverty level in the country. Omotola (2008) stated that government made frantic efforts to fight the scourge of poverty through the following programmes: Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, (DEFFRI)(1986); National Directorate of Employment, (NDE)(1986); Better Life Programme (BLP)(1987); Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN)(1989)Family Support Programme, (FSP)(1994). Others include Poverty Alleviation Programme Development Committee (PAPDC)(1994); Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP)(1997); National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, (NEEDs)(2004); Poverty Alleviation Program, (PAP)(2000); Community Banks (1990); National Poverty Eradication Programme NAPEP (2001) etc (Nwaobi, 2003; Obadan, 2001; Garba, 2006).

On environmental degradation, the federal government between 1968 and 2013 has made laws relating to environmental protection. They include Oil and Navigable Water Decree of 1968; Chad Basin Development Act (1917) and (1984); Decree 58 (1988); Decree 59, (1992); Federal Environmental Protection Agency, (FEPA)(1992) now Ministry of Environment. However, the success recorded by these agencies and ministries is nothing compared with the efforts and resources devoted to the programmes. The level of environmental pollution and degradation has continued to increase astronomically, while poverty remains endemic and pervasive in Nigeria. Empirical and theoretical studies carried out across the country have shown that the various programmes and projects for eradicating poverty and preventing environmental degradation have failed, see Obadan (2001); Alao (2008); Oduwaye and Lawanson (2006); Babanyara, Usman, & Saleh (2010) .

The National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP) put in place since 2001, which focuses on the provision of strategies for the eradication of absolute poverty in Nigeria (FRN, 2001:3) and complemented with the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) and thirty-seven (37) core poverty-alleviation institutions, agencies and programmes, have not been able to eradicate nor ameliorate poverty. Rather, the situation is exacerbating.

Integrating Poverty and Environment in National Development

To ensure environmental sustainability, there is need for adequate management of the ecosystem so that they can provide resources that will sustain human livelihoods. This is an important way of reaching other global and national developmental goals. Environmental sustainability and poverty reduction are important aspects of the Millennium Declaration signed by over 189 developing and developed countries in 2000. These Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are made up of 8 goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators to be achieved by 2015 (Angela, 2008). Reversing the negative trends in the environment will contribute to the achievement of poverty reduction because the health, incomes and opportunities of

the poor people are heavily influenced by the depletion of natural resources. Ensuring environmental sustainability, which is the seventh goal of the Millennium Development Goals, requires achieving sustainable development patterns and preserving the productive capacity of the natural ecosystems for future generations. These the government can achieve by integrating poverty and environmental issues in national development planning process. There is no doubt that the problems confronting environment all over the world require serious and thoughtful study and a new imaginative approach. It is believed that the key solution to this problem lies in educating the people about their environment. Hence, all over the world today, considerable attention is being focused on providing environmental education. This was supported by World Bank (1994). The World Bank (1992) stated that, “without adequate environmental protection, development will be undermined”. Environmental education therefore, is aimed at making education more relevant to the needs of the society. It should be a permanent process by which individuals and the community gain awareness of their environment and acquire skills, knowledge; experience and determination that will enable them solve future poverty and environmental problems for sustainable development.

Environmental Education as Solution to Poverty Eradication and Environmental Degradation

Education has been described as veritable tool for human development and important pre-requisite for combating poverty, empowering people, protecting the environment and influencing sustainable development.

Environmental education (EE) therefore, refers to organized efforts to teach about how the natural environments function and particularly, how human beings can manage their behaviours and ecosystem in order to live sustainably. EE involves acquiring knowledge about the environment, its associated challenges, and development of skills that will be useful to make informed decisions in environmental conservation, preservation and management (UNESCO, Tbilisi Declaration, 1978; UNESCO, 1985; Adara, 1998). Clapp (1994) perceived environmental education as a way of assisting children to acquire basic understanding of their total environment so that as adult, they would conserve, preserve and protect the environmental or earth's resources to meet their basic needs while also leaving the resources for generations yet unborn.

The scope of environmental education in broad terms according to Vidart (1978) is a pretext for working out a grand theory of education, which embraces all philosophical, social, and education ideals that unite to form a new education. The magnitude of the scope of environmental education therefore, should be made to cut across all aspects of education indirectly in environment-related disciplines and subjects like Agriculture, Geography, Chemistry, Biology, Social studies, and the likes. Elements of environmental education are taught even though often as facts

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rather than being issue-based. Perhaps, this was what necessitated the directives by the UNESCO for the inclusion of environmental education, drug abuse, population education among others into the national schools' curricula (UNESCO, 1985). Curriculum units and materials should be developed in five areas: Air Quality, Ecosystem & Biodiversity, Energy Resources, Land Use and Water Quality

Need for Environmental Education

1. Environmental education is a moral and ethical education needed to help in changing people's attitude on the use and protection of the environmental resources that will help to reduce poverty.
2. To protect children living in polluted regions, environmental education represents a relevant means of information.
3. Environmental education is needed to support and make powerful the community to preserve the integrity and diversity of nature, and to ensure that natural resources are used in an equitable and ecologically sustainable manner.
4. Environmental education is needed to fulfil the objectives of environmental sustainability, development, poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods.

Conclusion

Conclusively, all major natural resources in the country are in grave danger of irreparable damage. A society cannot survive if its people render its natural resources unfit for use. The only hope of salvaging this grave situation is by making the young aware that they need to proactively begin to protect the environment they will inherit through environmental education.

Environmental education is a key tool in combating poverty and promoting environmental awareness. Therefore, it will help produce Nigerians who will find environmental friendly solutions to the numerous environmental problems confronting Nigerians. Since poverty has been identified as a major catalyst in the waning of the environment, environmental education will produce Nigerians who will work to avert poverty. It will also make it possible for exploiting Nigeria's natural resources without endangering the environment. It will produce citizens who will run a sustainable economy which is defined as one using the renewable resources in such a way that only low accumulating level of pollution or degradation are produced (Essien, 1998). It is not an understatement to state that any government, which is environmentally conscious, will avert environmental pollution, which could create socio-economic insecurity, poverty and hinder the nation development and sustainability.

There should be effective implementation of government policies on poverty alleviation and the protection of the environment from degradation. Despite the fact

that there are defections and implementation flaws of policies and laws, environmental protection agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations, and writers should be given credit and accolades for creating a nation-wide awareness of the crises of environment deterioration and poverty.

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