

GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Our environment is increasingly becoming hazardous and complex. The news media now regularly features items on environmental problems in different parts of the country. The more we know about these things, the more we realize what we do not know. Mankind has inflicted assorted damages on the environment for economic purposes. The drive to explore and exploit natural resources to satisfy the myriad of needs of the burgeoning population of this nation is bound to have far reaching implications for the environment and future generations. These environmental damages include flood devastations, erosion, slums, desertification and oil spillages. We need to correct the damage. Thus, the paper discusses the contribution of geographers to environmental management and proffer suggestion such as mobilization of the populace to be environment-friendly, training professionals and the use of local institutions that would enhance further management of our environment.

Introduction

The natural environment has since 19th century, been a subject of growing concern to all nations of the globe, beginning with the highly industrialised ones and now developing countries. Soil erosion, desertification, toxic waste, polluted rivers, seas, lakes and oceans, global warming, the disappearance of the resources, droughts and flooding are some of the inter-connected problems of the natural environment which of late engaged the attention of the international community. These are the most notorious among the many factors that account for the environmental problems and degradations in Nigeria today.

The enormous environmental problems of this epoch have led to the rise and popularity of an environmental science specially devoted to the study and solution of the problem.

A phenomenon, environmentalism, has also developed among the enlightened and conscientious public of many nations, consisting of beliefs, advocacies and practice favouring the management of the natural environment and quality of life.

Since the 1960 feeble protest against the French nuclear test in the Sahara, it took Nigeria almost 30 years and the murder of several innocent citizens before she could come to terms with the acute environmental problems of the oil polluted Niger Delta and, perhaps also, of soil erosion and the rest environmental hazards. The extent and intensity of environmental hazards were negligible as a result of relative low economic activities and consequent disturbance to the environment. It was the Stockholm conference on environment in 1972 that ignited the desire of Nigeria for environmental management. Thereafter, the discovery of five shiploads of toxic waste by Italians in 1988 at Koko in southern Nigeria acted as a catalyst which spurred the federal government to action and the populace to greater environmental awareness.

In spite of the efforts of the federal government and other agencies to control the environment, environmental hazards still persist at an even more attenuated level which has impacted negatively on the environment. The situation therefore necessitated bringing about the integration of knowledge from various fields with their deep exploratory thinking on how to manage the environment. As a **matter of fact**, geography education has an indisputable contribution to **make in environmental management**. Thus, (his paper, therefore, intends to clarify some, concepts, discuss the contribution of geographers to environmental management and proffer some suggestions **that would enhance, further management of the environment**.

Conceptual Clarifications - Geography Education, Environment and Management

The geography education aims at studying the earth, including the activities of man. The purpose involves both description, interpretative and analytic techniques of looking at geographical

phenomena. The phenomena, whether physical, human or environmental are increasingly becoming significant in the planning and management of land and its resources upon which man depends. Different opinions give different definitions of geography which vary from one specialist to the other with different emphasis. In the opinion of Carl Snar (1894) one of the founding fathers of American Geography, it is the science of places.

Paul Vidal De La Blanche (1903) of the French School of Geography saw it as the science of places concerned with the qualities and potentialities of countries.

Ofofata (1974), In his presidential address to the Association of Nigerian Geographers said that Geography is interested in understanding man's environment and its contributions have been concerned mainly with interpreting the environment so that it could be better appreciated by man and in such a way as to establish the man environment interrelationship as a functioning and interacting system.

Richard Harschorne (1959) stated that Geography is concerned with providing accurate, orderly and rational description and interaction of the variables and character of the earth's surface. ^

From the above definitions, it will be seen that geography focuses its attention on man and his environment.. It is a living and dynamic subject. It integrates all subjects and it serves as a link between sciences and humanities.

The National Science Board of the National Science Foundation of U.S. A (197 1:7) quoted by Strahler and Strahler (1994:5) defined environment as "The study of all systems of air, land, water, energy and life that surrounds man." In other words, it refers to yourself and things around you. Environment can be divided into two types which include the internal environment of man himself and external environment which surrounds him. Man's relationship to his environment is a two way traffic in that the environment has a profound influence on man while at the same time, man extensively alters his environment to suit his needs and desires. But, when the alteration is excessive the resultant effect is environmental hazard.

Management is defined as a social process which is designed to ensure the co-operation, participation, intervention and involvement of others in the effective achievement of-a given or determined objective, (UNESCO, 1982). As a behavioural scientist, the manager's greatest duty is to change the people's behaviour to follow him do what will help achieve the goals. Thus management is the act of guiding the activities of a group of people towards achieving a goal. The management concern here is to activate the measures in the support and enabling optional environment control.

The idea is for the government to encourage geographers and other related disciplines, to effectively plan, organize, control resources and manage the environment; since these environmental hazards have, raised new and complex issues, which require going beyond conventional approaches for effective solutions.

Therefore, the new concept of environmental management should be tackled by amalgamation of interacting forces embodied in approaches of a number of disciplines; it is the **management** that is central (o creating the enablement. Geography alone has no unique claims to environmental competence, yet Geography has so much (o do with the environmental **management**.

Contribution of Geographers to Environmental Management

One of the unique features of geography education is its multi-dimensionality. According to Hagget (1972:142),

It has-connections with virtually all other disciplines and geographers are capable of exploiting these connections to provide a kind of multi- • dimensional approach which is important to the proper 'study of the environment.

No wonder, geographers jointly sponsored a workshop together with related disciplines in housing, urban and environmental aspects of oil pollution in Niger Delta in November 1978. The attempt was to bring about the integration of knowledge from various fields and applying it to solve problems constituting one of the greatest assets of geography education.

There is an awful lot of what a person with geography education can do but the question is

whether prospective candidates are aware of this or if they really care. In this section, we shall examine the contribution of some geographers to environmental management in Nigeria. Mankind has now become increasingly concerned about the profound changes being effected by man on the natural environment. Resources are being depleted or wantonly polluted, certain species of plants and animals have been exterminated and others threatened through desertification, deforestation, erosion, flooding, oil spillage and slums.

Geographers have long paid attention to the environment before it became fashionable. Leafing through the past proceedings of the Association of Nigerian Geographers Conferences, environmental themes were quite dominant: Almost no aspect of the environment has escaped the attention of Nigerian geographers. But it should not be surprising, especially in some states and outside the field of geography, eyebrows are still raised when geographers opine that they deal with the environment, especially such issues as soil erosion, landslides, flood, environmental pollution, urban and regional planning and boundary adjustment. It is the view of this author that it is the responsibility of geographers to let the public know what they can do, even where this means selling their wares. After all, where is the integrity in asserting that geography does what it does not do.

Flood and-erosion pose direct threat to lives and general safety of our citizens and adversely affect the nation's economy in diverse ways. The problems have been handled by the following geographers: Odomerho, Ayoade (1980) - Ibadan and Ofomata, Ologe, Jege (1976) - Eastern Nigeria respectively.

A major feature of the ecological crises in northern Nigeria is desertification. Here, environmental degradation in the form of desertification is associated, with the southward movement of the Sahara desert. Desertification has become the most urgent environmental threat to the northern states of Nigeria. The growing population pressure and unabating drought in recent years together with excessive deforestation, overgrazing and bush burning have all combined to bring about rapid rate of the desertification. Many villages and major roads have been known to disappear under sand dunes in Sokoto, Kano, Katsirira, Jigawa, Borno and Yobe States. Ayoade (1983), Oladipo (1991) and Kowal (1970) have made commendable efforts to minimize the situation. The contemporary perception of desertification in Nigeria is such that the problem must be tackled collectively and multi-dimensionally at individual levels.

Geographers in Nigeria have carried out studies which continue to contribute to our understanding-of the environment, They include: Ofomata's factor of soil erosion in the Enugu area of Nigeria (Ofomata, 196"5), Usoroh's man's role in inducing rapid rates of erosion-in Victoria Island (Usoroh, 1969) and Oguntoyinbo's solar energy as a potential for environmental resources in Sub-Sahara (Oguntoyinbo, 1976). If the studies of Ofomata and Usoroh were taken seriously we would not have been faced with the kind of problems we have now to combat at high expenses in the eastern states and coastal areas of Lagos and River States.

Other contributions are Ologe (1976) in the place of geomorphology in Nigeria. Kowal effect of storm in soil conservation at Samaru (Kowal),.Deforestation (Igbozurike), Slums and Squatter settlements' (Onokerhoraye, Izeogu, Sule), oil pollution (Onyige, Ikporukpo). Solid waste disposal and management in Nigeria was a study conducted by Filani and Abumere. Geographers in Nigeria either individually or collectively are rising up to the challenge. All these studies enable us to identify environmental, problems and suggest solutions to them from the geographical point of view.

Recommendations

With the effort of the three tiers of government, the populace should be mobilized to be environment-friendly. At the primary and secondary levels of education, environmental management scheme should be incorporated in all subject taught to remedy the task ahead.

Universities should develop environmental study programmes to train professionals of all disciplines in environmental issues. Particular emphasis should be placed on training in the range of environment related disciplines. Requisite equipments and materials should be provided. The development and encouragement of local institutions may help in curbing the environment hazards.

The federal government should organize geographers and active conservationists at many levels to be watch dogs of our nation's resources in a way that no wanton destruction will occur, to ensure environmental management and keep people, space and environment in equilibrium.

Conclusion

The consequence of ignorance or sheer disregard for environmental management can be disastrous, it is unfortunate to realize that politicians and administrators in this country seem to gear towards the relief of environmental hazards rather than averting them. Now, as a result of increasing value of environmental quality and concern for common man or public property, lessons should be learnt from past failures. And there is a great need for increased understanding of environmental management as this will lead, to comfortable and stable environment. It is hoped that this paper will ginger those interested in the future of our environment and natural resources into harder collaborative work.

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