

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

This paper x-rayed the effect of environmental challenges in the democratic process of Nigeria. Over the years environment has determined the pace of human activities and its endeavour. Hence the main objective of this work is to identify some of the environmental factors that have affected the democratic process of our country. Based on the descriptive method used, it was found out that many successive democratic governance in Nigeria has come up with different preventive measures to cushion the effect of the environmental factors through their policies but to no avail. These environmental challenges include, political, social, economic, election malpractices, insecurity, unemployment, corruption etc. having identified the challenges, some recommendations were made which include: National Orientation, education, proper implementation of policies, good leadership and others should be considered the most appropriate.

Keywords: Environment, Democracy, Challenges, National Orientation.

Environment varies in meaning because of its complexity and scope which encompasses anything from biosphere to the inhabitant of the smallest creature or organism, Brinie, et al (1972). The European Commission (1984) sees environment as the combination of elements that complex interrelationships make up the settings, the surrounding and the conditions of life the individual and of society as they are and as they felt. In other words, environment is where we live. Man's activities are determined by his environment whether political or otherwise. Hence the democratic process of a country is always affected by some environmental factors which could impact positively or negatively.

Effectiveness of democratic rules relies heavily on the environmental factors in that country. Often environmentalism denotes a social movement that seeks to influence the political process by lobbying, activism, education in order to protect national resources and eco-system. (Mernan, 2010).

To Aguwa (2004) democracy and its processes involve the rule or participatory leadership in a democratic dispensation. This connotes the ability to elect leaders who will represent the interest of the populace in different political sphere. Over the years, the Nigerian democratic process is pathetic because it is characterized with violence, corruption of various dimensions which include electoral malpractice, vandalism, insecurity, bombings, kidnapping, unemployment, ethnicity and Boko Haram insurgence.

In view of these environmental menaces, the democratic process must be faulty and imbalance in Nigeria. This work is sub-divided into three viz: Environmental Challenges and its effect on Nigeria democratic process, nexus between environments and democratic process and the way forward.

Environmental Challenges And Democratic Process

There is a correlation between the environmental problems and democratic process in Nigeria. These environmental challenges include social factors, economic, political, and religious and others.

Social Factors: This involves the human activities that affect their day to day attitude and behaviour, under the social factor we will discuss on the education, corruption, poverty and ethnic rivalry.

➤ **Education:** To Fafunwa (1983) in Jega (2006) Education is the aggregate of all processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitude and other forms of behavior which are positive to the society he lives in. It is the transmitting of culture in terms of continuity and growth or disseminating knowledge either to ensure control or

to guarantee national direction of the society or both. Ogunsina (2008) emphasized that education is the pivot around which civilization is built and the propelling that make development possible.

Despite the free and compulsory education in Nigeria, the rate of illiteracy is still high which affects the democratic process because they do not have the will power to make their rightful choices, unequal access to educational opportunities. This manifests in both male/female, rural/urban, rich/poor and regional dichotomies.

The implication of this environmental factor and democratic process is that it possesses insecurity and lack of stability in the country. This leads to high incidence of prostitution, child labour, violent, crimes, armed robbery and the Boko Haram menace in Nigeria. This is traceable to the problem of unequal access to education.

- **Corruption:** This is another threat to democratic process the has eaten deeply into the fabrics of Nigeria. It manifests in several ways (a) political corruption which involves mismanagement of public fund, embezzlement, fraudulent and misappropriation of political office by political office holders (b) Economic corruption, which involve mismanagement in the distribution of public goods, increase cost of goods and services, inflation of cost projects (c) Social corruption which affect the entire welfare of the people, the religious intolerance, among others. Corruption pervades all spheres of Nigeria's national life; the civil service, the police, the religious institution and education institution. Nigeria is consistently rated among the most corrupt countries in the world by Transparency International.
- **Poverty:** Environmentally, poverty is multifaceted hence it poses a great threat to democratic process of the country. Despite all the empowerment programmes, most socio-economic welfare indicators showed Nigeria as a poor country. It is important to note that poverty has become increasingly widespread since the collapse of oil boom in the early 1990's and have intensified, especially between the period of 1992 to present, with severe rural/urban and regional disparities, (Obi, 2001).
- **Ethnic Rivalry:** Nigeria with multiple ethnic groups, has over the years have been a controversial issue on superiority. These crises leads to various environmental problems which include the issue of military intervention, electoral malpractices, election crises, crime, assassin at times, religious rivalries which invariable affect the democratic process of the country. This is prominent in the recent governorship elections in Ondo, Anambra State etc.

- **Economic Factor:** This entails the policy formulation and the implementation in a country, that forms the engine room of that country. These must be based on the capability of the citizens involved. Some of the economic factors that hinders democratic process include: Population growth, Unemployment, Health challenges and Diseases etc.
- **Population Growth:** Population growth of a country is either an advantage or disadvantage based on the leadership and its economic policies Onwuemeodo, et al (2013). In a country where there is a sound economic policy and with a greater population, there will be increment in manpower development to produce resources and have effective governance. While over population especially that of the youth leads unemployment, increase in crimes etc.
- **Unemployment:** Okugbuju, et al (2013) asserted that unemployment has constituted myriads of problems to the socio-economic and political aspects of the nation. The whole issue of unemployment has made many would be responsible graduates to become armed robbers, and kidnappers. The efforts of the government to put things in order has not seen the day because, peoples interest are not the problems of the political leaders rather their selfish interest are seen in misappropriation of funds, and diverting of public fund to their private accounts. Despite youth empowerment programmes carried out by ministries and other government and Non-governmental agencies to ameliorate the suffering of the masses still, it has not met the needs and aspirations of the people.

Health Challenges: One of the objectives of Millennium Development Goals strategies is good health by 2015. This seems to be a mirage, because of the recent health challenges of the outbreak of Ebola Disease that is killing within 21 days. When traced, it could be seen that it started from Sierra Leone and their Ebola River in 1976, coming from animals, much was not done and it re-occurred again with more panic, fears etc. this is more destabilizing to poverty hence there other diseases like HIV, AIDS, Cholera, Malaria, all these are caused by environment which now possesses trait to our democratic process in Nigeria.

Insecurity: The state of insecurity in Nigeria is becoming worrisome considering the high rate at which innocent people fall to the hands of criminals in the country. The security strategies of the combined force of the military are not yielding substantial result. We have special crime-fighting military unit known as Joint Military Taskforce, (JTF), Operation Pulo Shield, just to mention but a few. In the face of these dreadful military set-ups in the country gunmen still go about molesting innocent Nigerians.

Insecurity in Nigeria, manifests in terrorism, illegal bunkering (Vandalism) Kidnapping among others.

Terrorism: The greatest challenge so far in Nigerian history is the emergence of “Boko Haram” that has drawn the attention of International Community. The Sect which is predominantly based in the Northern part of the country has an ideology that is averse to western education and anything it represents. The activities of government to curb their bombing attack through the intelligence agencies and military intervention is still ongoing but unsatisfactory.

Kidnapping and Adoption: The recent insurgence in Nigeria has led to the adoption of the Chiboko girls in Borno State, this has led to an uproar in the country and has kept people in suspense and pains especially the parents and guidance of the adaptors. This issue has led many business men to quit from their business area hence the means of production is reduced and this automatically affect the democratic process in Nigeria as well as the environment as a whole. Kidnapping was first used in the country by Niger Delta Militants before the amnesty programme by the late Yar-Adua. Today believing that kidnapping is less risky and more lucrative venture than armed robbery. It has been adapted by many criminal groups. These groups targeted the rich men and women in the society and demanded huge sums of money as ransom. This factor leads to the closure and reparation of many foreign companies in Nigeria which is not proper.

Illegal Oil Bunkering/Vandalization

Nigeria for long has been confronted with challenges of illegal bunkering and oil theft during which both crude and refined products are stolen on a regular basis. This has posed serious threat to the nation’s economy.

Political Factors

Man is the cream of the society can exist without the existence of man. Politically speaking environment has a lot to do with the political culture, socialization in a given country. Since there are political parties, there must election malpractice in form of rigging, propaganda etc. for instance, there are many political parties in Nigeria, but now the most prominent is the Peoples Democratic Party and Alliance Peoples Congress. Discussing on the election malpractice it is nothing to write home about because of the environmental factors etc.

Religious Factors:

This has existed before now especially in Nigeria where we have two predominant religious groups, Christianity and Islamic. This group has been fighting each other even the Boko Haram insurgence has been attributed to a religious war.

Irrespective of the zoning system or federal character system in Nigeria, ethnicity and religious intolerance has led to unhealthy competition, strife and problems that affect the citizenry; this will lead to democratic inefficiency.

Nexus between Environment and Democratic Process

There exists a correlation between environment and democratic process. Studies shown that the factors militating against the democratic process can be combated by education. Jega (2006) argues that no country can develop without qualitative education that ensures maximum efficiency, competence and self-reliant of the educated. Education is a powerful driver of poverty reduction and socio-economic development. It allows people to think straight, hold positive and concrete views about governance, community living, patriotism, and engage in constructive activities thereby reducing the tendency for them to be employed as agents of violence. Furthermore political education and socialization will enhance the democratic process as environment and man is inseparable.

UNESCO (2010), posited that education empowers people with the knowledge and skills they need to increase individual and household income, expand employment opportunities and fight against hunger corroborating the above, Annan (2001) affirmed that education help to combat poverty, preventing spread of diseases and promote political stability.

In the area of sustainable environmental development, Alvesson and Willmol (1996) emphasized the primacy of education. Particularly in the teaching of environmental education, models for playing, teaching and learning have been developed. These include equality, democracy, global citizenships, justice, multiculturalism, human right, anti-racism, community, participation, cooperation, poverty-reduction and prevention of marginalization. To Obanya (2002) education serves as a tool to inculcate an attitude of social cooperation or social consciousness nets self-motivating agent of social change and progress of the community and the country at large.

The Way Forward:

Education: The importance of education as the way forward will not be over-emphasized rather Berg (2001) noted specifically that education adds to the economy's capacity or ability to produce. Therefore, the level of education and per-capital gross domestic product (GDP) are correlated if the masses are educated politically and otherwise, the democratic process of the country will not be affected greatly by the environment. Additionally using of media and national orientation agencies will aid in the democratic process of political socialization.

- **Good Leadership:** It is the political leaders that pilot the affairs of the state. Invariably, the nature or type of leadership in a country determines the extent it will go, either democratic or autocratic, values or beliefs, cultural virtues can only be achieved through a trusted leader. For instance, President Goodluck Jonathan has been able to manage and control the insecurity using his military fiat and has reduced it to a bearable minimum despite all odds.
- **Economic Empowerment:** The environmental factors, which include political, social, economic religious etc. works together to achieve an expected end. In a situation where good policies are made, unemployment curbs, living standard increased, this must automatically cushion or reduced corruption, thuggery, rigging of election, ethnic rivalries, insecurity and curetic situation in Nigeria.

This must enhance the democratic process, because the democratic process with good leadership, education, honesty and transparency will ameliorate the effect of the environmental challenges.

Entrepreneurial ship education should be encouraged and seriously pursued if the trend of unemployment is to be controlled. Furthermore educational and information must be disseminated to inject ethics, moral values, and patriotism and community living.

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