
Achieving Environmental Improvement in the Niger Delta Area of Nigeria

By

JOSEPH A. AKINNIYI

*Department of Business Administration and Management,
Rufus Giwa Polytechnic,
Owo, Ondo State.*

Abstract

This paper investigates the extent to which environmental degradation has affected lives and business activities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The study also examines the efforts of the government, legislature and business organizations in environmental improvement. The paper reveals that the bastardization of the Niger Delta environment, especially by oil companies, has resulted in health, agricultural and aquatic hazards, strong hostility against business operations, huge material and financial losses, decline in national revenue and revenue allocation as well as acceleration of gun militancy. It is also established that the environmental role played by the government, legislature and business organizations in the Niger Delta is not encouraging and that the governmental efforts, in recent times, are belated. This study utilizes qualitative descriptive methodology. It relies mainly on documentary empirical evidence and personal interview as its sources of data.

Introduction

Environmentalism is the term used to describe the protection, preservation and enhancement of the environment (Blair and Hitchcock, 2001). Blair and Hitchcock identify environmental legislation, customer attitudes to the environment along with direct actions by environmental groups as part of the most obvious influences that can be grouped together under the umbrella term of environmentalism.

If there is any country where the harsh effects of environmentalism are profoundly demonstrated, it is Nigeria. It has been widely observed that environmental degradation pervades the Niger Delta area of the country. This ugly situation has resulted in youth restiveness and agitation for resource control.

The government and the private sector in Nigeria are counting their losses as a result of the acute environmental problem in the Niger Delta. For instance, Nigeria earns over 90 per cent of her national revenue from the Niger Delta. But, the country recorded a loss of ₦570 billion projected revenue for the 2006 fiscal year. Usman in Offiebor (2007) confirms that between January 2006 and April 2007, the daily production quota of 2.4 million barrels per day (bpd) approved for Nigeria by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) declined by 25 per cent.

The Coconut

The objectives of this paper are: to identify the effects of environmental degradation, to examine the contribution of the government, legislature and business organizations to environmental protection and improvement and to suggest ways of improving environmental situation of the Niger Delta. In order to give the paper both theoretical and practical outlook, literatures on environmental management are reviewed and historical perspective of agitations in the Niger Delta area is rendered.

Environmental Management System

Blair and Hitchcock (2001:9) claim that “It is hard to identify a business where environmental concerns have no impact on its operations.” Business environment consists of the economic, socio-cultural, technological, educational, legal political and ecological environment.

To manage the ecological environment properly, it is necessary to have an enduring environmental management system. The system involves a number of phases.

According to Welford and Gouldson (1993), the first thing to do when designing an organization’s environmental management system is to formulate environmental policy. Environmental policies often revolve around issues like waste disposal, noise abatement, radiation abatement, water pollution and air pollution (Ogundele, 2007).

Sherlekar (2001) argues that the essence of environmental policy is to enable organizations play the role of system regulator in order to keep operations in harmony with the environment. By the time an organization makes policy statement on any or all of the environmental issues earlier mentioned and works towards achieving them, the organization will be said to be socially responsible.

Environmental policy is meaningless if the senior management staff that is saddled with its implementation is not committed to it. Senior managers may not be committed if, according to Nwachukwu (1992), their training experiences have not exposed them to be conscious of environmental protection and improvement. They may also be non-challant if they feel that pursuit of environmental policies is a sheer waste of funds. Whatever the case may be, senior managers need to show enthusiasm and genuine readiness to actualize environmental policies.

Environmental management also requires the setting up of environment committee. The basic functions of this committee are to organize the implementation of the environmental management policy, monitor progress towards environmental improvement and ensure proper lines of communication (Welford and Gouldson, 1993). Members of the committee include the Environment Director, Health and Safety Officer, the Quality Improvement Director and representatives of the middle management and shop-floor workers.

Next to be instituted are the environmental action teams. An environmental action team is normally headed by one or more members of the environment committee. The function of a particular team is to investigate critically a certain

Achieving Environmental Improvement in the Niger Delta of Nigeria- Joseph A. Akinniyi

segment of an organization's duties which may include waste management, pollution control, storage, packaging or product safety.

Process improvement teams are equally set up. Their role is to examine in depth a particular process of the organization and suggest ways in which it can be improved. The so-called process must have something to do with environmental improvement.

Quality circles are also established. A quality circle often comprises a set of workers doing identical work and who meet regularly to identify and solve problems relating to organizational tasks. Thus, the workers implement environmental policies and carry out other legal directives of management.

It becomes clear from the discussions made above that environmental management system is a necessary procedure in all organizations. If properly organized, it is capable of bringing about environmental improvement in any community.

Agitations in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta territory of Nigeria consists of 9 states and 185 Local Governments. The states are Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Abia, Imo, Ondo, Cross River and Edo states.

The Niger Delta is a huge flood plain. The territory covers 25,640km² of the country's land area.

Protests and agitations are known features of the Niger Delta. Some of the reasons for agitation are stated below.

1. The land in the region is ravaged by exploration activities. That is, oil explorations have caused severe damage to the ecosystems of the general environment.
2. Fishing, a major economic activity in the region, is under severe threat as oil spills frequently destroy aquatic life and poison drinkable water.
3. Hospitals, roads, schools and other social amenities are grossly inadequate.
4. Business organizations in the area, especially the oil companies, are perceived to be socially irresponsible.
5. There is allegation of long time neglect and marginalization by the government. It is alleged that incomes from oil from the region are spent mainly on the development of other parts of the country.
6. There is lack of sustainability of governments' efforts to develop the Niger Delta.

Agitations against marginalization and environmental degradation have been on as far back as 1895 when King William Koko of Nembe, in today's Bayelsa state, started an uprising against the Europeans. The king mobilized 1,200 warriors in war canoes against the Europeans' Royal Niger Company which was exploiting palm oil in the area without paying anything for it. That fight received further boost in 1965 when Isaac Adaka Boro raised up a local army to demand for creation of a separate region out of the then Eastern Region for the people of the present Rivers State.

The Coconut

The agitations were further championed by Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 on the platform of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). In recent years, several interest groups have sprung up to continue the struggle against environmental degradation. Some of such groups are the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF).

Government's efforts at addressing the agitations in the Niger Delta became noticeable in 1958 when the then British rulers set up the Henry Willink Commission which metamorphosed into the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in 1960. In the early 1980s, the Alhaji Shehu Shagari administration allocated a mere 1.5 per cent of the federation account to tackle the peculiar problems faced by the region. The Ibrahim Babangida administration established the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992 and increased federal allocation to the region to 3 per cent from 1.5 per cent.

The Olusegun Obasanjo administration set up the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) on 21st December, 2000. On 28th March, 2007, the President launched a comprehensive master plan for the Niger Delta region. The master plan was a ₦15 trillion project, designed to be completed in fifteen years.

Further developmental efforts have been made by the Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua regime. The administration, in 2008, established the Federal Ministry of Niger Delta to cater for the developmental and environmental needs of the region. It is pertinent to point out, however, that the contribution of the government to environmental improvement in the Niger Delta has, all along, been discouraging. Of course, the on-going bloody agitations would have been avoided if the belated developmental efforts of the Federal and State Governments in the last four years had been unfolded twenty years ago in that region.

Effects of Environmental Degradation and Strategies for Environmental Improvement

Environmental Degradation Effects

The ecological environment of the Niger Delta is a deplorable one. The exploration activities of oil companies in the area have resulted in air, land and water pollution. Indeed, frequent oil spills and gas flaring constitute both health risks and a waste of resources.

Owing to land pollution, agricultural business is badly hampered as crops could no longer thrive and yield the desired harvest. Also, water in the region has been contaminated by hazardous waste and chemical substances, thereby disrupting fishing business as aquatic elements find it extremely difficult to cope with oil spills. This has resulted in the destruction of a large chunk of aquatic animals like fishes, crabs, crayfish and crocodiles.

Environmental pollution has also rendered a very large portion of the water in the area undrinkable. This development has badly affected the health of the inhabitants of the area. The same thing goes for air pollution.

Achieving Environmental Improvement in the Niger Delta of Nigeria- Joseph A. Akinniyi

Business activities thrive most in friendly environments (Jamali and Mirshak, 2007). The environmental bastardization of the Niger Delta has resulted in unfriendly gestures which have left many business organizations in the area gasping for breath. Previously, protest against environmental degradation and alleged marginalization of Niger Delta did not go beyond picketing or protestants barricading the gates of oil companies, the situation became worse in 2003 with the introduction of guns and weapons of war into the struggle. Consequently, oil installations of many oil firms were bombed and destroyed. Of the 631,000 barrels per day (bpd) that Nigeria lost in 2007, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) alone accounted for 455,000 bpd, Agip 75,000 and others 121,000. In addition, Okerenkoko, a tiny Ijaw community rich in oil deposits knows no peace most of the time.

The unprecedented protest against environmental degradation in the Niger Delta has a grave effect on national revenue. The revenue generating capacity of the Federal Government has been reduced drastically as oil is the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. This development has eventually led to decline in the revenue allocation to the State and Local Governments. This has, therefore, incapacitated the three tiers of government in delivering the dividends of democracy.

Environmental Improvement Strategies

Wehrich and Koontz (2005) observe that managers need to take into account the ecological factors in their decision making. Indeed, the pressure to improve environmental performance is emanating from the media, pressure groups, customers, employees, trading partners, insurers, investors and the community.

The task of improving the environment rests on the shoulder of three major agents, namely, the legislature, government and business organizations as shown in Figure 1. The legislature engineers debates on environmentalism in the Local Government Legislative Council, State Houses of Assembly and National Assembly. Such debates do give birth to legislation and the interpretation and implementation of that legislation. The legislation determines the framework of environmental law; it limits the freedom of companies to act in their own ways.

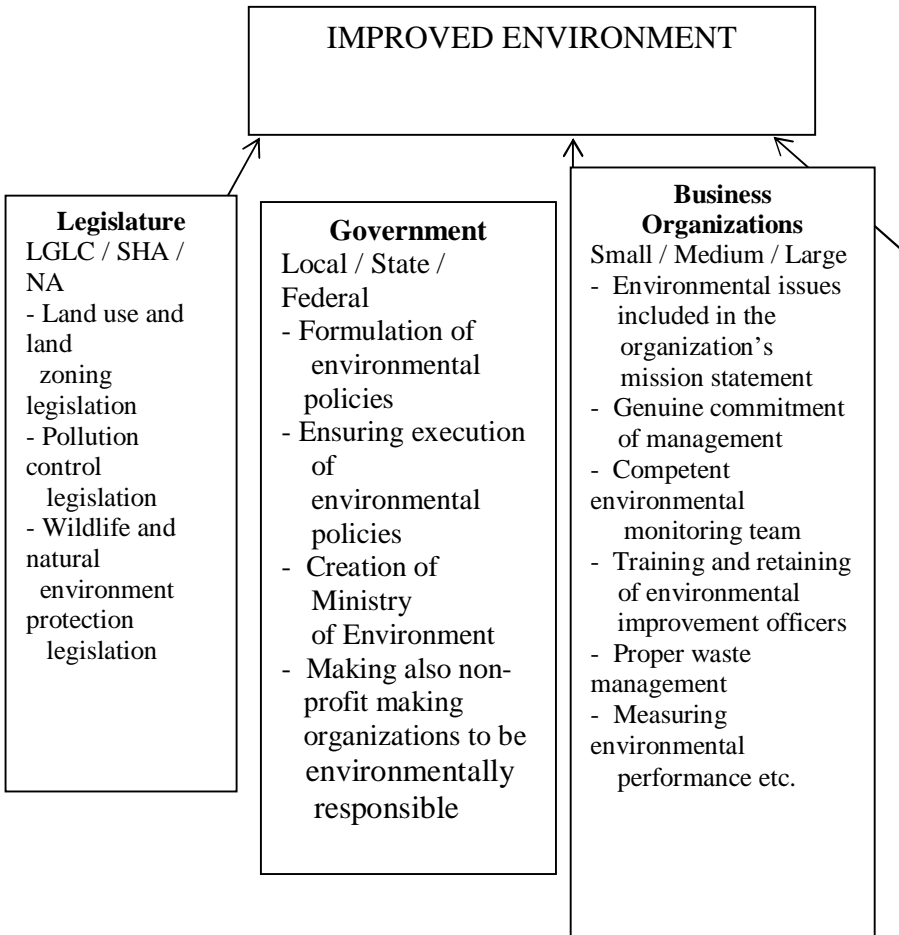
The major areas of legislation relevant to the environment are:

1. Land use and land zoning,
2. Pollution control,
3. Conservation and protection of wildlife and the natural environment.

The manner in which environmental legislations are interpreted and enforced in Nigeria is not encouraging. In most cases, the agencies that are supposed to enforce the laws are either weak or are engulfed in corruption practices which often paralyse their operations. Managers of business organizations must be keenly aware of the laws on the environment. It is essential for the relevant agencies too to enforce the laws to the letter.

The Coconut

Figure 1: Environmental Improvement Agents



Source: Developed by the Author

Note: LGLC – Local Government Legislative Council

SHA – State House of Assembly

NA –National Assembly comprising the Senate and House of Representatives

The three tiers of government are also involved in efforts to improve the environment. The different governments do make environmental policies and their agencies implement the policies. Nearly every State Government in Nigeria has the Ministry of Environment. In the Niger Delta, environmental challenges are handled by such government establishment.

It is high time the three tiers of government reviewed their existing policies on the environment. They need to come up with more practicable and relevant policies and should be genuinely committed to the policies' implementation.

Achieving Environmental Improvement in the Niger Delta of Nigeria- Joseph A. Akinniyi

Blair and Hitchcock (2001:10) note that “A business cannot ignore the environment ----- the environment is an asset which will enable the business to achieve greater commercial success.” Therefore, to improve the environment in which they are operating, business organizations, in general, need to be genuinely environment conscious. Of course, they need to consider and adopt the following approaches.

First, environmental improvement should be expressly stated in the mission statement of every organization. In other words, much emphasis should be placed on environmental improvement and sufficient financial and material resources should be committed to it.

Furthermore, performance feedback is necessary in environmental improvement. Performance feedback comes from an organization’s own performance. It is a backward looking process where organizations compare prior actual performance information with organizational goals (Akinyele and Olugbenga, January – March, 2008).

In assessing operational success, environmental damage should be made one of the criteria for measuring performance. To this end, any organisation that causes environmental degradation and could not provide a solution to it should consider itself a failure no matter how high its revenue is.

Also, every organization, whether big or small, should ensure that its management is committed to environmental improvement and should as well see that as a key element of corporate performance. The fact remains that whether or not an organization policy will succeed depends, to a large extent, on the inclination of the management team. It is the management team that allocates resources with which to implement the policy. So, if a particular policy does not receive the blessing of management, it may be frustrated by not releasing sufficient funds, personnel and durable materials Cole (2002). The non-challant attitude of many business organizations to environmental sanitation in Niger Delta may not be unconnected with this reason.

Successful monitoring, maintenance and improvement of the environment require the services of competent personnel, especially those individuals who have received adequate training and retraining in environmental health-related studies. To enable them work to the best of their abilities, such people need to be well remunerated and motivated. Also, a good information network that reveals environmental situations and inhabitants’ complaints on their environment deserves to be put in place. By the time an organization is able to communicate effectively with its environmental officers and people in the environment and is also able to react timely and appropriately to their complaints peace will reign supreme in that community.

Strategising for environmental improvement also demands that every organization, whether profit-oriented or non-profit oriented, should make necessary arrangement for proper waste management, recycling and reduced dependency on non-renewable resources. The objective here is to ensure that wastes resulting from used

The Coconut

products or resources are properly disposed of so as not to constitute a nuisance and health hazard to members of the public.

Conclusion

For business to flourish in any economy, intangible resources matter a lot. Otokiti (2004, p.3) notes that “resources include not only material things like land, forest, coal, machinery etc, but also intangible things like good health, knowledge, freedom, social harmony, technological capacity etc, because all these things have the attribute of utility”. Intangible resources can be incapacitated by unfavourable environmental conditions. It is, therefore, worth saying that the Federal as well as the oil producing State Governments need to invest fully in environmental improvement strategies in the Niger Delta.

To actualize the suggestion made above, the large, medium and small scale business organizations in the Niger Delta area should be fully mobilized, duly orientated and actively involved in the reparation process. Also, the Federal Ministry of Niger Delta, NDDC, the churches, mosques, and royal institutions in the area should create avenues for preaching of messages of peace, hope and restoration to the people in the area. The youths too should be encouraged to heed the advice of two female counsellors, Alaire Alaibe (of blessed memory) and Hilda Dokubo in Chukwurah (2008, p.81) that “book militancy and brain bullet should replace gun militancy”.

Recommendations

It has been established in this article that environmental degradation is a major cause of militancy in the Niger Delta. To curtail this menace and bring about environmental improvement in the area, the following recommendations are made.

1. The findings of this study reveal that business organizations in the Niger Delta have not fared well in the area of social responsibility. Therefore, each company exploring oil in the region should, as a matter of urgency, be mandated to establish “Environmental Improvement Department” for the purpose of genuinely tackling the problems of air, water and land pollution in the region. Each of the companies should be made to dedicate a certain percentage of its annual revenue, say 20 per cent, to environmental issues.
2. The nine states that constitute the Niger Delta should make environmental auditing a watchword. Environmental auditing is a means of assessing and monitoring continuous improvement in the environment. Its objective is to safeguard the environment and minimize the risks to human life. Towards this end, the environmental performance of business organizations in the region should be measured from time-to-time by the Ministry of Environment. Appropriate and timely sanctions should be imposed on offending organizations.
3. The small and medium scale business organizations in the territory should be persuaded to be socially responsible. The common impression that social responsibility is a task for only oil or large scale companies should be erased.

4. The Federal Ministry of Niger Delta, NDDC and the State Governments in that region should invest reasonably in erosion control. This is to preserve land for agro-business.
5. The Federal Government should be genuinely committed to its promise to develop the Niger Delta area. One of the reasons for the high degree of militancy in the region is that the inhabitants of the region generally feel that the Federal Government has been deceiving them and taking them for granted over the years. Take for example, as at June 2008, the outstanding funds which the Federal Government ought to have released to NDDC for developmental processes was over ₦300 billion (Agbo, 2008). Therefore, the advice is worth making that the government should release sufficient funds to improve the region's environmental condition and mitigate the effect of poverty in the area.
6. Although the NDDC has tried, to some extent, in the area of road construction, the government should give transportation a priority in the territory. There are some towns and settlements that are separated from the upland rain forest by the mangrove swamp and fresh water zones. Therefore, the government should initiate an expanded mass transit programme that will engender making available a large number of boats that will convey people, materials and farm produce to urban centres at affordable charges. Also, the NDDC's proposed railway network should be accorded due attention.
7. One way of lessening the effects of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta is to open up the region for business and tourism. This can be done by establishing business districts and developing local ports and deep sea ports in the region.
8. In view of the fact that environmental pollution has affected business operations negatively, especially agro-business, the State and Local governments in the region should assist small scale farmers to secure loan facilities. Towards this end, banks and micro-finance organizations in the territory should be mandated to give short-term loans to small scale entrepreneurs, under humane conditions.
9. To boost agro-business in the region, the Federal and Niger Delta States' Ministries of Agriculture as well as NDDC should pursue vigorously provision of agricultural implements, fertilizer and high-yield crops to farmers at highly subsidized rates.

The Coconut

References

- Agbo, A. (2008). Exodus, *TELL Magazine*, June 9, p.26.
- Akinyele, T & Olugbenga, F. (2008). The effects of rapid environmental change on competitive strategies, *MRL Journal* 1(2), 39-41.
- Blair, A. & Hitchcock D. (2001). *Environment and business*, London: Routledge Publishing Company.
- Chukwurah, H. (2008). Niger Delta-same talk, no action, *Daily Sun Newspaper*, May 29, p.81.
- Cole, G. A. (2002). *Management Theory and practice*, London: Harper Printers Limited.
- Jamali, D. & Mirshak, R. (2007). Corporate Social responsibility-theory and Practice in developing country context, *Journal of business ethics*, 7(1), 243-262.
- Nwachukwu, C.C. (1992). *Management-theory and practice*, Ibadan: Africana – FEP Publishers Limited.
- Offiebor, O. (2007). Endless violence, *The News Magazine*, July 16, p.28.
- Ogundele, K. (2007). Strategies for restoration of Moral health in Nigerian organizations – A Path to national development, *Management discoveries Journal*, 1(1), 35-38.
- Otokiti, O.S. (2004). *World resources and business*, Lagos: Pumark Nigeria Limited.
- Sherlekar, S. A. (2001). *Management value-oriented holistic approach*. Mumbai: Himalaya Publishing House.
- Wehrich, H. & Koontz, H. (2005). *Management- A global perspective*. New York: Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited.
- Welford, R. & Gouldson A. (1993). *Environmental management and business strategy*. London: Pitman Publishing.