

THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALS IN SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The paper examines the contributions *of* professionals (particularly town planners) to sustainable environmental development in the 21st century. In doing so, it attempts an explanation of who a professional is, and the meaning and rationale for sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper also highlights the advantages to be gained by nations and individuals from sustainable environmental development, but argues that unless nations and individuals adopt level-headed rationality in the exploitation of environmental resources, competitions by nations for political, economic, technological and strategic supremacy will pose far greater problems to implementation than financial incapability to subscribe to the call. Appropriately, the paper makes several policy recommendations, which highlight the important roles that the town planner- can play in the collective effort towards the achievement of sustainable environmental development in the Nigeria in the decades ahead.

Introduction

About one-and-a-half centuries ago, precisely around the 1850s, some scientists proclaimed the invention of the steam engine that was to transform the orientation and economic landscapes of Lancashire and much of Western Europe from the manual manufacture of clothes and textiles, to the more-sophisticated use of industrial machines, that brought increased productivity and, later, specialization of labour (Hall, 1975). It was least realized that this humble invention would trigger a revolution that was soon to engulf Europe and the whole wide world. Within a short spate of time, the revolution had caught up with the entire world resulting not only in the production of more and more sophisticated industrial looms for textiles, but also inventions in other areas such as transportation, mining, architecture, medicine and telecommunication, among others.

The end result of the revolution was that inventive knowledge and productive capacities flourished, and skills became greatly perfected and expanded, not only in renascent Europe, but also in other parts of the world. Knowledge became more systematized and competent, resulting in man's almost - complete dominion and control over the environmental factors that once impeded his development. As knowledge and competence increased, and more and more demands were placed on scientific inventions, commercial production and marketing of scientific endeavours soon attained technological height. Thus, science and technology came to be the two most important tools with which societies now exploit and degrade the environment on unprecedented scales.

No sooner was the steam engine invented, that a group of environmentalists raised an alarm about the 'new' ability of man to degrade the environment faster than was earlier experienced (Harvey and Hallct, 1977). This group published their first thesis alerting the world to an impending disaster from the wanton application of scientific knowledge to harness the resources of the environment. However, there were criticisms and counter-criticisms of their thesis, as the group was called various names ranging from iconoclasts to doomsday prophets. With time, these environmentalists were cowed into submission, until the few that remained became rather impersistent, or had their voices drowned amidst the louder and more populous calls by protagonists of more and more exploitation of the environment or both.

With the present state of our knowledge and experience about man-environment relationships, however, we are now in a position to judge whether these earlier environmentalists should rightly be called humane futurists, iconoclasts, or doomsday prophets.

On a yearly basis, statistics are being returned from national resource observatories, alerting the world to the dwindling fate of natural resources, which has resulted from rising expectations and pressures on earth's limited resources, in global terms. The greatest problem in the decades ahead will be how to stretch the meager resources to match the increasing demands from this generation and the next.

In the next 30 years, there will be 2 or 3 billion more people on the planet; sadly, majority of the population is located in the developing nations (Sanio, 1998). It becomes imperative for nations,

therefore, to evolve professional, administrative, organizational, scientific and technological strategies that will ensure the sustenance of the meager resources of the environment in local, regional and global terms. The recent call for sustainable environmental development is an open admission that growth is inevitable and necessary, but left unattended to, it will wreak havoc on our environment and civilization. "We", definitely, "must seek to bring fair reason into the process" (Pierce, 1998:20). This is the hallmark of the call for sustainable environmental development in the different countries of the world today.

The Meaning of Sustainable Development

The literary meaning of the verb "sustain", implies to carry the weight of, to hold or keep from falling especially for a prolonged period". The same word also means "support" (Hornby, 1984). The adjective, "sustainable" could therefore be said to mean a thing having the tendency to carry, hold up, keep or support, for a long time, because of its possession of an inherent ability, capacity or tendency, to do so.

Applied to environmental development initiatives, sustainable development could be explained "as the ability of the present generation to meet their own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UNDP, 1999,8; Tade Akin-Aina, 1992,2; Welford and Gouldson, 1994, 4). Thus, sustainable development is an attitude towards the environment that preaches responsible behaviour while, at the same time, saddling individuals* groups, societies, NGOs and nations with accountability, stewardship and liability, towards succeeding generations, for the proper management of the environment, or lack of it. Sustainable environmental development adopts the view that resources are, in fact adequate for our needs if and only if, we adopt planned, programmed, rational and enlightened approach towards their use.

Who is a Professional?

All over the world, a professional is usually associated with certain identifiable characteristics, the most basic being his possession of esoteric knowledge, and an inherent ability to; give competent and unbiased advice to the client, usually a layman (Marcuse, 1976). Other characteristics of the professional include enlisting under the guild system, guild loyalty, transparency, accountability and operating under rigid rules and procedures that are parceled up in the ethical codes and conducts of practice.

Above all, professionalism involves a credentialing process, usually attested to by the possession by the professional of the relevant degree, diploma or certificate awarded by recognized and competent institutions. It is almost impossible for anybody to claim to be in possession of an expert knowledge without having duly undergone a period of training accredited to be of reasonable duration and complexity (Marcuse, 1976; Akinyoyenu, 1998a).

In the light of the above, it seems justifiable that professionals be called upon to adduce solutions to today's and other future problems arising from the wanton exploitation of environmental resources, (and to jointly with the stakeholders), work out modalities by which our earth's limited environmental resources could be effectively managed to achieve sustainable development for this and succeeding generations.

The Recent Call for Sustainable Development and Rationale

It seems rather paradoxical that the nations at the forefront of technological development should be (he first to sound an alarm about the dwindling fate of earth's resources, and the need to adopt environment-friendly, attitudes and approaches towards them. At present, more than 80% of world's exploitation and pollution are traceable to the developed countries. There is the inherent ability for them to be accountable for even more, judging by the level of technology and finances at their disposal. But the false notions of more and more development and the infiniteness of environmental resources, are forcing countries such as America, Britain, Germany etc., to make a u-turn in preference for more environmentally - sustainable development, based on a philosophy of "smart-growth".

The first settlers of America viewed the country as a wilderness that lay to be conquered. Consequently, migrants moved in and exploited with the belief that the country was a land of infinite size and unlimited resources (Pierce, 1998). This primordial view has, however, since changed: America can now ill-afford her resources to be stowed away carelessly.

The recent call for sustainable environmental development seems to have hinged on these

observations:

- i. An awareness that resources are finite, contrary to an earlier belief of resources inexhaustibility;
- ii. That the climatic changes being reported all over the world have been researched to have been caused by the use and misuse of the environment;
- iii. That the existence of man centres on the continued availability, supply and the effective management of the resources;
- iv. That today's technology has been the most potent tool with which man degrades the environment, hence the need to adopt environment-friendly initiatives towards it;
- v. That man is innately greedy and irrational, hence the need to imbue him with sound moral codes that will ensure responsible behaviour towards the environment; and
- vi. That man owes it a duty to ensure that the world continues to thrive in a stress-free condition, providing equal opportunities for this and other generations yet unborn.

In spite of these observations and the series of world conferences so far convened to address the problem, environmental insustainability, still persists. Korten (1996), has advanced that the crises between the money and the living worlds are responsible for today's unsustainable environment due, in the main, to the greater emphasis on the imperatives of money and profit, over the imperatives of health and safety of society as governed by "the laws of nature".

Korten's analysis represents a new perspective for understanding and constructing future scenarios for sustainable development, especially about the need to:

- i. Overcome all "institutional barriers to providing healthy and sustainable living spaces for a growing world population¹;
- ii. Make more fundamental changes in our approaches to solving today's problems, since "the twentieth century solutions are no longer appropriate to our current historical circumstances¹¹; and the need to
- iii. Meet human needs through "appropriate local actions".

Surprisingly, nations and individuals are now knee-deep in the syndrome occasioned by the constant, corporate philosophical logic of material acquisition which has sadly but successfully, replaced primordial moral and ethical values about the environment and healthful living. The sad consequences of the growth process are seldom considered, but only the increases recorded in gross domestic product, corporate taxes and (the general level of profits and returns on investment in the cities that matter. These represent part of the indicators of progress that the developed (over consumer) developing (sustainer) and underdeveloped (poor) societies hanker after, to the detriment of their health and their environments. It is therefore appropriate for Nigeria to align with other nations in charting and implementing the global plan of action for the achievement of sustainable development in the country.

Advantages of Sustainable Environmental Development to Nations and Individuals

There is a felt need for societies to move away from the previous concept of development that emphasized place - prosperity rather than peoples - prosperity. Embracing the call for sustainable development implies an awareness that the present development concept is no longer relevant, and that a better alternative exists that will ameliorate the problem. The advantages to be gained by nations and individuals imbibing the sustainable development approach include: (i) Prevention and amelioration of hazardous methods of exploitation, manufacturing, storage and disposal, among others;

- (ii) The prolongation of the life of resources and the saving of those on the verge of extinction.
- (iii) The minimization and prevention of wastes arising from careless or over ambitious exploitation;
- (iv) The regularity and continued availability of resources;
- (v) The achievement of environmental comfort arising from the minimization of stresses and fluctuations in the energy flow patterns; and (vi) Giving enhancement to the value of resources.

The Challenges of Sustainable Environmental Development at the Individual, National Regional and Global Levels.

Undeniably, sustainable environmental development places certain philosophic, ideological, economic and strategic responsibilities and burdens on individuals and nations alike. At the individual level, a change in attitudes and patterns of consumption will go a long way to re-define the current philosophy of mass - consumption, to which the developed countries are accustomed. It has been researched and concluded that many goods and services to which sizeable funds of the developed economies are committed are not, in actual fact, required Korten (1996). Therefore, a change in the production - consumption relations will be beneficial to sustainable development at individual and national scales, although with some painful implications for the producers and the consumers.

The ideological perspective of sustainable environmental development concern the elimination of dominance which, hitherto had produced politico-economic rivalries between the West and the East blocs, and the differential ownership patterns of the means of production in these societies. The underlying rivalry between the blocs had been responsible for the inordinate demands for and stockpiling of, vast quantities of environmental resources imported from the developing countries.

On the other hand, the economic implications of the sustainable development call include the millions of naira, cedis or dinars that will be lost (albeit saved), from the stoppage of illegal exploitation, mining and exportation of developing countries' resources. This will definitely reduce, the volume of profit from the manufactured goods exported to the developing by the developed countries.

The strategic challenges of subscribing to the call for sustainable environmental development could be seen in the reduction of strategic arms that destroy man and his environment. The only disadvantage this has is that nations which truly limit their strategic arms, cannot expect to deploy them for emergencies. This, however, is the surest way to the maintenances of peace and environmental sustainability.

But the questions remain:

1. Are nations and individuals actually prepared to tread the sustainable environmental development path?
2. If yes, what are the alternative development strategies and incentives for doing so?
3. Since 'progress'⁷ in the money world is tantamount to progress in the living world (i.e. increase in production, taxes, corporate profits and competitions), how can we re-define these indicators to reflect our changed philosophy and outlook of development?
4. Since nations often strive for progress, will a reduction in corporate profits, market competition, and GDP not tantamount to a stoppage of growth?
5. How can we persuade the over consumer - societies to slow down on their consumption of vast quantities of resources? Or how can we persuade the sustainer - societies to wait for the "poor" countries of the world, etc? These and other questions form part of the strategic dilemmas to be resolved by countries waiting to fully walk the path of sustainable environmental development in the decades ahead.

As far as Nigeria is concerned, however, implementing the global plan of action on sustainable development, along with some other local agendas, appears to be the surest way to sustainable development of her environment. While the challenges involved are enormous, Nigeria's attitude to sustainable environmental development should center on the development of local initiatives and the adaptation of imported technology to the existing socio-cultural conditions.

This should not be misunderstood as calling for a stoppage or halt to development, (for it seems paradoxical that Nigeria should be confronted with calls for sustainable environmental development at this crucial stage of her quest for development), but that the country does not need to

replicate hook, line and sinker, the approaches of the developed West; the country needs to develop technologically along her own frameworks for betterment of the society.

As a country on the vanguard of development, the following issues provide possible challenges for which local solutions ought to be anticipated:

1. Imagine that the Nigerian government plans to expand its productive capacities by as much as 20% in manufacturing, construction, agriculture, transportation, etc. The country needs to

- prepare against the implications of these on housing demand, land, urbanization, etc.
2. The industries, schools, houses, roads, hospitals and cities that must be built must be agglomerated in space, what are the implications for wastes, traffic hold-ups, crowding, noise, urban violence, crimes, traffic accidents, urban poverty, population migration and increases?
 3. What are the implications of all these activities on global warming and climate change? What are the existing mitigating measures?
 4. What are the existing capacities (institutional, financial personnel, administrative, etc.), for coping with the increases? And what potentials exist for the building of local capacities to accommodate future resources demands? These and other issues pose life-long challenges for the country to utilize professional expertise in charting viable courses of action for the sustainable development of her environmental resources. In fact, a whole range of other civic engagements are needed in creating healthful, humane and just environments in which people can live, work and play in the country.

The Role of Professionals in Sustainable Environmental Development

There are a thousand and one professionals contributing knowledge and expertise towards the upkeep of man in the environment. These vary from the contributions of professionals reputed for creating edifices and other tangible artifacts in the environment (the engineers, architects, etc) to those of the researcher and scientists working quietly in the laboratories, and whose contributions, are evidenced more by volumes of documented reports, that require further refinements and transformations before they become useful. Luckily, however, the town planner belongs to both groups.

The town planner's role in sustainable environmental development cannot be over emphasized. As the manager of the environment, the town planner's role becomes very central because most human activities bear spatial implication that must ultimately come to rest on land. By definition, the town planner is one who possesses the professional training to bring arrangement and order on to the environment and who, by this action, enhances the beauty and convenience of the environment, (Kecble, 1969). In fact, Glasson (1978), defines planning as a sequence of actions which are designed to solve problems in future. Consequently, the futuristic perspective of planning places it on a comfortable pedestal to comment on the 21st century and beyond, vis-a-vis other professionals.

Below are some of the anticipated contributions of town planners to sustainable environmental development. But it needs to be qualified that while some of these suggestions could be achieved singly through the instrumentality of planning, a lot will require that the political, economic and institutional resources of government be deployed to achieve them. As we are all aware, the technical - advisory roles planners play only allow them to playwright without acting the scripts. Ultimately, the planner's advice may or may not be taken, as implementation depends on the psychology of his political master.

1. The town planner's first step towards sustainable environmental development is his contribution towards capacity building, i.e., the training and enhancement of the stakeholders to make them more willing and productive in the management of the environment (UNDP, 1999). As ever, town planners should be ready, more than ever before, to be enlisted in the league of professionals training and retraining personnel in the environment. This will be done through the regular revisions of curricula of planning institutions to accommodate changing trends.
2. The town planners, sustainable development and development control: There are various uses of land that require planning and monitoring, and approval. Town planners must be prepared more than ever before to ensure that illegal and incompatible uses are discouraged. Equally, illegal conversion or change of use must be regularly monitored and sanctioned. However,

this can only be effective if planners charged with the responsibility of demolishing illegal and incompatible uses are given the initiative and legal backing to dismantle such.

3. Town planners and EIA: As society's soft-cops, the only option left for the town planner is to seek rather subtle ways to enthrone and control the environment, through the granting of development permits to projects with desirable impacts on the

environment, while disapproving those with deleterious repercussions, either in the short or long run Akinyoyenu (1998b). In Nigeria, FEPA and SEPA have come to be described as "toothless bulldogs" on account of their inability to sanction erring companies polluting the environment. This, too, has to be changed.

4. Planners and the social audit of companies: One of the many ways by which town planners could contribute to sustainable environmental development is by making it mandatory for companies to present the social accounts of their operations in the environment. This will enforce a new consumerism on prospective companies and compel them to invest some fraction of their profit towards the amelioration of the nuisances they generate to the environment (Lipsey, 1979). Also, town planners could ensure that the latest environment-friendly techniques and technical equipment guaranteeing minimum pollution are installed.
5. Mapping of the indicators of development: One of the major ways by which town planners could be useful to sustainable environmental development is by mapping of indicators that will inform policy decisions. "Indicators are variables that measure particular real-world phenomena over time. Because of their ability to clarify and synthesize problems and complex issues in a few numbers they have become an increasingly common component of city management around the world" (Auclair, 1998). In 1998, the UNCHS developed over 40 such key city indicators that were to form the Global Urban Indicators database, to provide the basis for the Istanbul Habitat Agenda. Since the city remains one of the greatest visible expressions of our civilization, the services of town planners become highly invaluable in identifying and mapping such indicators for policy purposes.
6. Ensuring that landscape and amelioration plans accompany all development proposals: The present practice whereby development proposals are approved solely on the presentation of working drawings and accompanying site analysis reports should be extended to include the presentation of landscape and ameliorative plans. Landscape plans will show how a proposal will aesthetically and functionally impact the environment while the ameliorative plans will show preliminary and secondary measures that will be taken to reduce the existence of unplanned for, or unintended, effects of intended developments.
7. Seminars and workshops on environmental education: Town planners should conduct their businesses less within the office and classroom environments, and move to the consumers of planning services on the field. Seminars, workshops and conferences should be given on the responsibility of people towards the environment, and the necessity to adopt responsible behaviour towards exploitation. Also, planning extension services should be embarked upon to disseminate the latest concepts and methods about responsible resource exploitation. Planning education will have to be devolved to the lowest tiers of education in this country, where lessons on such issues as bush burning, erosion control, among others, can be imbibed at the earliest stages. Equally the training and re-training of professional planners are required to keep practitioners abreast of current method of practice, and about the most recent outlook on planning and allied issues in global terms.
8. The need for an Office of Technology Assessment: There is the need to establish an office of technology assessment in the country where decisions on technological choices are made, sorted, quarantined and adapted before finally being transferred. Town planners working here would liaise with other professionals to advise on appropriate technological choices that will suit our environmental set-up.
9. Planners and citizens participation: All over the world, there is more and more democratic expression for planning activities to be conducted with the people. This indicates that planning benefits more and becomes more successful when it is conducted in the open. As I had argued earlier, planning can not afford to wear a garb of exclusionism either of other professionals, or of the consumers of planning services (Akinyoyenu, 1998c). The more the

people become aware of planning activities, the more they become conscious about when to disapprove of development proposals that have negative repercussions on their environments.

10. Encouraging vertical developments where surface, subsurface and structural characteristics of land permit: Town planners should, through their instrument of zoning, encourage vertical developments where engineering and their factors permit, to reduce the vast consumption of

land, accommodate more people in residential units, and improve urban aesthetics and diversity. The monotony created by bungalows their tendency to consume large tracts of land and encourage urban sprawl, have been criticized by Biles (1997) for generating dull, monotonous and characterless subdivisions in the landscape.

11. Land mapping: To date, Nigeria has no reliable statistics on how much of its lands' is vacant or under active cultivation, or construction. There is the need for land accountancy in the country to quantify the various implications of the different land uses in the country.

Sustainable Development and Moral Responsibility of Nations and Individuals

The arguments advanced so far in favour of sustainable environmental development have been cast against the background of the popular economic dictum, *Ceteris paribus*. However, an observation of real world behaviour of nations and individuals only affirm the contrary: nations and individuals often act in the exact opposite of what they preach. This being the case, therefore, sustainable environmental development becomes intricately bound with the moral values of nations and individuals.

In fact, Mazrui's (1970) exposition of the diplomatic behaviour of nation-states shows that national interest and pride appear to be the underlying factors determining the political, economic and strategic relations among nations. Consequently, a nation acts and relates with others in its best interest, on the basis of the values and principles that are adjudged to be consistent with its political, ideological, economic and strategic aspirations.

Imagine that the U.S. President has to physically fight in a war encounter with another rival nation. Imagine also that he was captured while leading a detachment of the U.S. marine on an onslaught against the enemy forces. America would adopt every means, (including unsustainable means), to save the life of her president from the captor! Equally, the Israeli philosophy of war places (the nation above all other considerations. Part of her philosophy, as emphasized in her encounter with the Ugandan armed forces in '90 MINUTES AT ENTEBBE", was the non-surrender of any of the Israeli forces to the executioner, even if it required pulling down the temple of humanity!

The underlying value in these examples is the national prestige or pride that is at stake, which nations try to defend at all cost. This indicates how nations often act in defiance of environmental sustainability, to defend their territorial pride, integrity and security. In spite of the several treaties on the limitation of strategic arms, (SALT I and II), nations are still openly indigent to follow the call for non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and such other ballistic missiles.

Regrettably, however, the tempos of wars today often produce disastrous consequences for man and the environment. Unless nations and individuals become morally inclined to faithfully heed the call, the doctrine becomes a pipe dream in the inordinate and wanton destruction of man and the environment. Since issues of accountability, responsibility and stewardship are intricately bound to define intergenerational equity in the use and management of the resources of the environment, nations and individuals should endeavour to always act in the best interest of man in the environment. Man should be aware of the ultimate limits to growth otherwise he will, like a malignant cancer, destroy himself and the environment, if his use and misuse of it are not controlled.

Conclusion

The paper examined a number of issues related to sustainable environmental development in Nigeria and beyond. It also attempts an explanation of who a professional is, and what sustainable development stands for. The paper traced the evolution of today's technological development from the industrial revolution era, arguing that this was the humble genesis of the scientific ability with which man now exploits and degrades the environment today.

The paper laments the series of environmental crises arising from the world's corporate philosophy of profit and material acquisition, that has succeeded in supplanting the moral imperatives of a healthful, livable world, and canvasses a re-enthronement of the rights of man over the imperatives of money, in order for him to live in a stress-free world. This connotes a new civic engagement for citizens in the cities

While enumerating the benefits of sustainable environmental development to Nigeria, and the roles of the town planners in bringing these about, the paper argues that nations and individuals must adopt responsible moral codes and level-headed rationality so that the benefits of sustainable development will not be stifled by inordinate selfishness and competitions among nations and individuals.

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