

# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT IN ACHIEVING THE SEVEN POINT AGENDA

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## **Abstract**

The paper highlighted various developmental plans of the past governments and focused on the seven (7) point agenda as the present government's development plan. It discussed the imperativeness of environmental education in achieving the agenda, highlighting its objectives and how it can help in the realization of the agenda. The agenda, which consist of Power, Transport, Food security, Human capital development, Land tenure changes, and Home ownership, were each discussed in relation to the environment and how environmental education can further enhance their achievement. In the end, recommendations were made based on the stated issues with the hope that government may consider them in order to further facilitate the achievement or realization of the agenda.

## **Introduction**

Peale (2008) Stated that "if you fail to plan, then you have planned to fail". He stated this to stress the importance of planning to achieve success in any field of endeavor. Governments as well as individuals make all sorts of plans that will guide their focus in their effort to achieve success. Nigeria as a nation have had various types of development plans for example the vision 2010 of General Sani Abacha, the 5 year rolling plans of Babangida and now vision 2020. President Yar adua on his part, on assumption of office on the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2007, articulated the seven (7) point agenda to be the focus of his Government within the context of vision 2020. They were articulated based on their perceived criticality to development, stability and growth of the Nigerian Nation and economy. It is therefore hoped that improvement through investment in these sectors will lay the bedrock necessary for micro and macro economic development that will subsequently lead to the growth of the Nigerian economy. These seven identified sectors as stated by the Federal Ministry of information (2008) include Power, Transport, Food security, Human capital Development, Land Tenure changes and home ownership, National security and intelligence, and Wealth creation. Investment in these sectors is first of all hoped to reverse the impoverishment trend that have placed Nigeria among the malnourished and underfed Nations (Kwajaffa, 2010 ) and improve the lot of the common man especially now that estimates have put the poverty level of Nigeria at 56% compared to the 44% poverty estimate for the sub-Saharan Africa, rating us among the poorest of the poor nations (New Nigeria News pape, 2007)

The diverseness of the economy and the relative scarce resources to go round was the reason why the government through strategic importance preference scale, chose these seven sectors to act as development impetus that will revive, regenerate and initiate growth in the economy. It does not however mean that other sectors will be neglected or become the alternatives forgone but rather they serve as selected critical sectors for investing investable resources with the other sectors receiving their due dividend.

Financial investment alone however cannot bring success to the seven point agenda. The human capital of the nation must also be mobilized and re-oriented to work towards attaining the goals of the seven point agenda. This is where education and most especially Environmental education becomes imperative as indeed, all other sectors that may have bearing to the spirit of the agenda.

Environment as defined by the Webster college dictionary is the aggregate of all the external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of an organism. It is however more meaningful in this context to conceive the environment as the resource base available for human exploitation and harnessing for the purpose of satisfying his needs and aspirations. Though as rightly stated by Dausereau (1966) in his first ecological law ( the law of in-optimum) " no specie encounters

in any given habitat the optimum condition for all its functions”, man, out of necessity tends to modify his environment (through exploitation) in order to meet his needs and desires. As necessary as the resource exploitation and modifications is to his economic growth, well being and development, unregulated use of the environmental resources can result into unpleasant consequences. Knowing how to optimally exploit and manage the environmental resources as is necessary for the achievement of the seven point agenda therefore, needs environmental education. As stated by Sada( 1988), environmental standard (and education) have become the obligation of every government because mans uncontrolled use of the environment has not only been wasteful but also threatening to his (own) life. The main objective of environmental protection standard (and education) is (therefore) to protect human health and enhance social justice as well as the quality of life, which invariably is the spirit behind the seven point agenda.

### **Environmental Education**

Dawha and Hassan (2010) defined environmental education as a behavior modification that combines all the processes and activities that seek to develop a sense of value, insight, awareness, knowledge, skills and attitude that enable the educant to make an informed responses to all individual and social use of the environment and its resources and create in individuals the desire to promote the beauty of the total environment in a positive ecological context. Ezeudu (1988) on his part, perceived that to the layman, environmental education means educating the people on way of either checking the menace of the environment or improving the environment of man to ensure mans continuous existence.

The relevance of environmental education in achieving the seven point agenda can clearly be seen through its objectives as stated by UNESCO, cited in Kelly (1984) and they include:

1. To foster clear awareness of and concern about economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas.
2. To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, value, attitude, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment.
3. Create new pattern of behavior in individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment.

No doubt, the seven point agenda is an economic development agenda, however, environmental education is paramount for its meaningful realization because it ensures balanced and optimum resource exploitation thereby, safeguarding the Nigerian environment within which these development activities will take place and ensure equity in redistribution of dividend of environmental resources exploited. Environmental education also have direct bearing to the realization of some of the points on the agenda for example, Land reform and food security. Thus, it is the objective of this paper to highlight the ways and means where environmental education may be instrumental to realizing the seven point agenda of the president.

### **Environmental Education and Food Security**

Security as defined by Encarta dictionary is freedom from worries of loss; the assurance that something of value will not be taken away. Food security therefore means the assurance that food supply will not run out. In other words, it is the freedom from worries or a sense of confidence that a nations food supply will not run out within an expected time. Food security became the concern of Nigerians because it has been identified as one of the must vulnerable phenomenon especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Statistics have shown that 31% (203 million) people are classified as being underfed or malnourished (Kwajaffa, 2010) This would not have been the concern of Nigeria in the 1960s when agricultural products was the leading foreign exchange earner contributing up to 60% of Nigeria’s export earnings (NISSER, 1992) However, today the situation has changed and oil has become the jugular vein of our economy and contributions of agriculture to our GDP continued to decline, for example from 64% in 1980, it declined to 40% in 1989.( MAMSER, 1997).

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The declaration by the Federal Government that the food storage capacity of the Nation can last 15 million people for one month only and 140 million people for only 3 days if there should be an emergency was worrisome. As such, the Government adopted food security as a priority to guarantee food supply for the nation through increased storage capacity but most of all by increasing yield and production hopefully up to 5 to 10 folds. Per annum. ( presidency 2007). This may not be impossible following the Indonesian example. They were able to reduce food insecurity from 50% to 14% over a period of 10 years (New Nigeria news paper 2007)

The greatest factor threatening our food security however is not our inability to store much of the produced food but the production its self. Climatic factors especially rainfall is a big determinant of our capacity to produce food. This is because our capacity to irrigate our needed food is not fully being exploited. Lake Chad and the Niger/Benue basins can produce enough food for Nigerians if the opportunities they offer can best be utilized. However, this has not been the case hence, the looming food insecurity. Natural calamities like draught, desertification, soil erosion and the unpredictable whether pattern are also among what is threatening the security of our food supply. These calamities are however triggered by man's activities mostly due to ignorance and ill-informed minds where environmental resources are continually being degraded without qualms even by the people who should know the consequences of such actions. This practices if not checked will inevitably plunge Nigeria in to food crises due to the fact that they will render the environment unproductive and lower its carrying capacity as such, environmental education for protection and preservation of the ecosystem is an emergency requirement if Nigeria is to truly emerge and avert the looming food crises. Failure to educate the populace on the need to preserve the environment will mean allowing the degradation and deforestation of our environment which as well known, will lead to desertification especially in the arid (200 – 250 mm annual rainfall) and the semi arid (250 – 280 mm of rainfall) regions. Estimates have shown that Nigeria have already lost 351,000. sq km to the desert representing 38% of its total landmass and more than 30 million people live under the threat of desertification (Ayuba, 2005) Thambyaphillay (1982,1991) estimated that Nigeria is loosing 0.6 – 35 km per year to the desert. This scenario if allowed to continue unchecked, will definitely lead to food crises in Nigeria because as Ayuba (2008) puts it, it will damage the resilience of biophysical environment which is the ability of the environment to withstand stress and prevent quick recovery. Thus, the quest for food security in Nigeria must involve environmental education through mass awareness campaign to stop the practices that are detrimental to the productive and regenerative capacity of the environment.

According to Ayuba (2005), one way of improving food security of the Nation is by accomplishing a second green revolution. According to him, the first green revolution helped food production keep pace with population growth but because population growth have continued, and as the world population moves towards 8 billion people, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) estimated that 2 billion of these people lack food security and Nigeria is one of them (FAO 1995, 1996). As such, Nigeria will benefit much if she adapt the recommendation of the world food summit held in Rome 1996 as cited by Ayuba (2005) which include:

- a. Improving yields on marginal lands
- b. Expanding aquaculture especially fish farming.
- c. Rediscovering forgotten foods. That is re-cultivating food crops that modern agriculture has neglected.
- d. Increasing yield by adopting new approaches to crop production methods and pest control
- e. And empowering women farmers because women are estimated to cultivate about 80 – 90% of foods consumed in many developing countries (FAO 1990, Power, 1992)

Understanding the dynamics of the environment in order to manage and increase food production through environmental education is therefore necessary thus, achieving the food security item of the agenda requires environmental education to succeed as hoped.

### **Environmental Education and Land Tenure**

Land tenure refers to the condition under which a piece of land is acquired for ownership and used in a community (Dawha, 2008). The necessity for reform in this sector can clearly be seen when one considers the excessive fragmentation among dependents of a dead relative to the extent that Udo (1988) estimated that farmers sometimes hold as small as 0.5 acre of land for production in which case, the sizes of the land do not encourage mechanization. Mabogunje (1985) however advocated the inculcation of such feeling of trust in which people hold these lands as custodians of family heritage, he said it will do well if Nigerians can extend such feeling to our territorial land of heritage. To address problems associated with availability of land for ownership either to build houses or for cultivation, Nigeria in 1978 confiscated all lands and gave the Government power to allocate any land to any individual or groups on lease hold status (Land use Degree, 1978). The main purpose of the degree was as stated by Ibuzurike (1980), to make land for development available promptly to all who are willing, ready and able to use it for all purposes in the interest of the economy.

Scholars like Anaso (1981) however criticized the degree for its encouragement to monoculture and the consequent heavy dependant on chemical fertilizers and pesticides which are detrimental to the wellbeing of the ecosystem. Putting into considerations all these concerns requires a good environmental knowledge as such, land reform in Nigeria needs proper balancing based on cost – benefit analysis that can only be adequately carried out by the environmentalist. The inability to effect and enforce such reforms in Nigeria is the reason why we have ethnic clashes between the so-called indigenes and settlers in various parts of the country thus, a reform as such is timely.

### **Human Capital Development**

The most important resource of any nation is its population. In terms of investment, finance and man power are critical to the development of any economy. Investing in human development therefore helps in training the population and equipping them with necessary skills and technical know-how that will enable them to exploit and utilize other factors of production to initiate and sustain economic growth. As important as such exploitation of the environmental resources is, environmental education must be pursued vigorously in order to educate and create a community of environmentalist and ensure availability of successor generations of environmentalist who will work, train and continue to sensitize the public on environmental issues.

Unfortunately, Nigerian school curriculum have hitherto neglected such need. Scholars like Ezeudu (1997) and Mongunu (1997) have pointed out this need and have even demonstrated the needed strategy for its implementation. Their cries have however refused to yield result while countries like the United States of America starts giving environmental management skills to their younger ones from primary school. It will therefore be in our best interest to follow such examples in the implementation of the seven point agenda to ensure the development of environmentally friendly economy.

### **Power and Environmental Education**

If there is any aspect of the seven point agenda that requires the input of the environmentalist for its proper development, it is the power sector. In most of the developed nations, methods of power generation that utilizes coal which emits tones of green house gasses or nuclear energy which have devastating environmental consequences when mismanaged have become a course of concern to all governments of the world.

In Nigeria, the generation and method of transmission of power need to be reconsidered as government repositions her resources to invest in the sector. For example, power lines seem to have apathy for vegetation along the main roads hence where ever power line pass, trees along the roads are sacrificed unnecessarily. When such happens where the vegetation is scanty as in the semi arid areas, it does not only damage the environment but also destroys the beauty of such environment. As such, concern must be raised and alternative transmission method like underground or rubber coated lines should be advocated instead of sacrificing vegetation.

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Should Nigeria consider other sources of power like the nuclear option being advocated by some quarters, environmentalists have to be engaged to seriously consider the environmental consequences of such project in the interest of the well being of all Nigerians. The environmentalists however have resources they always advocate which are the renewable energy resources like the solar energy, wind and hydroelectricity generation. Nigeria has tried in hydro-electric generation but solar and wind power are still relatively untouched. It will therefore serve Nigeria well if she can invest in these alternative power sources which are more than abundant. The environmentalists who have such resource knowledge should be enlisted alongside the technicians who have the technical know-how to carry out cost benefit analysis of investing in such ventures for better results.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Environmental education in a broader sense helps in many ways towards the realization of the seven point agenda directly and indirectly hence it is an indispensable program that should be carried along for a successful realization of the agenda.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the facts stated in this proceedings, the realization of the seven point agenda will be easier if the government implements the following recommendations.

1. Environmental education should be taught or be an indispensable part of the curriculum of all schools at all levels of education in Nigeria as in the developed countries.
2. Government should also embark on public enlightenment to sensitize the populace and train them to acquire skills that will enable them to manage their environmental resources.
3. Government should provide assistance and teach farmers better methods of food production encouraging scholars to research on forgotten foods (traditional food crops) that are easily accepted by the vast majority of our rural settlers.

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