

VEGETATION CRISIS: A THREAT TO SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Nchekwube M. Okafor

Abstract

Vegetation crisis is a situation of vegetation destruction in all ramifications by man for self-interest and economic development. The development, being the overall man's action, which is dependent upon the outcome of man's effort to deal with his natural environment. The major cause of vegetation crisis is as a result of little permanent benefits that are not in the interest of sustained economic development. Suggestions made to curb vegetation crisis are possible through preservation and conservation management. Effective use and management of plants through preservation and conservation method to ensure availability of plant for sustained economy. The paper discussed the causes and the impacts of vegetation crisis on sustainable economic development. It also gave suggestions to protect vegetation for a sustainable economic development of the country.

Introduction

Vegetation resource is an enriched gift man acquired freely from nature. It refers to plant kingdom, which comprises all plant communities in the environment. In most habitats where life exists, the environment is incomplete without plant communities because plants are measures of survival. Man earns his living from plants. Economically and commercially, plants are source of food, revenue, souvenir and trade items. Besides providing shelter and recreational values, it is educationally important as a field for scientific research and tourism. It has high aesthetic values in terms of parks, sanctuaries, botanical gardens, game reserves, arboretum etc. Medicinally, it serves as drug bank and library for drug production. Vegetation resource is an energy-based resource. In fact the earliest known fuel used by man came from the forest.

Man has gone a long way in using vegetative resource within his reach to restructure his environment and develop himself, economically. Vegetation not equally and uniformly distributed but remains the means of acquiring a progressive economic goals and growth. Today man has shown capacity for independently increasing his capabilities or capacity to live a more satisfactory life through exploitation of natural vegetation or resources of nature as every nation independently noted earlier the time of the extension of man's control over his environment. Economic development, engages man with a task of survival by meeting fundamental material needs. According to Jhingan (2003), human capacities are related to economic capabilities as both are concerned with human well being. No society has been able to sustain the well being of its people without economic growth. So, economic growth is essential for human development. Equally, human development is important because it is healthy and educated people that contribute to economic growth through productive employment and increase in income. Obviously, economic growth is a means to an end has human development as the end. Ofuebe (2003), indicated that sustainable development is meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generation. Here, economic sustainable means "keep going" and a well man powers development without sustainable economic-development is a waste.

Notably, the minimum condition for economic development to be sustainable is based on requirement that the natural capital stock should not decrease overtime. In that case, the stock of natural resources and environmental quality should not be altered. Moreover, sustainability has nothing to do with depreciation of the natural stock. Thus, if needs are to be met on a sustainable basis the vegetative resource bases must be preserved, conserved and enhanced.

With man's involvement in activities to deal with his environment, vegetative resource is decreasing at an alarming rate. Actually, there is no calculated quantity but what is obvious, the vegetation is shrinking fast, Awake (2003), in the same sense of exploitation Rodney (1982), reported how developed nations underdeveloped (he underdeveloped and developing nations. " It is an environmental problem affecting more than an aspect of our lives Awake (1999). The questions: how wide spread is the shrinking of vegetation, how sick is the environment and how are peoples liver affected, are the concerns of environmentalists for economic development. Various organization? have been sounding the

alarm about threats to the environment Awake (2003), some merely report on environmental problem while some on the causes of keeping environmental issues to the fore. The threats or "Vegetation shrinks" are part of environmental degradation and what makes this environmental loss very bad is that vegetation is often destroyed for little permanent benefit. Many areas have been converted to grazing land and are abandoned when it failed to sustain the needed pasturage. More pressure on vegetation are the forces of national and international commerce, overpopulation, trappers for petradc, illegal hunters and loggers, burning, arbitrary felling of tress and clearing of land.

Dorfman and Dorfman (1972), reported exploits of our environmental problems is that many vegetation resources are not owned by anyone and consequently lack the protection and guidance that a private owner normally provides. Most vegetation at local levels does not have such provision and as such suffer the crisis.

The crisis presents itself as plant abuse on areal scale, ranging from local to global, and on a time scale, ranging from the present to an intermediate future point in time. The threat of abuse ranges in magnitude from deterioration of our local surrounding to small ecosystem and destruction of biosphere. The increasing awareness of the extensive range of vegetation crisis in the nation is a serious issue. Anle (2001) reported that environmental destruction due to continuous and intensive exploitation of natural resources without regard to environmental protection and sustainable development is of immense concern to the entire society. Uncontrolled release of gases and smokes in air and oil spillage has pushed plants to no hiding place in that region. Various mechanisms of plant abuse or vegetation destruction have been observed in different parts of our country with little or no concern. Such vegetation crisis demands immediate corrective actions if possible to avert deterioration, damage or destruction of plants.

This paper recognizes the root causes and mechanism of vegetation crisis, impacts on sustainable economic development and possible solutions to curb the crisis for sustainable economic development.

Causes of Vegetation Crisis

In the past there are many virgin lands with rich vegetation around us but the increasing demands on vegetation due to development has re-shaped the natural vegetation to the present day vegetation. The causes are presented and discussed below:

Population explosion has been a major ingredient in vegetation crisis. Economically, large population means both greater demands for useable plants and greater potentials to pollute and degrade the environment. Dorfman and Dorfman (1972), noted that an increasing population places a heavy strain upon the planet in more demand of the earth's resources besides food and cause more pollution and environmental degradation.

Development of" Technology for Easy Operation. The introduction of equipment capable of enhancing exploitation means is a problem. Forest has never been at rest since in contact with chain saw machines and bulldozers. Many companies and individuals use these equipment to clear-cut plants on a new scale. People enjoyed the market but by the time they realized the issue at stake, vast stretch of forest has gone. Awake (2003).

Insatiable Demand for Timber. The use of timber in building and construction has call for felling of trees. The greater the demand the more the destruction of forest zones.

Poverty. Large production of people in rural areas is poor and the communities involved are in total stagnation that the standard of living is below average. The villagers rely on bush for firewood.

Insatiable Desire for Quick Profit. Landowner and others involved in exploitation of vegetation for quick profits have little or no concern for the survival of their environment. The people grant themselves access to the bush and fell trees without fear and mercy. Fortunately, many forest or bushes are not protected and plants are weak to human interference.

No Ownership and Protection of the Land, Absence of lands ownership and proper protection creates room for invaders of multiple destruction. The destruction is without replacement and the natural desire of the destruction to better their lives today may be mortgaged at an intolerably high cost to the future generations.

Illegal Hunting, Arbitrary Felling of Trees and Clearing of Land. Means of hunting in the bush at local level is by setting the bush on fire. Villagers do it without given consideration to plant communities. Trees are down when the need arise and even when there is no need. Such actions are illegal and harmful to the environment. Land's are cleared to put into use and in the process" many plants or the entire vegetation are destroyed.

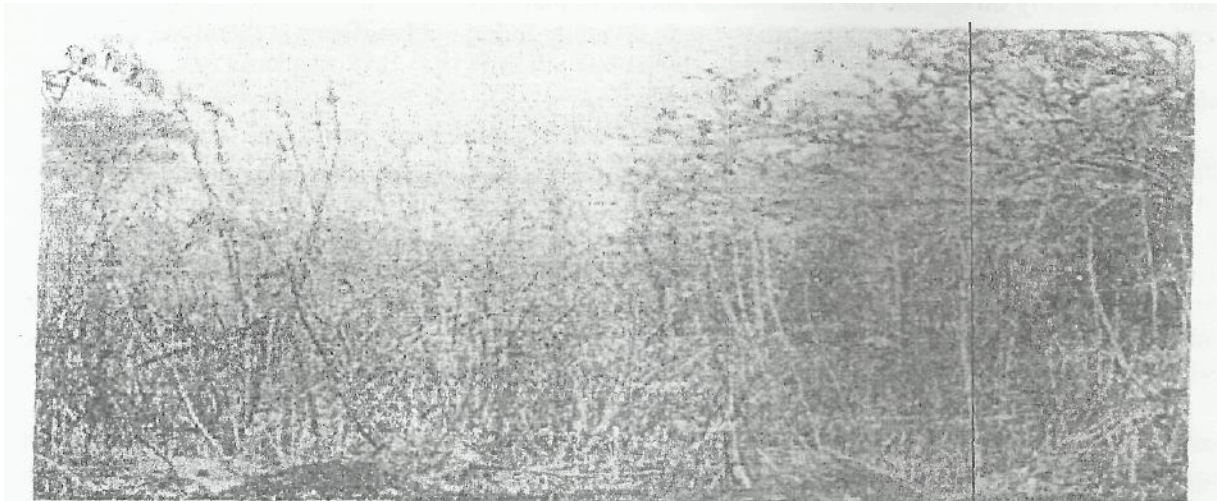
Ignorance of their Actions. People are not totally aware of the biological and economic values of most plants. They thought it is only provision of food and some medicine. They easily destroy, any plant they are unaware of its uses and fell such plant without remorse.

Mechanism of" Vegetation Abuse

In terms of preservation man has less regard for plants and abuse vegetation in all ramifications, starting from mowing and uprooting grasses to breaking and felling of trees. There is nothing like selection of plants for destruction rather it cut-across all ages and types of plants. Moreover, there is no chosen time but at any point in time and the intensity of these actions is becoming uncontrollable.

The mechanism involves all sorts of equipment to make it easier and faster. The major methods employed are discussed below.

Burning. Human impact on vegetation which still prevalent, especially, during the dry season, is the use and misuse of fire. Be it accidental or deliberate burning to reduce vegetation mailers, is a curse to economic development. Burning destroyed the tender and sensitive plants and left the land with only small population of fire-resistant and tolerant species, Definitely, it retards the growth and development of these species. Burning has associated secondary problems that are of biological and economical importance. Continuous burning reduces the capability of an area to regenerate itself and replenish its natural vegetation. Particularly problematic, is the frequent misuse of slash and burning techniques in some areas like Eha-Amufu and northern part of Nigeria. Extensive area of rich vegetation and cultivated lands are affected in the process of providing pasture for cattle and hunt of bush animals. The picture below shows destroyed cultivated crops in Eha-Amufu for little permanent benefit.



Land clearing is another means of destroying vegetation. In cases of agriculture, building and construction of road, vegetation is destroyed when clearing is done and plants are wasted. Plant preservation demands representation of all species of the community in the new area by transplanting. Usually, where the demand is not met, the result is wiping off the multiple plant species that beautify the habitat. Moreover, vegetation is the cloth the land wears and when stripped off deprived the land of vegetative cover, thus exposing it to erosion.

Arbitrarily felling of tree, is another method used in reducing plant population. Forest and bush destructors invade plant habitat any time it pleases them. They continuously fell tree even when there is no need for such action. There is no monitoring of trees as to chosen the type and age of plant to be cut nor the time of harvest. Such indiscriminate felling of tree-changes the floristic composition of the area.

Impacts on Sustainable Economic Development

The interference of man in plant kingdom is a serious issue and intolerable that the effect has induced one to ask if man's actions are the consequences of economic unsustainability. The exploitation and utilization of plant resources has lasting impacts on the environment and the economy of a nation, which are largely unsustainable.

Plants are known for utilizing atmospheric carbon dioxide in the manufacturing of food and in turn release oxygen back to the environment. Absence or reduction of plant communities gives way for accumulation of carbon dioxide released from respiration and flaring of natural gas into the atmosphere. This contributes to global warming, which is currently a global problem. Such an environment is not conducive for life not to talk of enhancing economic development. Destruction of vegetation uncovers the earth surface (land) and generates other environmental impacts that definitely impede economic development. Absence of vegetation may result to any of these landscape disturbances, soil erosion and deterioration of aesthetic values of the environment. In such situation, attention is given to environmental management instead of concentration on the development of national economy.

Biologically, the implication is on the extinction of endangered species, thus, depriving us of wealth of diversity and the potential use of many of their unique biological compounds that are of great medicinal values. Reduction of a vast area of vegetation may upset the nutrient cycles especially the oxygen and carbon dioxide cycle which plants form an important component. Academically, vegetation serves as a library where useful information is stored and extracted when needed. Destruction of forest deprives researchers' access to meaningful contribution towards economic development. Moreover, preservation of vegetation is vital because many domestic and commercial plants that we rely on depend on their wilder ancestors that still thrive in the forest. They are used to breed better strains in such a way that the genetic diversity found in wild varieties is therefore, essential.

Solutions to Curb Vegetation Crisis

The greatest challenge that confronts society and government today, and the generations to come is a sustained economic development and the intelligent management of this planet (Pickering and Owen, 1994). Availability of societal needs without compromising future generations and leaving a wasted land of environmental degradation is essential. Thus, a successful solution on vegetation crisis for sustainable economic development requires the co-operation of government, co-operate firms and the society. Preservation and conservation are vital bases of solutions for vegetation crisis. Both terms refer to careful planned management of the natural resources to ensure their sustained availability over a long period of time, without running them or decreasing from quality and quantity.

Further, investigation of vegetation is necessary. The practice aimed at finding out types, location and abundance of vegetation. Information obtained should be used for proper management of vegetation. Also, protection method ensures that vegetation are not misused or destroyed through over-use and involving activities capable of destroying them. Here, government should make policies and see to the implementation of these environmental laws by co-operate firms and the society to avert vegetation crisis. A situation where vegetation has been destroyed, repairing has to be done. It aimed at restoring damaged part or whole, back to their optimum production capacity. Aforestation becomes the practice to replace the damaged and used plants. Moreover, maximizing the use of individual plant to achieve the very objectives for which vegetation was created by obtaining as many benefits and services without running down the resource should be employed.

Upgrading the productivity of plants can as well, help curb vegetation crisis. Information on, all the plants are not known except when discovered. Certain management practice should be carried out on such

plants for benefit to mankind. It aims at placing values on them and avoids destruction. The quality of the society is important in this programme, for instance, public and environmental laws cannot function in uneducated society. Maximizing the use of plants, for economic development rely on educated society.

Recommendation

Obviously, effective vegetation management involves some added constraints to the freedom of individuals and co-operate firms to do as they please. Society has to be instituted by implementing public laws (old and new laws) to prevent destructors from indiscriminate actions against vegetation. Government, co-operate firms and the society have to be seriously involved in tackling vegetation issues from national level to the grass root and not backing off from commitment during implementation because they feel they should not accept the expenses involved. Further, tree planting programme should be initiated in schools (primary and above) to secure continuous existence of plants. Classrooms enlightenment programme on vegetation friendliness and should be inculcated in children earlier in life so that they will have regards for plants.

Conclusion

Vegetation crisis is a seriously environmental and economic problem and should be corrected for better economic development.

References

- Anelc, A. (2001). In Rivers, Raging Controversy Over Waste Plant. Guardian, Tuesday, July 3, 21 p.
- Awake, (1999). Our Universe Made for a Purpose: The Environment, Us Impact on Your Health.; Awake, June 22, 15p.
- Awake. (2003). Who Will Save the Rain Forest? Awake, June 22, 3 - 11pp. Awake, (2003).
- Can We Save Our Environment? Awake, November 22, 3 -10pp
- Dorfman, R and Dorfman, N.S (1972), (ed), *Economics of the Environment*. W.W. Norton and Co, Inc. USA, 404pp.
- Jhingan, M.L (2003). *The Economics of Development and Planning*. VR/NDA publi. (P) LTD, Delhi, 859pp.
- Ofuebe, C. (2003). (ed.) *Strands in Nigerian Development and Planning* 427pp. Joen, Publi. Co., Enugu.
- Pickering, K.T and Owen, L.A (1994). An Introduction to Global Environmental *Issues* 251 -325pp. Rodney,
- W. (1982). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Ikcnga Publi. Co., Enugu, Nigeria. 316pp.