

# **REPOSITIONING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

Nigeria is beset with numerous environmental problems such as deforestation, desertification, pollution, bush burning, wildlife depletion, soil erosion, flooding among others. As a result of these environmental degradation problems and various global initiatives in changing mankind attitude towards the environment, the Federal government adopted the National Conservation Education Strategy (NCES) in 1990. Like some other laudable strategies introduced in the country, there seem to be lack of commitment to follow through effectively the execution of the N.C.E.S after the initial enthusiasm. This paper therefore highlighted prevailing environmental problems and the cost of unsustainable development. It looked at the goals of Environmental education and the salient features of N.C.E.S and highlighted the hindrances to effective implementation. Finally, it suggested measures to reposition Environmental education, which includes better funding by government, cooperation by government departments, students, teachers, resources users, communities among others.

## **Introduction**

Man as agent of change has greatly modified the environment with his technologies in his quest for resources in the environment to the extent that even his survival and that of other living organism and ecological systems are endangered. The Stockholm conference convened in 1972 to express concern on the wanton destruction of the environment drew the attention of the world to this reckless behaviour of mankind. Since then, environmental issues and problems have remained as a top world agenda. Recommendation 96 of the conference referred to an international environmental programme interdisciplinary in approach, in - school and out-of-school embracing all levels of education and directed toward the general public.

In a similar vein, the first ever inter governmental conference on Man and Environment held in Tbilisi in 1977 was informed by the conviction that education was the single human endeavour capable of playing a crucial role in changing mankind's attitude towards the environment. The conference spelt out the role of member nations in ensuring that Environmental education became an integral part of the school system. The inter-governmental conference in Tbilisi (1977) defined environmental education as:

"A process aimed at developing a world that is aware of, and concerned about the total environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, attitudes, motivations, commitments and skills to work individually and collectively towards solution of current problems and the prevention of new ones."<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the importance of Environmental education in the drive for sustainable development was emphasized in chapter 36 of Agenda 21 of the of the U.N conference on Environment and development in RIQ.1992. At all these conferences, world leaders looked to education to release the competence and creativity of citizens. Education was seen as vital element in a strategy to nurture the sustainable processes.

In Nigeria, the National Conservation Education Strategy (NCES) was adopted in 1990 by the national council on education as part of the national policy on environment. Thereafter, the integration of environmental education into existing school curriculum commenced with pilot projects in some states - specifically Lagos, Bendel (Edo and Delta), Kano and Cross River. Formal education programmes with emphasis on students is a long-term educational solution to environmental problems. The Non-formal programme, which is also an important component of Environmental Education, is often directed at people whose decisions and behaviour affect the present environment. In this programme, farmers, businessman, community opinion leaders, elected officers, hunters, mass media specialists, adult, rural women are often targeted.

## Nigeria Environmental Problems

The fact that the Nigerian environment is threatened is no longer in doubt. This has been well documented by eminent scholars, such as Aina (1990), NEST (1991), Fetters (1993), Lawal (1995) among others. The environmental problems include desertification, soil and coastal erosion, flooding, drought, deforestation, indiscriminate bush burning, wild life depletion, land, air, and water pollution among others.

The scale of Nigeria's environmental problems and the costs of unsustainable development were summarized in a World Bank report reproduced by Noibi and Lawal (1993) in Table 1.

Table 1: Nigeria's environmental balance sheet: the costs of unsustainable development

Environmental problems	Estimated Annual loss
Soil degradation	\$3,000 Million per year
Water contamination	\$1,000 Million per year
Deforestation	\$750 Million per year
Coastal erosion	\$150 Million per year
Gully erosion	\$100 Million per year
Fishery loses	\$50 Million per year
Water hyacinth	\$50 Million per year
Wild life loses	\$10 Million per year
Total	\$5,1 10 Million per year

Source: World Bank, 1990

The colossal amount referred to in the above table excludes loss of lives as a result of oil spillage/inferno, social dislocation and the disruption of the means of livelihood of communities. The consequences of the environmental problems to Nigeria include reduced agricultural production, depletion of natural resources, loss of fertile soil and biodiversity, climatic changes among others.

It is pertinent to point out that in the first and second national development plans. (1962-66 and 1970-74) there was no serious initiative by government for environmental protection. However, in subsequent plans, (1975-80 and 1981-85) government initiatives improved considerably as:

demonstrated by the following enactments,

- i. The lake Kaniji National Act of 1979
- ii. The endangered species decree No 11, 1985
- iii. The environmental day decree, which has been cancelled by the current civilian administration of Olusegun Obasanjo.
- iv. Factory decree No 16 of 1987
- v. Harmful wastes decree 42 of 1988
- vi. Federal Environmental protection agency decree No 58 of 1988
- vii. Natural Resources Conservation Council decree No 50 of 1989
- viii. National Conservation Strategy
- ix. National policy on environment
- x. Environmental assessment decree No 88 of 1992.

In addition to these initiatives of the federal government, it is also important to stress that some N.G.Os, notably Nigerian Conservation Foundation have done a lot to improve the Nigerian environment. Some of the international initiatives include those of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). In spite of the numerous international and local initiatives, it is perplexing to note that the Nigerian environment is still experiencing all forms of environmental degradation.

## Goals and Objectives of Environmental Education

The goals of Environmental education endorsed by the Tbilisi Conference (1977) are as follows.

- i. To foster clear awareness of and concern about economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;

- ii. To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitments and skills needed to protect and improve the environment, iii. To create new patterns of behaviour of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment.

Accompanying the goals are the broad objectives listed below (from connect, 1978)

- i. **Awareness:** to help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and allied problems
- ii. **Knowledge:** to help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experience in, and acquire basic understanding of the environment and its associated problems
- iii. **Attitudes:** to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection.
- iv. **Skills:** to help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems
- v. **Participation:** to provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working towards resolution of environmental problems.

In the classroom setting, these broad objectives are formulated to specific performance objectives. More importantly a good E.E. Programme must adopt the problem solving approach. Practical experiences and field studies were emphasised.

### **Salient Features of the National Conservation Education Strategy**

Based on the recommendations of the Tbilisi Conference (1977) the National conservation Education Strategy was drawn-up guided by eleven principles. Some of the principles include the following:

- i. Consider the Nigerian Environment in its totality...
- ii. Be a continuous life-long process....
- iii. Be interdisciplinary in its approach, drawing on the specific contents of each discipline in making possible a logistic and balanced perspective.
- iv. Emphasize active participation in preventing environmental problems and working towards their solutions.
- v. Utilize diverse learning environment and a broad array of educational approaches to teaching and learning about and from the environment with due stress on practical activities and first hand experience.

Some salient features of the National Conservation Education Strategy are that it advocates a two-pronged Environmental Education programme which includes the integration of E.E into the teaching curricula and establishment of conservation clubs in all schools in Nigeria to promote extracurricular environmental activities. In addition, it includes the use of the cross-curricula approach, the introduction of E.E. into the early life stage, transcending formal and non-formal education and maximizing the existing teaching resources. The N.C.E.S. is a laudable document. The crux of the matter is that experience has shown that the country is not known to lack good and well articulated master plans in any endeavour, but is deficient in the proper implementation of her laudable programmes.

### **Hindrances to Effective Implementation**

- i. **Inadequate funding:** At the initial stage funding of the E.E. programme was adequate. This was a result of the financial support from some notable N.G.O.s such as the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) and other international organizations such as WWF, UNESCO and UNEP. With the handing over of the implementation to state governments, funding E.E. has become problematic. Budgetary provision is made by state ministry of education for E.E. activities in schools. This provision is seldom released. In some cases, what is eventually released is an insignificant proportion of what was proposed. This has hindered monitoring of E.E. activities in secondary schools.
- ii. **Transfer of Teachers:** Majority of the teachers in secondary schools who were trained in

various workshops on E.E. in the 1990s have been transferred to other schools because it is mandatory for teachers to accept transfer to schools within the state. This has disrupted E.E. activities in such schools.

**iii. Passive Conservation Clubs:** As a result of the afore-mentioned reasons, the once active conservation clubs of the 1990s have become dormant in the 21<sup>st</sup>. century. Akhiojemi (2001) observed that in spite of the establishment of as many as 98 conservation clubs in Delta and Edo States, many if not all of them are not functioning. The 5<sup>11</sup> day of June each year Christened Environmental Day by the United Nations to focus attention on the important role of the environment in man's life is not marked in most schools.

**iv. Death of Qualified E.E. Teachers:** There is the death of qualified E.E. teachers in the country. Lawal (1995:4) observed that it becomes complicating to expect a large crop of untrained teachers to resolve the issue of choice of methods and materials for effective teaching of Environmental Education in Nigerian schools. Moreover, the implication of the death of trained personnel to the implementation of E.E is that resource materials for teaching would not be effectively handled where they are available.

#### **The Need for Repositioning Environmental Education**

i. **Evaluation of the N.C.E.S progress:** It is now fifteen years the N.C.E.S. was adopted by the federal government. There is the need to assess the extent to which we have produced environmentally conscious citizens who would save the nation and the world from environmental disasters. According to NEST (1992:118) it was suggested that it would be meaningful to evaluate the progress of the programme after it has been operated from five to ten years. The operation of the programme started in 1992.

ii. **Making the Environmental Education Programme more Functional:** The present approach to E.E. has been mere transfer of facts, devoid of the inculcation of values, attitudes and practical skills in the students which will assist them in imbibing conservation practices and harmonious living in the environment. Teachers of E.E will have to realize that the ultimate result of their teaching is not in the body of knowledge passed to the students but the successes in creating the ability in the students to find information, analyze it, assess its value and formulate a solution to the problem. His teaching must be committed and geared towards helping in problem solving rather than transfer of mere facts.

#### **Suggested Measures to Reposition Environmental Education**

i. **Better Funding:** The federal and state governments should fund E.E. adequately. The budgetary allocation for E.E. in states ministries should be promptly released to fund E.E. activities.

ii. **Incentives for E.E. Teachers:** More incentives should be given to E.E. teachers. These incentives include scholarships, work-study programme, study leave with pay among others.

iii. **Re-invigoration of passive conservation clubs:** There should be the re-vigoration of erstwhile passive conservation clubs and the establishment of new ones. More emphasis should be laid on practical work such as the planting of trees and flowers to enhance the aesthetics of the local environment.

**iv. More functionality of E.E programme:** There should be greater emphasis on solving the day-to-day problems of the real world rather than mere facts. Field studies should be used to stimulate the students in solving real world problems.

v. **More emphasis on informal education:** Informal education plays a major role in the acquisition of knowledge that will change our attitude for a better environment, and should be emphasized and not trivially treated as it is done now. E.E. should target women, children policy makers, industrialists,, engineers, planners, community development officers, communities, adult learners among others.

vi. **Emphasis on Teacher Education:** Teacher education in E.E. should be given prominence as

it is the teacher that will interpret and transmit E.E. messages,

vii. Philanthropic Contributions to the development of E.E resource materials for our local problems should be encouraged;

viii. Non-Governmental Organisations, Civil Society Philanthropic and Multi-national corporations operating in Nigeria should play a more prominent role in funding E.E. projects.

### **Conclusion**

The environmental problems confronting Nigeria are numerous and complex. A well-implemented environmental education programme centered on awareness, knowledge, attitudes and practical skills can play a great role in sensitizing and mobilizing school children, communities and decision-makers towards sustained environmental action. There are obvious hindrances in the path to a sustainable future. This necessitates a repositioned Environmental Education. What is therefore needed is greater commitment by all levels of government and better funding of the Environmental Education programmes.

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