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Environmental Ethics for Sustainable Environmental Education in Nigeria

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Abstract

Apart from natural causes Nigeria has continued to undergo great environmental crisis arising from the quest to conquer nature and harness it for meeting her need for food, clothing and shelter. The magnitude and intensity of this problem in recent times have become major sources of worry that call for concerted environmental educational strategy. Education should among other things serve as a system and a tool which is structured in content and context to bring about sustainable protection and promotion of healthy environment. Unfortunately there is widespread ignorance arising from pervasive illiteracy and absence of sustainable enlightenment programmes for the citizenry. This work therefore seeks to identify the environmental ethics that should constitute the ethical core for a sustainable environmental educational strategy in the collective quest to protect the environment for the present and future generations.

Ours is an age of increasingly degrading and depleting environment arising from aggressive and hostile exploitation of natural resources as well as ravaging natural disasters such as erosion and climate changes. Thus our environment has continued to be manifesting severe dysfunction and unhealthy posture due to the composite factors of industrial pollution, urban growth, population pressure, ethnic and sectional conflicts and modernized agriculture. The above view is corroborated by Ibe (2003) when he states that the entire atmosphere is rendered unhealthy by land, air and water pollution, arising from industrial wastes, petrochemical pipe leakages, use of fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides. Moreover he posits that other activities that modify or

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change the Nigerian physical environment are “urban growth, population pressure, agriculture, fishing, industrialization, exploitation of natural resources and oil explorations. Furthermore he submits that structures of colonialism, and neo-colonialism, erosion of cultural values, inordinate consumer mentality, ethnic and sectional violence all these cumulate to interfere with nature’s equilibrium and sustainability. While the modern societies perceive these activities as symbol of development and growing society, they cumulate to pose great interference to nature’s equilibrium.

Environmental debate and education have continued to generate interest following the Earth summit of Rio de Janeiro. This interest bothers mostly on the major areas namely, sustainable development and worldwide equity, biodiversity and climate. Despite these education and debate the situation of our environment continues to deteriorate at an alarming speed. The need to trim down the controversy associated with educational efforts of providing sustainable direction for reducing the above crisis informed this work. Thus this work is an attempt at identifying the ethical core that should form part of the educational agenda of protecting and promoting healthy environment in Nigeria. This moreso is relevant as discussion on the environmental education is a multi disciplinary issue cutting across not only economics, geography, natural sciences but also ethical and cultural sciences. Moreover since it is an education that relates to man as a person and his destiny, the religious and cultural dimension of the educational strategy should not be overlooked.

Theoretically this work is hinged on the divinity theory of creation. In Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 2:15, the Holy Book records that God created all things and gave man charge over the earth to take care of it. Theologically man is conceived as an integral part of created order and has been empowered to use nature’s gifts in a creative manner to satisfy his needs. Equally, the salvific work of Christ in dying to redeem fallen humanity as recorded in the New Testament underscores that God cares for the created order. What this means is that man was not created to assert absolute authority over natural order but one of responsibility and care. Ifesiah (1989) corroborates the above view when he states that philosophically man is a transcendental self-reflective being created in the image and likeness of God to manifest moral excellence and refinement. Man consequently is a creature that was packaged from creation for an ethically driven lifestyle.

Definition of Terms

Ethics: According to Allens and Schwarz (2004) the word ethics refers to the branch of study which is concerned with character and conduct, morals, standard of behavior or professional standards of conduct. Nnadi and Udabah (2008) cited in Ezeugwu (2008) on their own state that the term comes from a Greek word ‘*ethos*’ meaning

customs, habit, or convention, moral philosophy or simply put the study of human customs. Moreover Chua (2010) noted that it has to do with the branch of moral philosophy which involves making a specific moral choice and sticking to it. Ethics as used in this context has to do with those moral guidelines, rules and principles that should moderate the interplay of man and the environment. It is the standard of moral responsibility that should control human activities as he seeks to exploit the environment for his own use.

Environment: The word environmental, relates to the environment which generally refers to the Earth system which surrounds man. The term according to Britanica Micropaedia refers to the composite of complex chemical, physical and biotic factors that act upon an organism. In addition it defines it as an ecological community that determines the form and survival of an organism. Dokubo (1995:3) in his own contribution stated that it relates to the summation of all processes and domains in which the interaction between nature and human development takes place.

Nigerian Educational Research and Development council (NERDC) cited from Udo (1992:253) corroborating the above view defines the concept as the composite of all natural factors that influences or are influenced by human beings. Against this backdrop the word environment as used in this work refers to the aggregation of natural and artificial factors that impact on man. They relate to the physical and non-physical dimensions of existence. The physical embracing man's natural surrounding while the non-physical relates to his artificial and cultural dimension of living which encompasses his housing, agricultural and industrial technology, transportation and communication networks, religious and educational system, socio structural dynamics of family, work and recreation.

Education: Education according to Onuchukwu (2005:2) is defined as the act of imparting desirable habits, skills and attitudes which are directed at making the individual a good citizen. Thus he submits that it is a process that is geared towards the shaping of an individual to align him with the aims and goals of qualitative and productive national life. The concept according to Allens and Schwarz (2004) refers to the training, development of physical and mental powers or simply put, culture enhancement. Education could therefore be defined as the process of providing individuals with the tools for understanding the society with a view to making and developing them into positive members in societal networks of activities and relationships. It refers to the cultivation of physical, mental, relational, spiritual and all other dimensions of powers and faculties that help to give the individual a strong footing not only to survive in the society but also to promote her overall good and development. Environmental education in this context therefore relates to that branch of learning and training that should promote the maximum protection of the

environment for the securing of sustainability and lasting benefit to present and future generations. It is the education that fosters good stewardship in the management of the natural and artificial environment for overall lasting benefit of human society.

In this work we shall be considering the following issues:

- i. The need for environmental ethics
- ii. The principles of environmental ethics
- iii. Anchoring environmental ethics for sustainable environmental education in Nigeria.

The Necessity for Environmental Ethics

In this section we shall attempt to examine the various factors that make the incorporation of environmental ethics a necessity in the educational programme of the nation.

Common interest and survival: Having a sense of morality or ethical responsibility is very important for our collective survival, progress and unity. This is in agreement with Udabah (2004:269-270) who posited that no society can survive if each individual is left to pursue only his or her own interest without considering the common good. According to her ethical guidelines or rules of behavior are made to promote the good of all even when they go against some self-interest in some particular circumstances.

Moreover she posits that ethical morality derives from the dictates of human reason which endows him with the capacity to develop rational rules for regulating his activities in the environment. Eneh (2001:42) corroborated the above submission when he states that ethical provisions are the stipulation of Standards set by societies to avoid individuals facing the difficulties on the right direction to be adopted or wrong direction to be rejected. Moreover he notes that they help to protect both individuals and society from the harm inherent in personal thinking and majority opinion that are inimical to logical and sound reasoning.

Consequently environmental ethics is predicated on the need for providing fundamental, coherent, and rational rules that should help to protect and promote the survival, sustainability as well as healthy development of the environment for the good of present and future generations of mankind. They are the foundations or vital core values on which environmental educational strategy for the promotion of common survival of the environment and the human population would be anchored.

Fostering Human Dignity: Environmental ethics helps to foster human dignity. Ethics generally helps to ensure that the inordinate drive to exploit others through unrestrained quest for personal or group interest at the expense of others is restrained. By providing rules to curtail human excesses, environmental ethics helps to safeguard the right of the weak against the rich and powerful. The word human dignity refers to

those fundamental preferences and respect that are due to individuals irrespective of their status, race or creed. It comes from Latin word “*Dignitas*” meaning ‘worth’. Environmental ethics therefore has to do with providing codes of conduct or rules of behavior that ensure that in the activities that relate to the exploitation of the material and non-material components of the environment the inherent worth of the present and future human persons are preserved and enhanced. What this means is that providing environmental ethical responsibility is predicated on the need to respect the fundamental, inherent human rights to freedom, property, security, and economic rights among others such that each generation of human persons are guaranteed minimum level of opportunity for survival and self- determination

Protecting Divine Authority /Command: Ethical morality according to Udabah (2004:272), is predicated on morality as a divine command. Thus she notes that in all societies of the world there is the belief that there exists a supreme being who is above everyone and who not only created the world but also demands mans obedience to his decrees. These decrees or commands consequently form part of the basis for man’s environmental ethical responsibility on earth. They serve as the medium through which man seeks to live in equilibrium with the divine principles for the created order in order to attract divine blessings and reward. This is corroborated by Njoku (2006) while grouting John Paul II when he posited that the Decalogue as embedded in Christian scriptures provides the unshakeable foundation for sound ethical judgment. What this means is that belief in the supernatural deity embraces the fact that such a being has communicated what is right and what is wrong or simply put has provided revealed truth or authoritative text that should moderate man’s moral or ethical conduct. Environmental ethics therefore stem from the need to discover and respect those revealed principles of fostering environmental protection and development. Ibe (2003:85) summarized the above argument when he states that the call for environmental protection through environmental ethics is grounded on the fact that man is both a moral person and subject. According to him while he is responsible for protecting the environment he owes this responsibility not to himself or nature but to God his creator.

Furthermore he opines that it is only when man operates in the direction of three levels of compatibility with respect to divine command that he secures himself, the society and the environment. These compatibility he identifies as: Intra–personal, social and environmental compatibility. From the foregoing, environmental ethics has to do with securing the general welfare of individual, the society and the environment through fostering the need for human responsibility to the divine order or authority.

Human Rationality: Environmental ethics are products of human rationality. Man as a rational being drives the society through the power of intelligence. While ethical laws are mostly made to moderate man’s conduct and interpersonal relationships, they

equally should incorporate rules that protect the environment from abuse and unguarded human activities. Nature operates through laws and principles and man must therefore recognize and harness those laws in order to secure the environment for himself and his posterity.

Principles of Environmental Ethics

Northcott (1996:268) in his work argued that the natural law does not provide enough stipulation that would secure the protection of the environment. Consequently following the advocacy of several other ethicists for the development of new environmental code, the concept of promotion of human goods was expanded to embrace also that of non-human-world as well. Such goods therefore were meant to protect abusive treatment of the environment by individuals or groups. Below are principles that constitute environmental ethical core values.

Justice: Justice, according to Obodo (2006:91) relates to the natural right theory which could be defined as a social norm that prescribes directive for guiding men in their actions towards one another. Continuing he states that Aristotle, Plato and Thomas Aquinas are all in agreement when they defined justice as “the firm and constant will to give to each his due.” He therefore states that the above definition embraces three ideas of equality of exchange, contribution and distribution. Durmmond (1972:21) corroborated the above view when he states that justice refers to the idea of equality which is concerned with the maintaining of balance with respect to social relationships, by rendering to each his due as well as preserving the mutual independence of those who make claim in its name.

The Catholic Encyclopedia states that the term comes from a Latin word “*Justitia*” which implies the regulation of actions of men toward one another with reference to a fair and constant standard. Justice therefore can be described as a disposition towards the equity, fairness and equality whereby each person or group receives their due. It embraces three aspects namely legal justice, commutative justice and distributive justice. Whereas legal justice has to do with extracting from individuals their debt to the society and commutative justice seeks to enhance fair exchange between two individuals, distributive justice on the other hand is that concerned with ensuring that all individuals secure an equitable share of the society’s benefits and burdens. Justice from the foregoing relates to the regulations of man’s actions towards another in accordance with prescribed and unchanging standard of fairness and equity. Justice as an aspect of environmental ethics is therefore that geared towards protecting individuals, groups, organizations or even the state from injustices arising from unjust laws that contravene natural laws by forcing people off their lands or even denying their inherited claim to such things as land, shelter and livelihood. On the other hand commutative justice as an aspect of environmental ethics is the concern that seeks to

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regulate the relationship between individual members and groups within and among themselves. It is that which requires the safeguarding of property rights, paying debts as well as fulfilling contractual obligation freely contracted.

Furthermore distributive justice as, an aspect of justice is very fundamental in the issue of environmental ethics. This is because it calls for sacrifice which demands that present material standards of living be regulated for the sake of an improved and sustainable standard of life for the future of humanity and of creation. It equally makes a claim for the redistribution of wealth from the affluent to the needy to ensure that everyone including the poor share in the material well-being of affluent societies. This is more so as history has proven that unbridled prosperity of the rich often provokes social instability through environmental conflict in forms of social and political disorder. Distributive justice also referred to as social justice is fundamental and relevant in protecting individuals' right to contribute or secure active participation in charting their destiny. It could therefore be adduced that environmental justice is all about a call to uphold a healthy environment by defending the basic human rights of individual(s).

All human activities in the environment are not always beneficial to man, animal and plant life as well as other constituents of the ecosystem. The degrading of the environment arise from various forms of human activities such as farming, use of fertilizer, nomadic pastoralism, fishing, mining, industrialization, urbanization, ethno-sectional conflicts, urban waste disposal, transportation and vehicular emission and deforestation. The above activities pose environmental crisis that ranges from desertification, air, soil, and water pollution, flooding, extinction of animal and plant life. Effort that seeks to protect the environment should therefore be rooted in educational process that provides legal framework that provides adequate legislation to deter the abuse of the environment.

Sustainability: Development economists have adopted the term sustainability as an integral part of environmental ethical responsibility. The term has to do with striking a desired balance between economic growth on the one hand and environmental preservation on the other. Todaro (1994:325) while noting that the above term has many definitions, stated that it basically refers to meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the need of future generations. What this means is that present generation has not the right to use nature's resources to the extent of destroying and damaging the environment. In other words the environment should not be exploited and drained at the cost of children and children's children as future generations have also the right to live in an intact world and take advantage of the inherent natural resources. Todaro put this pointedly when he posits that the natural

resource base of a country namely the land, water and air represents a common heritage which should be preserved for all generations.

Environmental ethics in this instance has to do with securing an environmental carrying capacity which ensures that both the economic and social systems are run efficiently to promote conditions that fosters term long survival rather than short term.

Solidarity: This principle of environmental ethics posits that solidarity is of the nucleus or centre of social system. It states that environmental protection must be pointed in practical terms of bridging the gap of polarities in the human conditions. According to Pope John Paul II the term solidarity relates to the capacity to see the ‘other’ whether a person, people or nation not just as some kind of entity with a work capacity and physical strength to be harnessed at low cost and then discarded when no longer useful but as our neighbor to be made a fellow sharer, co-equal, partner with ourselves in the banquet of life to which all are equally invited by God. It is all about each person, people, nations and cultures and group embracing unity that is fueled by everyone contributing to the common good.

Ogbunwezeh (2005:243) commenting on the problems of lack of solidarity in Africa stated that the rich resources in the region have sometimes become a source of tremendous suffering. Noting for instance that the oil exploration in Niger Delta has been associated with deeper economic impoverishment and ecological disasters for the region. Thus he submits that without peace, stability and solidarity, development will continue to elude African nations as the region continues to be on the boil arising from enthronement of structures that perpetrate injustice, oppression and poverty.

Subsidiarity: This principle has to do with non-interference. It provides that the community of higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of lower order, thereby depriving it of its functions. Rather it should be supported where the need arises to help it co-ordinate its activities with the rest of the society always with a view to secure the common good.

Anchoring Environmental Ethics for Sustainable Environmental Education

Environmental education is strategically indispensable if the Nigerian society is to develop the vision of mankind stretched out along the dimension of time. To ensure that our general view of the general good of mankind is expanded, Edision (1981:15) stated that there is the need to redefine “mankind” in terms of the whole of humanity, dead, living or as yet unborn in order to ensure that we secure the environment for both today and tomorrows generation.

Environmental education must be harnessed to break Nigeria and indeed African nations from the shackles of poverty, disease, death fostered by institutionalized poverty, high level illiteracy, ignorance, greed, bad governance,

political exclusion and economic subjugation. This education must however be pivoted on environmental ethics as the philosophical foundation for securing the environment. This work has enunciated the environmental ethical core or principles which should be integrated into our environment education strategy. It should now attempt to suggest how those principles should be adopted in the educational agenda for a secured environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has so far established that environmental educational agenda must be grounded in environmental ethical philosophy to ensure sustainable protection of the environment for both the present and future generations. Based on this finding, it has suggested the following recommendations to be adopted in realizing this objective.

1. The judiciary should be more adequately funded to train more experts in environmental legislation who will be charged with promoting public awareness on environmental law as well as enforcing compliance to same.
2. Environmental Education should begin at cradle to ensue the citizenry develop healthy environmental habits early.
3. Government and the society should promote human rights education so that individuals through the schools, and mass media and other agencies of government will ensure that people are adequately educated on their fundamental rights, privileges and responsibilities as well.
4. Parents and people in various levels of leadership must show exemplary concern for the protection of the environment by demonstrating their commitment with both deeds and words.
5. Environmental ethical education should embrace social and political education that are structured to dismantle structures that promote economic injustice, oppression, political and cultural subjugation and all forms of dehumanization of the human person.
6. They should promote education that fosters peace, brotherhood, natural integration, solidarity, promotion of common good, as well as preferential option for the poor, the weak and the elderly.

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