CHANGING VALUES IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY, EFFECTS ON ENVIRONMENT AND IMPLICATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The relevance of education is always with special reference to the learner and the society. In Nigeria's case where social norms and values are under serious threat, the environment is also affected. Nigerians have to be sensitized to return to the values of commitment, responsibility and concern for the environment. This paper exposes environmental threats as a result of the changing values in the Nigerian society and the role of environmental education as an agent of value change for societal growth, environmental sustainability and inculcation of environmental awareness, skills, knowledge, attitude in the Nigerian society.

Introduction

According to Uche (1996). In the pre-colonial period, man interacted with the environment, understood the need and actually protected it through what is referred to as customary and traditional values or systems.

Achi (1996) noted that as the population increased over the years, resource use and availability became acute thus triggering concern over how to meet the targets. Achi continued that with the birth of industrialization, value system changed, people wanted *things quicker, bigger and faster.* This resulted in the increase of 'unwanted' waste both in solid, liquid, gas and other forms of environmental abuse. Awake (2003) quoting Human Development Report 2001 stated: *"every technological advance brings potential benefits and risks, some of which are not easy to predict".*

Changing Values in the Consumption Pattern of Nigerians

According to Websters New Dictionary, 'value' means a principle, standard, or quality considered worth while or desirable.

The pattern of consumption of goods and services since the advent of the industrial revolution continues to change as Nigerians develops 'high taste' for goods and services. The industries have to cope with these demands and this has led industries to generate waste especially hazardous wastes.

Okebukola (2001) stated that about 400 million metric tons of hazardous wastes are generated each year worldwide. The society has been nicknamed 'throw away' society because of the assumption that endless resources will allow us to produce an endless supply of goods. One of the greatest problems in most of the urban centers in Nigeria today is the ever-accumulating heap of uncleared refuse.

The problems caused by wastes are multifaceted. First, they degrade the environment; an eyesore that creates odour and air pollution through smoke and fires. Second, they constitute health hazards. Thirdly, the rubbish spills into drainage and canals, blocking them and causing floods.

Household sources of hazardous wastes include toxic lead paints, flammable solvents, caustic cleaners, toxic batteries, pesticides, drugs, and mercury from broken thermometers.

In agriculture, fluoride wastes are by-products of phosphate fertilizer production. Soluble nitrates from manure may dissolve into groundwater and contaminate drinking water wells; high levels of nitrates may cause health problems. In this computer age, making a computer circuit board generates spent electroplating baths that contain metal salts, acids, caustic chemicals and solvents. 'Flic value changes in the packaging of foods and goods have left our streets scattered with cellophane bags as can be observed in packaged water 'pure water'. In the olden days, mothers were used to using the same baby napkins for even their fourth child but now, the use of disposable napkins have taken over, most of them very difficult to degrade w ith implication to environmental decency.

Greed and 'get rich fast' syndrome have made Nigeria a dumping ground for cars (tokunbo cars and parts) packaged drinks and foods, all of these constitute environmental

menace after consumption. Nigeria as well as other developing countries is still grappling with how to effectively manage waste. Waste disposal facilities have proved most inadequate in the face of volume of domestic, commercial and industrial wastes

Deforestation

The rising value and ‘ high taste’ in the selection of timber example mahogany, iroko, cedar for the construction of doors, window frames, crates, coffin, furniture, plywood sheets, chopsticks, house hold utensils and other items has devastated the rain forest.

Akpan and Okebukola (2004) quoted the World Rain forest Movement as follows:

> The rich nations with one quarter of the world’s population consume four fifths of the world’s resources. It is the “throw away” culture of the industrialized countries, now advertised in and forced on the third world countries (Nigeria being in forefront) that is leading to the ‘throwing away of the environment such so called progress leads to destruction and despair.

The importance of rainforests to the global environment is immeasurable. They are linked to weather and climate patterns we still don’t fully understand. Yet, nearly every second another acre is lost to logging or farming most of it caused by huge appetite for paper and hard wood, to make everything from furniture to disposable chopsticks.

Energy Consumption

Until the Industrial Revolution began in England in the eighteenth century demand for energy resource was relatively modest. Waterpower, and firepower from wood and peat were the principal means of obtaining energy. The natural energy resource of wood, fossil fuels such as peat and coal, waterpower from streams and rivers and wind energy harnessed in windmills seemed adequate and did not pose any long-term environmental problems. Any atmospheric pollution seemed to be merely a local phenomenon associated with certain areas. Nobody really thought that there was any serious threat to the environment. By the early 1970s there was a change in value and natural gas was considered a fossil fuel for premium use such as in domestic heating and cooking, with oil as the major intermediate and perhaps, long term energy resource. The 1980s saw the groundswell of environmentalists lobbying for safer, ‘greener’ energy resources and a less profligate use of these resources.

At a refinery, the crude oil from underground is separated into natural gas, gasoline, kerosene, lubricating oil, fuel oil, grease, asphalt and paraffin powering automobiles and airplanes and in industrial production processes. Petroleum is the main source of Nigeria’s economic survival to the detriment of groundnut pyramids and other cash crops, which were largely the main source of revenue for Nigeria-prior to the 1970s. In the words of Lawal (1995)’Petroleum refining is accompanied with some environmental problems, typical examples include oil spillage, dangerous gas Haring, explosion of oil wells, discharge of heavy oil laden on land and water front. The refining and burning of petroleum and its products can cause air pollution.

Agabi (1995) supported Lawal that the greatest environmental problem connected with petroleum exploitation in Nigeria is oil spillage as loss of fish population, crustaceans and other aquatic animals, eutrophication of water bodies, abandonment of fishing grounds, emigration of wild life, loss of aesthetic value of water bodies and loss of drinking water. All these impact on man and the quality of life.

Implications for Environmental Education as an Agent of Value Change

Realizing that environmental problems have assumed serious proportions in the country, there is a need for fundamental change. Change to a more caring use of the earth’s resources and greater cooperation and equity in sharing the benefit as well as the risk of our technological civilization. Particular importance is the need to integrate the ecological dimension into education. This brings us to the issue of Environmental Education which is a philosophical orientation entailing the conception of and planning for a livable environment E.E. is now a subject of worldwide importance. The emphasis on the knowledge of the problems associated with several environmental crises at the early stage in our students is of greatest importance and goes a long way to form the foundation of their awareness and

effective utilization of the environment. Bearing in mind that as far back as 1972. the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment has as one of its principles that 'education in environmental matters for the younger generation as well as adults, is essential in order to broaden the
basis for an enlightened opinion and responsible conduct by individual'. Some authors have defined Environmental Education as With the current interest in environmental matters now in Nigeria, it is necessary for educationists, parents, children, manufacturers, developers of processes and other entrepreneurs to understand to what extent they contribute in polluting and degrading the environment. It will be a right step in the right direction to make them aware of the environmental side, effects of economic activities, and rapid social/ value change like overcrowding in urban slums, the health hazard of the emission of waste products from factories, the problems of domestic, industrial, agricultural waste, the pollution of natural sources of water supply, the destruction of protective forest cover all in the process of construction of roads and buildings. In Nigeria, powerful commercial giants exert strong influence on government not to implement measures that would eat into corporate profits. Businesses and corporations want to get the most they can from land without regard for future consequences. Example in the olden days mothers were used to using the same baby napkins for even their 4th child but the use of disposable napkins have taken over some of them, most of them are difficult to degrade with implications to environmental decency.

Okebukola (1993) outlined some Nigerian Environmentalist definitions of EE as follows: "Environmental Education is education in or and for the environment (Environment defined in its widest sense i.e. local to global not just saving cuddly animals" (Ebbutt, 1993).

"Environmental education is any form of education, both formal and informal, that will influence the attitude of people towards a sustainable use of resources of the environment" (Ighrakpata, 1993).

"EE is education aimed at the acquisition of knowledge, skills, desirable attitude by an individual towards a better interaction with the natural world" (Igbinokpogie, 1993).

''Environmental education is the process of individual and collective internalization of knowledge, attitudes, skills about from and the environment towards ensuring ecological stability and improving the quality of the life for man (Noibi, 1993).

A working definition emerging from all of these is to take environmental education as the process of acquiring or transmitting knowledge, attitude and skills of the sustainable use of natural and man-made resources.

From our conception of environmental education discussed above, it may seem that the ultimate goal of environmental education is the promotion of the "quality of the environment " (IUCN, 1970). It is beyond this, as the ultimate goal of environmental education is *improvement of the quality of life of the* W£/;;._SpecificaIly, the general goal of environmental education is to develop a. citizenry that is aware of the total environment, concerned about it and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitude, motivations and commitment to work individually and collectively towards its solution of current problems and the prevention of the new ones.

Objectives of Environmental Education

With reference to the general goals of EE, categories of objectives, which teachers could use to develop and inculcate value change in their subjects, include:

1. Awareness - to facilitate students and social groups acquisition of awareness and sensitivity for the total environment and its allied problems
2. Knowledge - to help students and social groups gain a variety of experiences with the total environment and to acquire a basic understanding of the total environment, its associated problems and humanity's critical responsible presence and role in it.
3. Attitudes - to encourage students and social groups to acquire social values, strong feelings of concern for the environment and motivation for activity.
4. Skills: to help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems;
5. Participation: to provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working towards resolution of environmental problems.

EE is regarded not as a new discipline but as an environmental dimension, which should be incorporated into educational systems, programme and processes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has highlighted the consequences of value change in our environment and the need for Environmental Education to inculcate positive attitude and behavioral change in the populace for the survival of the environment. The importance of E.E. for value change cannot be over emphasized and based on this the following recommendations are made.

1. Curriculum development agencies should take a critical look at the available materials on EE content with a view to harmonizing EE curriculum with similar programmes into an instructional module.
2. To give EE its own slot in the school timetable when combined into an instructional content.
3. Train more personnel who can effectively teach EE components
4. All tiers of government including local communities should participate in the formulation and implementation of project-centered environmental education programmes based on the peculiarities of their local environment

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