
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, SUSTAINABILITY AND POVERTY ERADICATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Sustainable Development and Environmental management are centered on human activities and means of raising the living standard of humanity in general. In line with this, environmental degradation sets in and eventually results in communal-environmental conflicts. Studies have shown that poverty is anchored to inefficient environmental management and therefore sustainable development becomes impossible to attain particularly in developing economies. This article surveys the relationship between environmental management and sustainable development and the strategies that could be employed to improve environmental management and consequently, eradicates poverty in the country and the African continent at large.

Clean water, clean air, fertile and unspoiled land – all of us would agree are desirable goals. But how much are people willing to pay to achieve them? What is the threat to humanity if people do not respect the limits of our natural environment?

When Nigeria became independent in October 1960, it immediately embarked upon the road to development as mapped out by the west without any serious ideological reflection on the appropriateness or otherwise of the type of development it wanted to embrace. Along the road to economic development, Nigeria exhibits the resemblance of development in its socio-economic institutions and programs but deep down there is the reality of poverty and environmental degradation with its communal – environmental conflicts as experienced for instance, in Ogoni land, Tiv – Jukun crisis, Chad – Nigeria boarder conflict, etc. (Egunjobi, 2005).

In order to overcome poverty, Nigeria embarked upon many strategies which are yet to bring to an end the reality of poverty in the lives of the poor and raise the living standards of all its citizens. The major challenge facing developing economies of the world in the realization of developmental goals is partially attributed to the rising pressures on environmental resources (Todaro and Smith, 2006). It is in the light of this that this article is structured to examine the nature of environmental management, Sustainability and Poverty eradication in Nigeria.

Sustainable Development and Environmental Accounting

The concept of Sustainability or sustainable development is a notion around which legally significant expectations regarding environment conduct have begun to crystallize. The issue of sustainable development is now seen as a problem that is confronting humanity. What is then Sustainable Development?

According to Lele (1991), sustainable development is a new way of life and approach to social and economic activities for all societies, rich and poor which is compatible with the preservation of the environment. On their part, Pearce and Watford (1993) described sustainable development as a process in which the natural resource base is not allowed to deteriorate. This emphasizes the unappreciated role of the environmental quality and environmental inputs in the process of raising real income and quality of life.

The World Commission on Environment and Development, (WCED), (1987) defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Similarly, in the words of Todaro and Smith (2006), sustainability generally refers to “meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of the future generations.” Implicit in these definitions is the fact that future growth and overall quality of life are critically dependent on the quality of the environment.

The natural resource base of a country and the quality of its air, water and land represents a common heritage for all generations. To destroy that endowment indiscriminately in pursuit of short – term economic goals penalize both present and especially, future generations. It is therefore important that development policymakers incorporate some form of environmental accounting into their decisions. For example, the preservation or loss of valuable environmental resources should be factored into estimates of economic growth and human well-being.

Alternatively, policymakers may set a goal of “no net loss of environmental assets”. This implies that if an environmental resource is damaged or depleted in one area, a resource of equal or greater value should be regenerated elsewhere.

According to Pearce and Watford (1993), the overall capital assets include not only manufactured capital (machines, factories, roads) but also human capital (knowledge, experience, skills) and environmental capital (forests, soil quality, and rangeland). By this, sustainable development requires that these overall capital assets are not decreasing and that the correct measure of sustainable net national income (NNI*) is the amount that can be consumed without diminishing the capital stock. Symbolically:

$$NNI^* = GNI - D_m - D_n \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Where; NNI* is sustainable National Income

D_m is depreciation of manufactured capital assets

D_n is a depreciation of environmental capital – the monetary value of environmental decay over the course of a year.

An even better measure, though more difficult to calculate with present data collection methods, is;

$$NNI^* = GNI - D_m - D_n - R - A \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

Where; R is expenditure required to restore environmental capital (forests, fisheries, etc), and

A is expenditure required to avert destruction of environmental capital (air pollution, water and soil quality, etc.)

In the light of rising consumption levels worldwide combined with high rates of population growth, the realization of sustainable development in developing countries will remain a major challenge.

Conceptual Framework of Poverty

Poverty is a multidimensional and dynamic phenomenon. It is also a social problem. Considering it as a dynamic phenomenon, Townsend (1997) saw poverty as a situation where individuals or families are in command of resources which overtime; fall seriously short of the resources commanded by the average family. This conceptualization of poverty demonstrates the dynamism of poverty in such a way that the average standards of the relevant communities increase, the relative poverty line increases as well.

According to Black as cited in Ayo (2012), poverty is the inability to afford an adequate standard of consumption. The poor are by this understanding, those that have little or no shelter and inadequate food; they are the unemployed, and their prospects for a better life are bleak or uncertain at best. That is why, Ravallion and Bidani (1994) described poverty as lack of command over basic consumption need.

From the foregoing definitions, poverty can be associated with underdevelopment. In this case the indicators are;

1. Low levels of productivity;
2. High rates of population growth and dependency ratio;
3. High and rising levels of unemployment and underemployment;
4. Significant dependence on agricultural production and primary product exports;
5. Dependence on vulnerability in international relations; etc.

Despite the fact that some scholars treat poverty as synonymous to underdevelopment, there are some discernible differences. As such, the World Development Report by the World Bank (1990) and the United Nations Development Programs (UNDP) (2009) describe poverty as a state of long – term deprivation of those essential materials and non – material attributes of well-being which are considered necessary for decent living.

Environment – Poverty Nexus

For improvement in the living standard of both the rural and the urban dwellers, the position of the environment is essential. According to the National Planning Commission (NPC) (2005), the environment provides numerous opportunities for wealth creation and employment generation which consequently reduce poverty. The connections between poverty and environment are dynamic and context specific. It reflects both geographical location, scale and the economic, social and cultural characteristics of individuals, households and social groups (Ayo, 2012).

According to Jehan and Umana (2003), the environment – poverty nexus is a two-way causation. Environment affects poverty situations in three different dimensions namely:

1. By providing sources of livelihoods to poor people;
2. By affecting their health; and
3. By influencing their vulnerability.
4. Conversely, poverty also affects environment in various ways:
5. By forcing poor people to degrade environment ;
6. By encouraging countries to promote economic growth at the expense of the environment; and
7. By including societies to downgrade environmental concerns including failing to channel resources to address such concerns.

The environment matters a lot to people living in poverty. The poor often depend directly on a wide range of natural resources and ecosystem services for their means of survival. They are often the most affected by unclean water, indoor air, pollution and exposure to toxic chemicals. Ayo (2012) decried that the poor are particularly vulnerable to environmental hazards such as floods, prolonged drought, attack by crop pests and who cited in Gordon and Gordon (1996) remarked that much of the African

environment with regards to maintaining the critical balance between the ecosystem and human activities, the continent is moving toward un-sustainability. Therefore, addressing these poverty–environment linkages must be at the focal point of policymakers to eradicate poverty on the continent in general.

The Place of Sustainability in the Management of Environmental Resources in Nigeria

Sustainability is a vital element in development. In the words of Ballara (1991), sustainability is humanity’s ability to survive by means of the national use of renewable resources, by refraining from disrupting the ecosystem or over-exploiting natural resources and instead allow them to reach potential. The over-use of the environment for agriculture, mining and other purposes has destroyed its future use for agriculture. The Niger-Delta area and the arid region of northern Nigeria, where desertification has taken its toll, and to a lesser extent, some parts of Jos where tin and columbite were mined are highly impoverished.

According to Ayo (2012), these areas, particularly the Niger-Delta area, where petroleum has been mined, are of low utility for agriculture and other socio-economic activities thereby, perpetuating the level of poverty. In general, human factors that cause deterioration in the utility of the environment include;

1. Uncontrolled grazing
2. Over-exploitation of forest resources for fuel-wood and timber
3. Indiscriminate bush burning, extensive and unplanned land tenure system
4. Mining activities
5. Poor water and land management
6. Absence of significant private sector involvement in waste management
7. Weak enforcement of environmental laws
8. Inadequate environmental data, among others.

It is saddening to note that Nigeria’s rich environmental resource base is being undermined by these unsuitable practices. A report by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) shows that deforestation is high (3.5 percent annually) and is being encouraged by use of fuel wood for cooking, a common phenomenon in rural areas. Oil companies pollute water in the Niger-Delta while gas flaring, though a declining trend, still remains high. Though access to safe drinking water and sanitation is improving, the report also stressed that housing has reached a crisis point with only 31.1 percent having secured tenure.

Over the years, the Nigerian government has designed programs aimed at discouraging environmental resource abuse and consequent impoverishment of the countryside and the nation at large. Some of these programs include;

1. Desertification control through rational exploitation of forest resources as well as their replenishment through tree planting.
2. Water resources conservation through the preparation of a Water Resources Master plan and construction of dams.
3. Protection of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystem and habitats through the establishment of National parks, Game and Forest reserves;
4. Protection of endangered species of plants and animals by the endangered species decree;
5. National campaigns against bush burning which is being accorded prominence in the rural development sector;
6. Establishment of manpower training and research centers to provide background material for the policy making arms of government.
7. The National Economic and Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) document outlines the following strategies for engendering and promoting sustainability:
8. Strengthen the machinery for desertification, erosion and flood control.
9. Use space-based research and information technology for environmental management.
10. Develop a private-public partnership scheme to address the increasing urgency of waste management.
11. Install, calibrate and standardize relevant early warning systems for monitoring the onset of environmental hazards.
12. Promote the safe use of pesticides and agro-chemicals to protect the environment and public health, among others.

Protecting the Rural Environment for Poverty Eradication in Nigeria

Whatever is the specific component of a better life, sustainable development in all societies must have at least the following three objectives:

1. To increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life-sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection.
2. To raise standard of living, including the provision of more jobs, better education and greater attention to cultural and human values, all of which will serve not only to enhance material well-being, but also to generate greater individual and national self – esteem.
3. To expand the range of economic and social choices available to individuals and the nation by freeing them from the forces of ignorance and human misery.

In line with these developmental objectives, environment policies will only succeed in developing economies if they first address the issues of landlessness, poverty and lack of access to institutional resources. That is why Todaro and Smith (2006) maintained that insecure land tenure rights, inadequate credit and inputs and

absence of information often prevent the poor from making resource-augmenting investments that will help preserve the environmental assets from which they derive their livelihood. As such, preventing environmental degradation is more often, a matter of providing institutional support to the poor than fighting an inevitable process of decay.

The National Policy on Integrated Rural Development (NPIRD), states that Integrated Rural Development Programs shall fully support the objectives of the National Policy on Environment and Nigeria's National Agenda 21 which focuses on redressing the major existing environmental challenges in the country. This will essentially improve integrating environmental issues into development planning and decision making, strengthening the legal basis for sustainable development, strengthening, improving and coordinating the implementation of sound environmental management strategies, creating and improving capacity for sustainable development, promoting environmental education, information and public awareness and forging viable partnerships among various stakeholders and interest groups at community, national and international levels (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004).

Accordingly, strategies and policies need to be put in place to protect the rural environment from degradation. At this juncture, legislations have to be promulgated to facilitate the enforcement of the rights of the rural populace when their environment is degraded. International, efforts of the Nigerian government is yet to yield any commendable result.

It is therefore necessary, that such legislations targeted at protecting the rural environment should be focused directly at eradicating poverty at the grass root.

Conclusion

Much of people's concerns over environmental issues stems from the perception that people may reach a limit to the number of people whose needs can be met by the earth's finite resources. This may or may not be true, given the potential for new technological discoveries, but it is clear that continuing on the present path of accelerated environmental degradation would severely compromise the ability of present and future generations to meet their needs.

Therefore, to meet the expanding needs of the LDCs, environmental devastation must be checked and the productivity of the existing resources stretched further so as to benefit more people and poverty will eventually be ameliorated.

Recommendations

In order to bring to reality governments' efforts toward environmental management, sustainability and poverty eradication in Nigeria and the continent at

large, the following recommendations are suggested to facilitate the implementation of the numerous governmental programs on environmental management and sustainability:

1. Appropriate legislations should be put in place to facilitate the enforcement of programs aimed at environmental protection.
2. Empowering the various agencies responsible for degrading environment with adequate funds and manpower in good time.
3. The government, stakeholders and all interest groups should promote community-based environmental conservation and rehabilitation programs as well as support community-based initiatives to public education and enlightenment campaign on good environmental practices.
4. Integrating the rural populace into environmental programs particularly women who are frequently seen as the caretakers of rural resources like forests and water supply.
5. Encouraging research into the provision of alternative sources of energy and over-exploitation of environmental resources.
6. Lastly, providing and creating environmentally friendly job opportunities in both rural and urban areas.

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