

**A CRITICAL INSIGHT INTO ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA:  
ISSUES AND PROSPECTS**

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**Abstract**

*Care for the environment is everyone's responsibility for the protection, preservation and sustenance of environmental resources for well-being of biodiversity. Currently, many nations face enormous environmental challenges. This paper offers a critical insight into environmental challenges in Nigeria and proposes corresponding solutions for just and supportive attitudes towards the environment. Various factors are said to be responsible for that environmental problems in Nigeria. This ranges from not being patriotic, poor environmental awareness, non-implementation of national environmental policies, and the persistent lack of commitment to focused environmental management and development strategies. The most popular among the prescriptions for tackling the phenomenon of environmental challenges emphasized national policies, cultivation of environmental ethics, transparency and accountability in agencies directly involved in environmental management. Presently, these solutions have not been able to adequately address Nigeria's environmental challenges. However, the crucial role of the regulatory bodies, especially their oversight functions and personal aggrandizement have arguably been the ado for environmental care and the missing link in enforcing national policies and environmental development in Nigeria. The paper therefore recommends that Nigerian government should developed practical and effective laws and policies at all levels to address biodiversity issues which include careful and systematic planning based on comprehensive framework of laws that define processes, obligations and responsibilities. Again, Non-Governmental Agencies as well as individuals should committedly join the force to ensure safe environment for all.*

**Keywords:** Environmental Ethics, Environmental Challenges, National Policies, Sustainability, Patriotism

## Introduction

The environment is a complex and interactive system consisting of the atmosphere, land surface and bodies of water, as well as living things. The degradation of an element of the environmental system will have negative feedback effects on the others. Thus, the environment must be managed in a coherent and integrated manner through the implementation of a well formulated policy framework. The nexus between man and his environment is unique and very vital. Environmental ethics is a branch of ethics that studies the relationship between human beings and the environment. Drawing inspiration from the American environmental philosopher, John Rodman (Freya, 2010), environmental ethics must rest on the intrinsic values of natural entities that would confer moral considerability. For Rinkesh (Sabiagrik, 2021), ethics plays a significant role in the environment. Humans are a part of society as well as other cosmological entities, which include plants and animals in relation to each other. These later items are very important part of the world and are considerable functional part of human existence.

Nigerians are poorly aware of the wide range crises of their environment and the damages being done to it through their various activities like proliferation of borehole, deforestation, bush burning, open dumping of human waste, in-flow of outdated cars, pollution of rivers with sewage among others. More so, the climatic change and the increasingly grievous consequences are less recognized. It has been a teething concern that many Nigerians are not committed to environmental care. In fact, Nigeria as a nation plays down on environmental management due to some considerable factors that are man-made. Ekpebu (1998) argues that development will be meaningful if it does not increase Nigeria's vulnerability to environmental impacts. It is a truism that Nigerian environmental foundations are depleted and her economy is fast declining, her social fabric is deteriorating, and her political structure destabilized.

There is minimal established environmental protocol or information system for accessing environmental information. The current provisions in national educational curricula is not substantial in providing environmental awareness. In addition, there is the challenge of weak environmental legislation and enforcement to coordinate environmental plans and actions.

While acknowledging the considerable and appreciable contributions of some Nigerian environmental scholars, this paper subscribes to the implementation of environmental ethics which

is the task of philosophy to ensure safer environment for all. The arguments made in this paper are analyzed in twofold. First is the identification of environmental challenges that affect the entire nation. Second is the possible solution through the applicability of policies for a sustainable environment.

### **Environmental Challenges in Nigeria**

The various challenges that confront Nigeria include the following:

#### **Improper Disposal of Wastes**

Significant negative environmental impacts accrue from improper dumping of waste products which can easily be observed in many places both in major and minor cities like Lagos, Onitsha, Aba, Minna, Lokoja, Port-Harcourt, to mention but a few. In Aba, Abia State, for example, due to a lack of proper planning, funding and effective implementation, the solid waste management scenario is becoming worse every day and appeared insurmountable (Udodili, 2012). This city is facing miserable solid waste management crises due to rapid growth in population, poor city planning, industrialization, provision of appropriate dumping sites and insufficient funding. Generally, improper solid waste dumps are spreading different diseases in the nation. The major contributing factors for the inefficient municipal solid waste management systems in aforementioned cities which were used as case studies are lack of environmental ethical consciousness, social awareness and community involvement, implementation of environmental policies, improper resources including improper equipment and lack of funds. Solid wastes are seriously affecting the environmental conditions in Nigeria. The inefficient solid waste management system had created serious negative environmental impacts like infectious diseases, air and water pollutions, obstruction of drainages and loss of biodiversity.

#### **Lack of Proper Care for Mentally ill Persons**

In his counselling session with some counsellees, Esibor Idohonoba, a seasoned clinical psychologist stated that too many mentally ill people live on the streets rather than in the hospitals and psychiatry homes. He agreed with Yang, a once New York City mayoral campaign candidate, that money is better spent on building facilities than on the treatment of mentally ill people.

Nigerian high ways such as Ibadan, Upper-Iweka in Onitsha and Benin City express ways are full of mentally ill people with junk of dirty materials and cooking items. Worst still are the female ones among them who are being impregnated day after day by sane men of questionable characters. Besides, the lives of people are threatened by the insane characters. As such, right to safety are sometimes being violated by such human condition as people walk around the streets (Adepoju, 2020).

### **Lack of Proper Care for Wildlife**

Traditionally, wildlife is undomesticated animal species, inclusively are all organisms that grow or habituate wild in an area without being introduced by men (Usher, 1986). Nigeria is blessed with wild variety of plants and animal species as sources of wealth to the nation through regulated tourism. It is widely taken that human interactions with wildlife are a defining experience of human social life. However, there is a potent threat to wildlife which has led to the extinction and reduction of numerous species and uncountable human deaths and economic losses. Ijeomah, Ogogo & Ogbara (2013) stated that wildlife management is facing several challenges in Nigeria which show up in forms of encroachment into wildlife habitats through hunting, fishing, grazing, collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), logging, seed collection and mining that results in habitat degradation and species migration.

But even inside the national parks created purposely for protection of species, game populations still appear to be under threat. Ijeomah and Emelue (2009) reported that many herds of elephant at both the Cross River and Kainji Lake national parks have emigrated to Cameroon and Niger Republic respectively, and populations of some species in these parks have continuously decreased, while some endangered species have vanished from the park environment. This is an indication that every game species in Nigeria including those abundant in national parks are under threat especially as owners of parklands are agitating to reclaim their lands in the face of human population explosion and poverty.

### **Wrong Excavation of Sand**

Soil excavation refers to the removal of soil in order to lay foundations of buildings and install other structures such as pipelines, cables, etc. Soil excavation and sand-digging may be used interchangeably although sand digging differs slightly from soil excavation in the sense that the former defines the removal of soil to sand-fill wetlands or for embankment in road construction.

Sand digging in Nigeria has become a disturbing issue because it has caused dangerous erosions that resulted to loss of landed properties, displaced families and the damage of agricultural produce. Sand-digging and soil excavation in Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area, Ogun State have given rise to nationwide concern (Akinola, 2012). The processes of degradation in the aforementioned communities have intensified in recent times due to uncontrolled urbanization that sometimes ignite civil protest. Corruption has made people not to maintain the required parameter distance from residential areas and major highways before excavating the soil. The crude method of soil excavation is causing untold damages to private properties and infrastructures such as roads, electricity poles and drainage system.

Akinola (2012) found that the impact of oil extraction, brewery and cement industries, gold mining, road construction and steel plant have direct negative impacts (like cancer of the lungs) on the welfare of citizens because these industries are situated at residential areas than industrial layout. The impacts of these projects on the local people can be summed up as deprivation and poverty. Oil drilling, gold mining and blasting of limestone and iron ore result in displacement, dislocation and other attendant consequences. In addition, these projects lead to loss of employment opportunities, air and water pollution, deforestation, decrease in soil fertility and ill-health. There have been clashes between host communities and site workers due to lack of compensation and or inadequate compensation from either the government or private company as the case may be.

Using an African Polycentric Sustainable Environment Model (APSEM) for restructuring decision making on environment in order to conserve and protect environmental resources will go a long way to tackling this particular crisis. This model and other proposed relevant mechanisms would enable local people and professionals or practitioners in the environment to have a robust dialogue and mutual understanding with the local government officials in order to re-position urban councils to effectively manage urban environment and conserve natural resources (Akinola, 2012).

## Sporadic Boreholes

Water is essential for every existence, and its importance cannot be overemphasized. Fresh water represents the main sources of safe water for household use, sustainable development, and human survival (Orubu, 2006 pp. 231-233). Due to the poor investments of the Nigerian government in water supply, it has been estimated that over 50% of its citizens have no access to good water (Ayantobo, Oluwasanya, Idowu & Eruola, 2012). The fresh water sources available to the local inhabitants are either unsafe or difficult to obtain. In some instances, women and children need to walk for hours to fetch drinking water. These have led to proliferation of ground water in many parts of Nigeria (Okhuebor, Izevbuwa, 2020).

The growing rate of Nigerian population, urbanization and individualism have necessitated drilling of boreholes in an uncontrolled manner. Naturally, the state should concern itself with provision of amenities, creating a stable political and legal environment that is conducive to sustain life (United Nations Development Programme -UNDP, 1997). Lack of provision of water supply by the government has made borehole drilling a continuous enterprise. Every house owner needs water supply and it is now a pride of place not to go about looking for water from the neighbourhood. There is a constructed borehole in almost every compound, offices or business establishments within major cities like Onitsha, Lagos, Abuja, Calabar and Asaba, to mention but a few (Eja, 2002). The development of borehole projects is mainly carried out by private drillers for individuals from the time public water supply systems in various states stopped functioning. Many cities especially in the Southern part of the country like Delta and Benin have shallow water table which makes it less cost intensive to construct boreholes and hand-dug wells within so many places as the need arises. The quantity and quality of groundwater reserve can be seriously affected by proliferation of drilled bore holes and hand-dug wells by introduction of intensive pressure arising from heavy abstraction of water as a highly vulnerable resource. World Health Organisation (WHO, 2006), in its specification says that depletion of groundwater is usually because of over exploitation of groundwater resources with little or no intensive recharge system especially in areas of low rainfall that can cause a natural recharge process.

As much as boreholes provide fast and cost-effective access to portable water, the effect of its proliferation can be devastating such as lack of standards in drilling boreholes. More so, when boreholes are sporadically drilled and water is generated from different points at interval, it may

lead to reduction of flow and ground water level reduction. There is also high level of pollution and contamination through indiscriminate springing up of waste collection and disposal sites in various nooks and cranny of the cities.

Water is life and access to good quality water cannot be overemphasized. However, the proliferation of boreholes may lead to a long-term environmental hazard. Increased human activities particularly the indiscriminate location of septic tanks, soak-away pits and pit-latrines, disposal of refuse and waste, and other materials that can leach into the groundwater constitute a major health quagmire. With false assumption that the water is 'pure', majority of those living around continue to drink the water without adequate and proper treatment.

It is recommended that the state government should first do the needful by supplying portable water to the masses and secondly to enforce policies that will regulate the construction of boreholes so as to ensure that it is constructed to standard by professionals.

### **The Use of Outdated Vehicles**

It is a truism that Nigeria has become a dumping ground for outdated cars which most Western countries have rejected as no longer safe in their environment. The genesis of this problem results from the inability of the Federal Government to provide better means of transportation and promotion of more qualitative life. Therefore, due to poor economic status and dire need for mobility, Nigerians resort to second hand vehicles which are scraps in some other countries. Only about 10% of the masses can afford brand new cars. Most of these cars ply high ways causing air and noise pollutions which are detrimental to health. Majority are not quite aware of the fact that old cars consume a great portion of energy which directly or indirectly affects the environment (Reynolds, 2021).

Used cars discharge more carbon contents as they are made up with the earlier technologies that are not so much in favour of the environment. Therefore, they constitute global warming. The engines get worn out with time and they are unable to burn the fuel in the required ratio (Green, 2018). Car pollutants create negative impacts on the natural resources like air, water, and soil and deplete the quality of these resources very badly. Pollutants like nitrous oxide harms the ozone layer which is essential and protects from the ultraviolet radiations from the sun.

## **Addressing the Environmental Crises in Nigeria**

Having analyzed the environmental challenges in Nigeria and their negative impacts on biodiversity, this paper proceeds to discuss the way forward towards a healthy environment.

### **Ecological Education Through Environmental Ethics**

Environmental ethics invites Nigerians to act in responsible manners towards the environment. It submits that humans are a part of the society as well as other living creatures, which include plants and animals in relation to each other. According to Pope Francis (Laudato Si, 66), environmental harm is caused partly by the tendency to claim lords and refuse to acknowledge our human limitedness— a dynamic that causes us to mistake God’s command for humans to “have dominion” over creation (Genesis 1:28) as exploitative license rather than a vocation to “cultivate and care for” God’s good gift of creation (Genesis 2:15). Environmental ethics points out that anthropocentrism leads to “practical relativism”, which values creation only to the extent that it is useful to man (Laudato Si, 118, 122). It criticizes as well “anthropocentrism,” that is, the belief that humans are radically separate from non-human natural world. It is essential that we respectfully accept other living beings and the physical environment in an ultimate sense (Naess, 1973). Of course, our factual knowledge leads us to expect imminent danger in our interactions with the environment especially with regard to dangerous species of animals and these elicit negative responses. However, with the concept of 'biocentric equality', Naess meant that humans should act in the world as if it were a home where brothers and sisters dwell together.

Equally, we are called as individuals to respect the environment in which we live and work and the biological organisms with which we share the physical environment. If we base our logic on acting within a common environmental ethical system, then we have a basis for environmental education, discussion and debate about common goals and plans, and common action to resolve global environmental problems. Of course, there is no utopian solution to environmental dilemma. Ecological education (Laudato Si, p. 213) which should provide information and seek to form habits must occur everywhere in the society: “at school, in families, in the media, in catechesis ... political institutions and various other social groups.”

### **Effective Implementation of National Policies on Environment**



The basis of environmental policy in Nigeria (Golub, 2018) is contained in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. According to section 20 of the Constitution, the State is empowered to protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air and land, forest and wildlife of Nigeria. In addition to this, section 2 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Act of 1992 (EIA Act) provides that the public or private sector of the economy shall not undertake or embark on or authorize projects or activities without prior consideration of the effect on the environment. As a result, the Federal Government has established National Environmental Standards Regulation Agency, (NESREA) and tasked them with the responsibility for the protection and development of the environment, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development of Nigeria's natural resources, environmental technology, including coordination and liaison with relevant stake holders within and outside Nigeria on matters of enforcement of environmental standards, regulations, rules, laws, policies and guidelines (Kate, 2018). The NESREA Act (Nigerian Federal Ministry of Environment, 2016) allows each state and Local Government in the country to set up her own agency for the protection and improvement of the environment within the state as there are ANSEPA in Anambra, ESWAMA in Enugu, Abuja Environmental Protection Board (solid waste control/environmental monitoring), to mention but a few. For strict adherence to these policies, specially designated agencies and persons were formed under the umbrella of "environmental monitoring team", but the unfortunate result is that most often they end up collecting bribe from offenders and neglect their duties. Hence, the problem is on the implementation of these policies. Nigerians are good in making laws but they lack the moral probity to keep them.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper has established that there is a wide range of environmental challenges in Nigeria. The fact that the environment is in continuous crisis which cannot be denied. Crisis is an integral part of life and living but there is need to seek for solution for every crisis. The harm done to the environment today has aftermath effect on the future generation. Pope Francis referred to this as "brutal injustice". Nigerians must think positively and act responsibly towards the environment. Awareness and conscious efforts are the keys for ethics of environment in Nigeria. Man is at the centre of it all; either to protect the ecology or to suffer the effects of environmental nonchalant attitudes.

Therefore, this paper recommends that the problem of environmental challenges must be addressed by checkmating the excesses of harm done to the environment by different individuals and by enforcing the legal restraints towards environmental degradation. Furthermore, it recommends that Federal Ministry for Transport in collaboration with the Federal Government should help with cheaper, safer and more effective means of transportation in order to reduce the number of vehicles that ply the roads and consequently, the quantity of air pollution.

More still, political elites must re-focus, re-emphasize and pursue with nobility the vision as well as the mission of environmental philosophers by promoting environmental ethics. Nigerian government in modern times should develop more practical and effective laws and policies to address wildlife conflicts which includes careful and systematic planning dependent on a comprehensive framework of laws that define processes, responsibilities and obligations (Adewumi, et al. 2018). Through the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act (2007) (NESREA), Nigerians are to develop wildlife consciousness and apply responsible wildlife actions and have regard for other entities in the ecosystem.

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