

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

## **Development and Environmental Sustainability in Nigeria: An African Perspective**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research titled “Development and Environment Sustainability in Nigeria: An African Perspective” examines the effect of development on the African environment. Recent trends and tenets of development are accredited to technological advancements infrastructures and industrialization. Thus, development is respected within the light of social and economic productivity and mostly applauded within the ambiance of consumable scientific, architectural, agricultural and engineering, etc. Notably, the afore-mentioned directly affects the environment and this has become a conundrum to both living and non-living organisms within the environment. It is undisputable that development is good and encouraged, but not at the expense of those to whom it’s meant for. This work then is an exposition of the effects and defects of development that infringes on the environment and proposed a possible solution to environmental sustainability. The paper advocates for a religio-cultural relation with the environment; a relationship that is rather personified than objectified, using Nigeria as a case study. This paper employs the methods of exposition, explication and critical analysis.

**Keywords:** Development, Environmental Sustainability, Nigeria, African.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The environment without a doubt is the best-accommodating planet for human and living organism’s spatio-temporal existence. This implies that the degradation of the environment will directly result in the degeneration of humans/living organisms within

that environment (Ogar and Bassey, 72). Human consciousness on the effect of environmental degradation has resulted in conferences, sensitization, campaigns, and demonstrations by different intellectuals, governmental and non-governmental organizations and researcher's et al both nationally, continentally, and intercontinentally on this need of environmental sustainability cum preservation (Bassey et al, 39).

The question of environmental sustainability and preservation is a natural call not designated to only living human organisms but also to biotic, abiotic and symbiotic factors (Bassey, 161). Hence when the activities of one become horrendous for the other, the environment becomes bared, a condition of degradation results and both factors become volatile to terrifying and hampering dangerous deteriorating environmental conditions.

Environmental sustainability simply put; is the process by which human and non-human activity on the environment is geared towards improving human living standards and protecting/preserving the environment in *pari-pasu* (Igbudu, & Amadi, 17). It is an effort to preserve and maintain the ecosystem *vis-a-vis* proffering and promoting modalities through which human living beings can enjoy a better malicious co-existence.

Development within the sense of environmental considerations has to do with the exploration, modification, and manipulation of the environment to yield on expected envisaged result for the improvement of the human standard of living or achieve an economic goal, reputational goal or meet up with sociological stratification (within or outside the ambiance of modernization) (Bassey & Pimaro, 130). Development and environmental sustainability within the afore-stated auspices imbue the idea of the exploration, escapade, modification, and manipulation of the environment for the improvement of human/living organisms standard of existence and co-existence in a way in which the environment is not degraded, deteriorated, and the ecosystem is not altered or hampered. 'An eco-friendly interaction between humans and their environment'.

This work is geared towards the assessment of the developmental activities *visa-vis* the quest for environmental sustainability in Nigeria, in *pari-pasu*. Notably, the term sustainability connotes the ability of a society or ecosystem to continue inadequate functionality into the infinite future without being forced into decline through exhaustion of key resources.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

The concept 'environmental sustainability' is important within this century where the effects of environmental degradation stares us in the face as the earth is currently experiencing in global warming due to depletion of the ozone layer, expansion of the universe due to electromagnetic aggravated effect, deterioration of agricultural and

agro-based productivity, environmental initiations and reduction in the healthy state of individuals resulting from reduced functionality of the immune system (Offiong and Dibie, 269). Bosah opines that environment degradation is the "deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water, soil, the destruction of the ecosystem and the extinction of wildlife. It is seen as any change or disturbance to the environment perceived to be deleterious or undesirable". (Bosah, n. pag). It is the constraints manipulation and exploitation of the environment to the decline of its resources. Sustainable development is an edifice that employs the enthusiasm of degradation but channels it to productivity for continuity. The key nature content of sustainability is continuity and openness to or docility modification amidst of human civilization, without which there is no sustainability' It is the mutual and responsible interaction with the environment to the degree of which there is no depletion or degradation of its natural resources and maintenance and preservation of the quality of the environment. This also has to do with the maintenance and preservation of those agents: actors and factors that account for environmental sustainability.

Environmental sustainability entails consciousness, an attitude, behaviour or character approach towards the self and one's environment (Adebimpe et al, 2001). It takes cognisance of population, sustainable yield, sustainable waste disposal, and competitive development and industrialization. Whiting, Peter on his idea on environmental maintenance averred that for renewable resources, the rate of harvest should not exceed the rate of harvest and the rate of harvest should not exceed the rate of regeneration, the rates of waste generation from projects should not exceed the assimilative capacity of the environment and for non-renewable resources should require comparable development of renewable substitutes for that resources". (Whiting, 182). Manipulation of the environment should be geared towards development that is eco-reifying, in this case this manipulation becomes a process of change in which the exploitation of the resources within the environment which entails economic investments, technological and infrastructural transformation and reformation, and institutional change are structure with the focus and ideation of consistency, projecting into the future while fittingly containing present needs. It meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, it is that which takes account of economic, social and environmental factors to produce projects and programs which will have results depended on finite resources. Exploration and manipulation of the environment for development ought to also toe the prescriptions of Prof. Ojong in his idea on Environmental Sustainability in Nigeria: challenges and prospects, quoting Olaitan Ojuoye who considers the meaning of suitability to be:

S	-	Which stands to – Safe
U	-	Universally accepted
S	-	Stable

T	-	Technology that benefits all
A	-	Anti-population
I	-	Improvement in quality of life
N	-	Non-toxic
A	-	Awareness
B	-	Beautiful
I	-	Indigenous knowledge
L	-	Last-cost of production
I	-	Income
T	-	Total quality
Y	-	Youth

Although this prescription as a consummate whole seems unattainable due to relative ideation it can yield results on environment sustainability under positive scrutiny.

Ugboma averred that environmental sustainability allows for the needs of man to be met without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Moreso, it is the responsible interaction with the environment to avoid depletion or degradation of natural resources and allow for long-term environmental quality (52). Also, Agunwamba opine that the practice of environmental sustainability helps to ensure that needs of today's population are met without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their need (2227).

Environmental sustainability takes cognizance of the health of the eco-system in the long run and aims at protecting and preserving the eco-system. This is achievable through

1. Protecting and preserving resources of heath and health productivity.
2. Consideration of renewable resources by diversifying into energy sources that are non-renewable but consistently potent and effective e.g. solar and wind energy, which will reduce global warning etc.
3. Ensure the production of factors of environmental reification especially on species diversity and ecological structure to give the opportunity for further innovation in technology medicine/medical improvements.
4. An interaction with the environment, bearing in mind its rights and values. E.g. right for the existence of forests, for the existence of co-habitats and protection of rainforests.
5. National policies and decisions on economic and infrastructural development should highly take 'environmental preservation' into integral consideration. Intricately analysing into the future, the present decisions. Temperature, harsh weather conditions, water shortage, disease vulnerability, and agricultural productivity should strictly be put into consideration during economic and infrastructural decisions as it affects the environment, without which the

phenomenon of '*The aikpuchi anya*' (the phenomenon of concealment) as propounded by Asouzu will manifest strongly. A situation in which the present gain blinds us from envisaging the future repercussion, especially when this gain is built on selfish faculty foundations, such as could come from inconsiderable development (Ogar et al, 64).

## **DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: THE NIGERIAN SITUATION**

Every society that has a quest for development often contends with the issue of environmental sustainability. Nigeria as a developing nation is not immune to this baneful situation. As afore-mentioned, the environment is often abused through technological and infrastructural developments, degrading agricultural activities, deleterious economic blast activities and human nonchalant disposition towards environmental affairs.

Development simplistically is the gradual growth or advancement of a thing, society, being, etc. to a better appreciable state. Hence the consideration of the term development within the Nigerian ambiance entails the mode of Nigerian technological, infrastructural, societal and economic advancement to a seemingly better state as manifest in present-day experience.

Nigeria from inception has practised an environmentally dependent economic system as ken speckled in the agricultural products trade both nationally and internationally. Before this discovery of crude oil, agricultural products were out of major export products, ranging from palm oil, cocoa, cola-nut, groundnut, sugar cane, etc. However, the discovery of crude oil has drastically endangered our environment. Firstly the terrific veer of economic interest from agriculture to crude oil has led to abandonment and maltreatment of the environment. In the area of crude oil drill, the environment is painfully spilled in such a manner that there is very low agricultural productivity; both terrestrial and aquatic. Most affected among these areas are the Niger Delta regions of the South-South and southeast, which include: Edo, Bayelsa, River, Cross River, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Ondo, Abia, Imo and Anambra State.

The environmental hazards recorded in Ogoni, Ikwere, Okrika of Rivers State, Urhobo and Isokos of Delta State areas in Nigeria, are enormous, hampering the cultivation of crops and rearing of life-stuck, due to the vandalization of pipelines and pipe-line exposures. This has also displaced humans, claiming the lives of many and creating undue environmental waste.

The building of industries most of which are in non-strategic locations, which emit and produce waste, ranging from carbon, indecomposable waste, to waste that cannot be recycled. Nigeria is now beset by unimaginable environmental pollution and

hazard which has terrifically degraded our environment. Some of these include gas flares, fire disasters, floods, erosion, toxic waste, etc.

Due to development, there is terrestrial aquatic encroachment, construction that has altered drainage and water routes, overlabouring of rivers and seas by waste, etc. Developmental structures are without concession or considerations of possible hazards. Further, deforestation and destruction of water bodies have led to suffocating alteration of the eco-system, our environment has lost many terrestrial and aquatic creatures that balance the ecosystem and engender good health of mind and body. New conducted research found out that, in Nigeria, disposed plastics, toxic waste and industrial wastes on water bodies which most times decompose to micro-plastics and other chemical substances are ingested by fish which in turn is eaten by humans, endangering human health (Agunwamba, 850).

Due to diversification of the economy to infrastructural development and industrialization, agricultural and eco-preserving activities are terrifically relegated to the background (Mbonu, 34). The forest zones are ripped of its heritage and left bare to the detriment of the eco-system, without frantic efforts for rejuvenation. Stated, if left on its own, the environment has a wonderful way of revivifying and balancing itself without any form of deprivation. The Nigerian Population density and need of occupancy is a herculean threat to environmental sustainability even rural agriculturally dominated areas are not be signed with the need of habitation, hence affecting a proper ecosystem interrelationship. Illiteracy is another major bare to environmental sustainability. Most citizens who consume products of industrial are not educated on how to dispose of the remnants of industrial waste, as such use then to abuse the environment. Unhealthy international developmental competitions for international recognition, etc. are all barriers to environmental sustainability.

The quest for infrastructural development and undue urbanization has blinded national interest in proper urban and town planning. This is why there is a predominance of flooding in riverine areas. Naturally designated drainage plans are veered to achieve urban crafted aesthetics, in the long run, when nature takes its course it results in environmental disaster. Recently, it is scientifically opined that the earth has increased mechanical activities on the earth-cross. This is an indication that in due course, they may be the predominance of an earthquake across the earth. Nigeria is not alien to this and has to take caution.

Much urban and rural viscosity in Nigeria is beset by terrific health challenges due to environmental abuse. Illnesses such as malaria, typhoid, cholera, diarrhoea, cancer etc. are emanates of environmental abuse (Federal Ministry of Environment Nigeria). More, the random collapse of buildings and infrastructures across the country is a clear indication of poor developmental structure, town planning, and topography study. The government is not conscious of its automobile importations. Importations are at random

whether environmentally destructive or unfriendly. On a stringent note, the economy of the country allows for little or no futuristic rationality. This has drastically affected our approach to environmental demands, rendering most citizens insensitive to environmental phenomena and demands.

## **A WAY FORWARD**

From the afore-discussed, it is pertinent that if left without redress the Nigerian environmental situation will degenerate into a pitiable, empathetic and non-solvable state. It is on this note that there is a trumpeting cry on the need to pay attention to the Nigerian environmental condition.

Firstly, is that environmental issue should be addressed with the mood of sincere religious pious alacrity. The environment should be envisaged for what it is; an extension of the human existence; a mother foundation of human existence; a companion of human existence; a repository pious pensively, human will develop a fraternal and cordial collaborative co-existence with the environment to the degree that, as they obey the first law of existence which is “self-preservation”, this obeisance will transfuse into their interactions with the environment such that, the preservation of self will directly imply the preservation of the environment. As a result, if the self is allergic to carbon, if the self is allergic to toxic substances of all sorts, then the environment should not be beset by these toxins. This is analogical implying that, the environment should be given that which suits them for their self-preservation. Man is mandated to table care of the environment nurture if and make it productive and not to destroy it. With the afore-stated, there is need for a societal cum general re-orientation of the Nigerian populace on fact that “man is part of the environment”. Bearing this in mind, infrastructural placements, industrialization, urbanization and economic development will be geared towards improvement of human-living standard and the preservation of the environment.

Environmental regulatory bodies and agencies ought to see to it that situation of industries and economy boosting ventures are both humanly and environmentally friendly. More so, that industrial produce are of human sanity and healthy environmentally accommodating, and economically manageable. These regulatory bodies and agencies should pay rapt attention on importation, to ensure that goods and services imported into the country are both of human health and sanity and environmentally friendly, ranging from edible items to automobile (being conscious of the level of carbon oxide in the atmosphere. In like manner, proper and qualified expertise should be employed on this regard, without bias. This follows that governmental policies should be formulated crystal clear in this regard with independent mandate for the execution of this task for the good of the state and its populace. In suit, environmental bodies and their creatures should be valued and preserved with devotion.

Proper and functional policies with their enforcing agencies should be formulated to regulate activities on vegetation, forest, and water bodies.

There should be encouraged agricultural sanitary practices and mechanization. And the government in union with educational institutions should encourage environmental studies and professionalism.

It is within these considerations and even more that our political state (Nigeria) can experience environmental sustainability and account for sustainable development. In concomitance with this ideation, Pope Francis emphatically and pathetically states thus in his address to the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). “They live in precarious situations: the air is stale the natural resources are depleted, the rivers polluted, the soils acidified; they do not have enough water for themselves or their crops; their sanitary infrastructures are very deficient, their houses scales and defective” (Francis, and Alicia, 179). This statement pictorially exposes the Nigerian situation of environmental degradation calling for optimum attention. Furthermore in his (Pope Francis) in-call in the different continental delegates he averted thus “the presence of all of you here shows that environmental issues are extremely important and invites us to once again look at our planet, hurt in many regions by human greed by war like conflicts that engender a wealth of evils and misfortunes, as well as for the natural catastrophes that leave in their wake poverty and devastation” (Word of life, May/June, 2019. 179). The wakeup call here is to what environmental degradation and abuse will yield “poverty and devastation” which affects both poor and rich alike (poverty and devastation; respectively). Notably, the global nature of the earth makes it glaring that the defects of environmental degradation within a locality affects other parts of the earth in one way or the other, hence, the salvaging effort of a locality is a good for the entire earth. Now imagine the harm Nigeria has cost the globe, and the harm it still does on the globe.

The Pope toeing a religious approach to the issue of environmental degradation avers that “Native people.. become for everyone a wake-up call that emphasizes that man is not the owner of nature, but only the manager, the one that has as vocation to watch over it with care, so that its biodiversity is not lost, and the water can remain healthy and crystal clear, the air pure, the forest leafy and the soil fertile(Francis, and Alicia, 179).

He further emphasises a humanitarian relationship with the environment, advocating an empathetic approach to environmental conditions “the earth suffers and the native people know of the dialogue with the earth, they know what it is to listen to the earth, to see the earth, to touch the earth. They know the art of living well in harmony with the earth. And we have to learn that” (180). Although making reference to those of the in-depth rural communities, he calls on all humans to develop human fraternal relationship with the environment to enhance harmonious co-existence.



In like manner, he urges that industrialization and development should primordially take cognisance of the demands of self-preservation and well-being of both humans and their environment. Thus he asserts

“the aim is always to affirm centrality of the human person, remembering that the new process that are being developed cannot always incorporated into schemes established from the outside, but must start from the same culture..... it is necessary to bet on innovation, entrepreneurial capacity, the protagonists of local actors and the efficiency of productive process to achieve rural transformation in order to eradicate malnutrition and to develop in a sustainable way the rural environment...” put technology really at the service of the poor” (Francis, and Alicia, 43).

Pope Francis admonishes a unique and distinct approach to development in relation to stability. Its emphasis is that centrality on the human person, indigenous consumability, environmental reification, grassroots/general affordability, participatory economic values and production efficiency should be the *Summum* consideration of technology and developmental ideation and manifestation (Francis, and Alicia, 45). A technological development that will be at the humble service of the poor and the affluence alike, without any dis-service to the environment.

The environment (earth) is the most wholesome accommodating structure freely given to man to fully manifest and project his potentiality and ability. Thus, to be for the environment in any ramification even in its minute nature is to be for one’s self and to be against the environment in any ramification is to be against one’s self.

## CONCLUSION

Development is an important character of growth and productivity. However, when developmental structures and edifice tend to endanger those to whom this development is directed, it becomes futile and doom. Since development is majorly environmentally dependent, it is pellucid important and necessary to consider the factors and actors, that account for environmental sustainability before embarking in any developmental project. In doing this;

- Adequate attention should be given to possible environmental hazards that could emanate from a developmental structure.
- The populace should be educated in the effects and defects of abusing the environment, and on the possible and simple ways to respect and care for the environment.

- The government should enact rational and proficient/implementation policies that will protect and preserve the environment.
- Qualified, dogged and accountable personnel should be employed to faster environmental preservation and sustainability. Notably, this body should be independent.
- Developmental structures should properly consider indigenous and cultural values of the nation (especially those in relation to the preservation of the environment). Also, developmental structures should be all embracing, focusing on the general public not a sectional part of the country.
- The issue of environmental sustainability should be a matter of great concern for every Nigerian, government, public and private sector.

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