

# **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND THE POLITICAL IMPERATIVES OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Abstract**

After clarifying the concepts of environmental education and national development, this paper examines the place of the former in the actualization of the ideals of the latter. Environmental education implies inculcation of certain attitudes, and the taking of certain decisions and actions about the physical natural environment and its resources for the enhancement of the socio-economic and the political well-being of a nation. Certain political decisions and steps are imperative if environmental education is to facilitate the desired national development. Certain political decisions and steps are imperative if environmental education is to facilitate the desired national development. These are lighted with suggestions made to overcome some impediments that may be confronted.

## **Introduction**

Development scholars and practitioners are almost everywhere contending with a host of problems. Development is dependent on a number of factors; prominent among them are men, natural resources and money. Of these three factors natural resource endowment stands out to be the most significant because it is the source of wealth and power to a nation. No doubt today, political decisions of nations have come to be influenced by the endowment of a basic natural resource of economic significance in the international system.

## **Conceptualizing Environmental Education and National Development**

The concepts of national development and environmental education are sometimes taken for granted. Such tendency is probably responsible for generating misunderstandings and misapplication of their ideas to the developmental efforts of a nation. Thus the aim of this section of the paper is to examine both the concepts of environmental education and socio-political development and the relevance of the former for the pursuit and actualization of the ideals of the latter.

## **Environmental Education**

From the standpoint of international communications, there arose a real need for common agreement on the meaning of the concept/term, environmental education. This problem confronted the delegates during the opening sessions of the First International Working Meeting on Environmental Education in the school curriculum at Foresta Institute in the summer of 1970 (Saveland, 1974: 3-4). In this meeting, the definition of environmental education which was agreed upon, and adopted, reads:

Environmental education is the process of recognizing values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the interrelatedness among man, his culture, and his biophysical surroundings. Environmental education also entails practice in decision making and self-formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality (Cеровsky, 1971:17).

Peters (1993:171) defines Environmental Education as the process of educating our citizens about matters and issues that affect our environment - our homes, villages, citizens, farmlands, water supplies, forests and weather in order to improve our environmental awareness, skills and engender a change of attitude towards our environment and thereby arouse concern about the physical problems around us. To Emeh (1996:50) environmental education is:

The educational process that deals with the human inter-relationships with the environment and that utilizes an inter-disciplinary problem solving approach with value clarification concerned with education process of knowledge, understanding, attitudes, skills and commitment for environmental

problems and considerations.

The above definitions emphasize the acquisition of knowledge and skill relevant for man's interaction with the natural environment.

Nobi and Lawal (1991:101) see environmental education from three perspectives: (i) Education from the environment, (ii) Education about the environment, (iii) Education for the environment.

Education from the environment, refers to the experiences and knowledge we gain or acquire from our surroundings or physical environment. Education about the environment, refers to the study of our environment; what it is made of, its resources and what we can make of it. Education for the environment has to do with our commitment to environmental protection, conservation and sustainable development.

From the various definitions of environmental education it may be noted that three crucial elements are identifiably constituting the concept of environmental education. First, creating awareness and understanding about the environment. Second recognizing man's relationship, responsibility, attitudes and commitment to the environment. Finally, developing efficient and effective environmental management skills and strategies for the survival of present and future generations.

### **The Concept of Development**

It may be noted that there are problems or difficulties in conceptualizing development in Nigeria. The problem of conceptualizing 'development' arose out of the confusion among the social scientists during Nigeria's independence. On attainment of independence in most African countries including Nigeria, the Western trained social scientists assumed a leading role in the conceptualization of development for their countries. They gave a list of attributes, which they considered to be the irreducible attributes of a developed country or polity. Such attributes include specificity of functions; structural differentiation enhanced adaptive capacity and widespread citizen participation in the political process of the entire system. Thus Coleman (1961:127) summarized that:

The political development (should) be seen as an interminable contrapuntal interplay among the processes of differentiation, the imperatives of equality and of the integrative adaptive capacity of a political system.

In other words, the Western social scientists saw the Western countries as models for development; therefore conceptualizing development in such a manner was bound to create problems, since development is an ongoing process.

The Latin American Theologian, Merino (1969:201) argued that we should talk of liberation, not development when he said:

The term liberation avoids the pejorative connotations, which burden the term development. At the same time it is the logical expression of the most profound possibilities contained in the process known as development.

This views national and political development as the process of emancipation of man from poverty, exploitation, polluted environment and dependence on foreign aid and imports. The liberation view of development also tends to agree with the contention that development starts with people and not with goods.

It is also the view of (Schumacher, 1975:171) that development starts with the people their education and a technology that will facilitate a sustainable management of their resources to enhance their well-being. Thus he recommends a technology with a human face, a development strategy, which considers the quality of life as its supreme goal. Development is not just money, profit, number of industries only: the quality of the environment, the health of the nation, the type of education, the discipline of the citizenry and quality of administration or organization are more essential ingredients of development goals.

From the perspective of political economists, development of a society is essentially a transformation of its mode of production and meeting the many demands or needs of the society. Generally, development is the sum total of social, economic, political, scientific technological and cultural capacities of a society and the way they are utilized to produce needed change. National development encompasses social, cultural, economic, physical and political dimensions.

### **Environmental Education and Political Imperatives of National Development**

Until recently, according to Maduka (1980) Nigeria had maintained three basic assumptions about our relationship to our environment:

- (i) That our environment exists primarily for us to enjoy, not to modify or conquer.
- (ii) That our environment has infinite resources,
- (iii) That technological and economic growth are synonymous with progress and are worth whatever they cost.

Consequently, we are constructing dams, drilling oil and establishing industrial complexes without taking proper precaution, regarding the destruction of land, vegetation and the pollution of the environment that result from these operations.

Environmental education influences our realization of ecological violations resulting from our activities or operations. We have realized that our economic and developmental activities constitute an ecological violation.

The relationship between environmental education and politics of national development resides in the fact that nearly every field of enquiry can be studied in the light of its ecological implications. In other words, there are ethical and political implications of the ecology. The very notion of environment implies both moral obligation and political imperatives.

Thus Wheeler (1973:77) observed that "some who hold a classical view of politics argue that ecology is part of politics, applied ecology is but politics devoted to a special range of environmental problems".

The attainment of political and economic development requires not only industrialization and utilization of the human resources, but the effective deployment of knowledge and skills of such academic and practical disciplines as environmental education. Thus, the task in the paper is the contributions which environmental education, environmental educationists and environmentalists make towards the attainment of the goals of national development. Consequently certain political imperatives of national development in Nigeria have been necessitated, as explained below:

#### **(i) National Environmental Policy**

During the latter half of the 1970s public concern about environmental conditions at national and international levels became more widespread than ever before. In fact in the past two decades government has evolved a national policy concerning environmental exploitation, The main thrust of the national policy on environment in Nigeria is to achieve sustainable development.

#### **(ii) The Creation of Ministry of Environment**

This ministry is charged with the responsibility for co-ordination, formulation and the implementation of the national policy on environment. All relevant bodies and agencies-department of forestry of the Ministry of Agriculture, environmental health sanitation unit .of Ministry of Health, and oil and gas pollution control unit of the Ministry of Petroleum Resources, coastal erosion unit, and environmental assessment division of the Ministry of Works, flood control department of the Ministry of Water Resources and the Federal Environmental Protection Agency have been transferred to the Ministry of Environment.

#### **(iii) Actualizing National Power Through the Physical Environment**

The physical environment or the geographical location of a nation is a source of a nation's power. The environment is the core element of state power because, first, all states in the international system are geographically defined. Second, the climatic conditions of the state determine whether a state has potentials for agriculture or not. This also determines the ability of a nation to feed its populace. Third, the geographical location can bestow strategic

advantages or disadvantages upon a state. Nigeria has a long coastline and access to waterways with direct access to the sea. A landlocked state cannot think of adopting a hostile foreign policy towards a state upon which it depends for access to the sea. Lastly the size of a state is a geographical factor, which affects national power. It may be noted that the great powers have tended to be very large countries. Larger countries have the tendency to have greater mineral resources and other natural endowments. Nigeria, the known giant of Africa enjoys these benefits.

(iv) **Actualizing National Power Through Environmental Resources**

Availability of economically significant environmental resources is also a basic source of a nation's power. Natural resources are very essential for enhancing the process of industrialization and overall development of state. In Nigeria, the discovery of the natural resource of crude oil has enhanced her power in the international system. Nigeria derives about 91% of its foreign exchange earnings from oil exploration and production activities. She is a member of OPEC.

(v) **Eradicating Neocolonial Perception of National Resource (OIL) Exploitation**

It had been observed that people of the developing nations including Nigeria have adopted a particular political or neocolonial view of exploitation of the natural resources within their boundaries by the industrialized nation. This is primarily because of the environmental crimes

of the oil transnational corporations in particular operating in Nigeria (Nwoke 2000). Nigeria is vigorously combating this seemingly negative view through her participation in the politics of international environmental regulations.

(vi) **Participation in the Politics of International Environmental Regulations**

There are today a great number of international agreements to which Nigeria is committed and which address various aspects of environmental protection, particularly pollution control. These include: (Aluko 2001: 55 - 56).

- (a) The Stockholm Declaration of 1972 on the Human Environment.
- (b) The Convention on Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage of 1983.
- (c) The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of 1986.
- (d) The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer of 1990.
- (e) The International Convention for the Protection of the Pollution of the Sea by Oil 1954.
- (f) The Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution of 1976.
- (g) The Bamako convention on the ban of the import into Africa and the control, of trans boundary movement and management of hazardous waste 1993.
- (h) The Basel convention on the control of trans boundary movement of hazardous waste and their disposal of 1989.
- (i) International convention for the prevention of pollution from ship (MARPOL) 1973.
- (j) United Nations Conference on environment and development 1992 i.e. the Rio Declaration.
- (k) United Nations convention on the law of the sea of 1982.
- (1) The African Charter on Human and People Right.

In other words environmental education has facilitated international political cooperation between Nigeria and other nations of the world. Environmental issues cannot be tackled by one nation alone successfully. Pollution particularly needs the cooperation of other nations to address. For instance the preservation of the ocean fisheries require concerted effort and cooperative behaviour of men and nations. This means that environmentalism cannot be divorced from international politics. In other words, environmental education has created the awareness of International Environmental Rights among nations. International right according to Kant (1979) is the right of nations in relations to one another. International environmental law prescribes the rights to nations in relation to one another regarding environmental issues, of pollution, protection and all other environmental crimes.

(vii) **The Development of Environmental Law in Nigeria**

The political concern about our environment has also led to the development of environmental laws in Nigeria. The following are some of the environmental laws in Nigeria today:

- (a) Federal Environmental Protection Agency Act 1988, reviewed in 1990 and amended in 1992 and 1999.
- (b) National Environmental Protection (Pollution Abatement in Industries and Facilities Generating Wastes) Regulations 1991.
- (c) State Environmental Protection Edicts etc.
- (d) (viii) **EIA as an Environmental Management Strategy**
- (e) The political and economic philosophy of sustainable development aimed at preserving the environment for future generation is now pursued with the management instrument of environmental impact assessment (EIA).
- (f) **Conclusion**
- (g) National Development includes industrialization, large-scale agriculture, exploitation of natural resources, availability of educational and health facilities, security and the enhancement of political stability and political power.
- (h) Environmental education is an important factor in enhancing a nation's development as \-rayed above. There is however the problem of ignorance of environmental education in Nigeria. The factors responsible for this include the fact that it is both a later comer and new -comer in the Nigeria educational scene (Anijah Obi 2001:31). There is also ignorance among employers and policy makers of environmental education and what environmentalist or environmental educationists can do. In other words there is ignorance of the practical value of environmental education and its application to job situation and national development issues.
- (i) The misconception of environmental education is another factor responsible for the ignorance about environmental education. This is traceable to the problem of distinction between environmental -science and environmental education. There is lack of knowledge of the relationships between environmental education and oilier disciplines. Most of us can actually appreciate that most human • issues or national development issues require interdisciplinary approach in the search for their -solution.
- (j) **Recommendations**
- (k) (i) What can be done to redress this problem of ignorance of Environmental Education with a -view to enhancing a better understanding and knowledge of it as it holds the prospects for national development? First it may be suggested that environmental education as school subject be introduced at the secondary school and tertiary levels of education.
- (l) (ii) Second, the Federal Ministry of Environment should adopt the international policy of using environmental verifiers as professionals to monitor environmental compliance by companies and other government parastatals, whose activities pollute the environment.
- (m) (iii) Thirdly local governments and the National Orientation Agency should educate Nigerians on the importance of Environmental Education.
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