

REPOSITIONING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Abstract

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For over two decades, our policy makers have been grappling with how best to solve the present environmental problems and prevent future ones. A well elaborate and comprehensive policies and programmes for environmental education have been put in place, but the implementation of these policies has not been taken seriously for lack of commitment. This informed this paper, to examine Nigerian Environmental Education and to suggest ways of repositioning the programme.

Introduction

In recent years, terms such as desertification, flooding, toxic waste, gully-erosion, deforestation etc have become part of our every day vocabulary. The popularization of these terms stems from increased awareness that our developmental efforts have negatively affected our environment. Although the desirability of development is universally recognized, recent years have witnessed rising concern about environmental constraints limiting development and impairing the quality of life for this and future generation.

Most concern for the environment arises from the effects of developmental activities on both the environment itself and man who inhabits it. In this regard, Caldwell in Nyangoro (1996:195), argues that, concern about the environment compels us to look at humanity as it lives in two realities:

The abiding reality is that of earth the planet- Independent of man and his works, the other reality-the transient reality is that of the world, which is a creation of human mind. The earth and its biosphere form a grand synthesis of complex interactive systems within systems, organic and inorganic, animate and inanimate. The world is the way humanity understands and has organized its occupancy of the earth; an expression of imagination and purpose materialized through exploration, invention, labour and violence".

In this sense, the interconnectedness of environmental issues and humanity should receive appropriate attention. Indeed, this interconnectedness was one of the major issues addressed by the RIO de Janeiro 1992, UN, conference on environment and development. This concern for environment and the amelioration of environmental problems created by man, is the main focus of Environmental Education (EE). This informed this paper, to examine the state of environmental Education in Nigeria and suggests ways *to make it effective*.

Meaning of Environmental Education (Ee)

Environmental Education is a vital component of efforts to solve environmental problems. These efforts must stay relevant to the needs and interests of the society and yet constantly adapt to the rapidly changing social and technological landscape.

Environmental Education (EE) has been defined by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCNNR) (1980), in Enem (2002:30), as the process of recognizing values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the interrelation between man, his culture and his biophysical surrounding. The World Wide Fund (WWF) for nature education sees it as the type of education, which helps in the development of insight, awareness, knowledge, skills and attitudes that help individuals to respond to the social demands of the environment (Enem, 2002).

There are various definitions adopted by the various stakeholders and government agencies, concerned with for the environment, which all boil down to the single fact of treating the present environmental problems, preventing the future occurrence of such problems and the conservation of natural resources.

The main focus of Environmental Education (EE) is how to reconcile human activity with sound protection of the environment and natural resources. The argument is not to preserve natural resources, but to conserve them; i.e., to use them wisely.

Causes of Environmental Problems in Nigeria

Development in whatever perspective, it is looked at, involves the exploitation of natural resources. In their course of development, human beings have made many changes in the environment. In Nigeria, both the government and private individuals have been involved in development activities, which have often resulted in the creation of environmental problems.

For over three decades, the Nigerian policy makers have been grappling with how to improve the agricultural sector which is considered the focal point of the economy. In the 1970s and up to mid~80s, a number of institutions and policies were set in motion to create self-sufficiency in food and fiber production, self-employment, rural development etc. Titilola and Igben (1992), in Essien (1998:132), have observed, "these policies and programmes have undoubtedly put increased pressure on the natural environment". This is because they involve massive exploitation of natural resources to obtain the required output.

Rapid urbanization and its accompanied industrialization has resulted in great extraction of resources and emission of wastes which have degraded the land, air and water.

The expansion and mechanization of agriculture have also resulted in the clearing of large expanse of forests, desertification resulting from over-cultivation and overgrazing, pollution of water through the use of agro-chemicals and have put smoke and dangerous chemicals into the air.

Mining activities have contributed greatly to environmental deterioration in Nigeria. In this regard Hutchful (1985), in Nyangoro (1996:212), observed that; oil industry activities in Nigeria -exploration, production, refining and transportation -have caused widespread social and ecological disturbances. These include explosion from seismic surveys, pollution from pipeline leakages, blowouts, drilling fluids and refinery effluents, as well as land alienation and widespread disruption of the natural terrain for construction of oil related industrial infrastructures and installations.

All these problems make the environment less productive and incapable of generating adequate income, employment opportunities; adequate industrial raw materials etc. For Nigeria to develop, the protection of the environment is an essential part of the development process. Without adequate environmental protection, development is undermined. Without development, resources will be grossly inadequate for needed investments. In this vein Awolola (1992), in Essien (1998:133), reported that the world Bank has analyzed the environmental problems in Nigeria and found that, soil degradation, water contamination, deforestation gully erosion, wild life and biodiversity losses, air pollution and the invasion by water hyacinth are the priority environmental problems facing the country. The report concluded that these losses lead to as high as \$5bn per annum, when translated into monetary terms.

Government Policy Responses

In historical perspective, Nigeria's development plans have been in line with the principles of environmental protection and conservation. However the degree of emphasis and reinforcement of regulations concerning the environment have been a far cry from what is desired. The ones that have often received primary attention were; slum development, water supplies and refuse disposal. In the 1980s, environmental sanitation was the only programme that got wider publicity and awareness.

In this regard Awolola in Essien (1998), explains that, there was still the need to: -

- i. integrate national development plans and policies with environmental sound management of wastes;
- ii give high priority to waste management in production and consumption programmes;
- iii. elaborate the linkages between sustainable development and waste management.

In order to respond vigorously to environmental issues in the country, the government enacted the harmful waste decree No 41 of 1988. The same year Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEDA) was established by decree 58, with the power to control indiscriminate wastes disposal, water and air quality and to enforce regulations concerning the environmental well being. This concern culminated in the establishment of a full-fledged Ministry of environment in 1999.

Evolution of Environmental Education in Nigeria

Historically, environmental education in Nigeria has been embedded in our developmental policies and programmes. The problem has been lack of emphasis and vigorous pursuance: of environmental concern policies and objectives. In the traditional society, Environmental Education was passed from one generation to another through traditional education rooted in cultural and social organizations of the communities. Thus in the rural societies, children imbibed EE while growing up but in modern societies, EE is cultivated in the citizens through government programmes and public enlightenment campaigns.

During the colonial era, EE elements were embedded and taught through formal education system, in subjects like nature study, agric, primary science, hygiene and arts and crafts. In recent times Environmental Education topics are incorporated and taught in the syllabuses of subjects like; Biology, Integrated Science, Geography, Social Studies, Agric Science, Economics, Chemistry etc. In geography for instance themes like ecosystem, environmental hazards, vegetation, population, soil and natural resources are taught in secondary schools. While at the post secondary levels, diploma and degree programmes are available in environmental related areas like Science, agriculture, medicine, forestry, fishery, wildlife and social sciences. The inclusion of environmental topics in our school curriculum at this stage was not backed-up with emphasis and proper enforcement of regulations. There is therefore lack of emphasis and vision of the type of environmental education the country needed.

Current Direction in Environmental Education in Nigeria

It was not until 1988 that the clear vision for and form of environmental Education in Nigeria emerged, essentially through the effort of a Non-Government Organization called the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF). The activities and programmes of NCF for environmental protection and conservation in the country came almost when the government had begun to show some levels of commitment to environmental education. In this regard the government launched the National Conservation strategy in 1986, established FEDA (as mentioned above) in 1988 and launched the National Policy on Environment in 1989.

According to Nigerian Environmental Study Team (NEST) (1991:133), NCF constantly pressed on government to include conservation education in the school curriculum and back-up her action by promoting conservation education in few states, notably Borno, Lagos, Cross River and Bendel (now Edo State). The NCF continued in her effort towards Conservation Education by making draft proposals for a National Conservation Education Strategy to the Government. NEST (1991:103), further reported that the proposals represented the most comprehensive treatment of environmental education as a school subject in the country. This draft proposal was adopted in the Yankari conference of 1988 and this became the starting point for a comprehensive and aggressive Environmental Education in Nigeria.

The Objectives of Environmental Education in Nigeria

The general aim of Environmental Education is to promote the quality of the environment and man's life. Specifically, it is to develop a citizenry that is aware of the total environment, its concern and problems, and has the knowledge, skills, attitude, motivation and commitment to individually or collectively work towards the solution of current problems and the prevention of future ones (Adara 1998).

Since the Environmental Education is regarded as the process through which people can acquire knowledge, skills, experience and values to enable them solve the present and future environmental problems, it was necessary to have common objectives for the world community. The Environmental Education objective common to all nations as enumerated by Essien (1998:336), and Adara (1998 :3), are

Environmental Awareness

This is to facilitate people acquire awareness of and sensitivity for total environment and it allied problems;

Environmental Literacy

Built on awareness, by the acquisition of greater knowledge and understanding of the components of the environmental system, the links between these components and their dynamics.

Environmental Responsibility

This involves making people to realize their role in determining and guiding change.

Environmental Competence

This implies a degree of mastery of the system and ability to act effectively on matters concerning the environment for its better functioning.

Environmental Citizenship

A concept of participatory membership in the system, i.e. citizens must actively participate in the prevention and solving of environmental problems.

To achieve these objectives, mechanisms and processes are required to assist us as a people to comprehend that we are part and parcel of the environment and whatever we do, affects it both in adverse and beneficial ways. We need also to acquire basic idea of the causes of environmental problems, skills useful to understand, prevent and correct the problems.

Implementation of Environmental Education in Nigeria

For the implementation of the National conservation education curricula in our schools, the following recommendations were made, as outlined by NEST (3991:107): -

- I. Uniform curricula for each level of education should be developed throughout the country.
- II. Writing of suitable textbooks and teachers guides on environmental education for primary and secondary schools'
- III. Conducting orientation workshops for teachers on the use of the textbooks;
- IV. Trial testing of the syllabuses, textbooks and teachers guides;
- V. Commencement of the programme by January, 1992, throughout the country;
- VI. establishment of environmental education clubs in all schools, colleges and universities,
- VII. organizing in-service and pre-service training programmes for teachers regularly, and;
- VIII. providing adequate funds to support all the above actions.

These are very elaborate preparations, but one has cause to be apprehensive about how soon environmental education can become truly integrated into what our children are learning in schools. The first four actions were to be taken before 1992, the year of commencement of the programme in all states and at all levels of our educational system, but from all indications it seem none was fully implemented. In this regard Ezeanya (1998:4), reported that the implementations of environmental education is yet to be fulfilled anywhere in the country for the simple reason that classroom implementation is yet to commence.

From the above, one can make bold to state that the implementation of EE in the country has not taken place and that such implementation always end up at paper presentation in seminars and conferences. Nigeria really has to pursue her objectives of environmental education religiously and with all vigor, otherwise, her desire to develop will continue to elude her.

Repositioning Environmental Education in Nigeria

Environmental problems are increasing and becoming very complex to understand and evaluate. Reasonable treatment of environmental issues has not been taken seriously by the stakeholders, NGOs and the citizens. Everyone knows there is the problem of pollution resulting from industrial discharge, indiscriminate use of chemicals, degradation of the environment also resulting from the massive exploitation of natural resources and poor agricultural practices yet, our action has been mostly on papers.

The anti-environmental protection and conservation feeling has been that there is no use of expending efforts and resources on environmental education, seeing that the country still has vast area of land and many other resources that have not been tapped. But obvious cases of gully erosion, flooding, overcrowding in the cities have left no one in doubt that effective environmental education is a must. In this regard the following postulations are made in order to repositioned EE in Nigeria: -

It is pertinent that planning and implementation of environmental education in this era should involve the local communities. Involvement of the local communities in EE programmes, will make them realize that it is meant for them and that it is also beneficial to them. A participation of the local community also yields high economic and environmental returns in implementing programmes of afforestation, soil management, parks protection, water management and sanitation.

More revenue should be devoted to the management of ecological problems and damages nationwide under a special organ of the ministry of Environment. In this regard, the ministry should play supervisory role to make sure all programmes of environmental protection and conservation are fully implemented by all states of the federation. Part of their work should be to enforce all regulations concerning the environment in the country.

Any educational programme that cannot produce measurable results is considered a failure. Hudson (2001), in this respect stated that, effective education requires the recognition of appropriate and meaningful strategies to help students discover more about the natural world, assemble information and facts, and to solve problems. Teaching children to become responsible and productive citizens will make them find significant, tangible benefits from Environmental Education. Nigeria EE should therefore be activity-based in order to produce economic as well as environmental benefits. In this regard Adara (1998:3), reported that problem solving or outdoor education strategies such as field-trips, projects, discussion, role play, peer teaching result in up to 90% learning and remembering as opposed to 10% in the traditional technique of lecturing. This is due to participatory learning that takes place with the teacher acting as a catalyst and team-member. This should be the method of imparting EE in Nigeria.

Orientation workshops and in-service training for teachers of EE in Nigeria should be taken as the first step towards effective implementation of EE. In the same way relevant textbooks and teachers' guides on environmental education for primary and secondary schools should be made available in all schools and colleges for effective take-off of the programme.

A strong partnership between the government, community and NGOs in the running and sponsoring of environmental education in the country should be another step taken to reposition environmental education in the country. The desire to communicate and educate effectively must be matched with programmes and leadership that will result in meaningful changes in policy and resource management. Partnership efforts among these organizations are the mechanisms that can lead to effective EE implementation. Where such collaborate efforts are obtainable, they must be expanded to all parts of the country.

Public education should be the main focus of EE in the country. Public education can be achieved through educational techniques like national documents, advertising, campaigns, demonstration; projects, schools, colleges' universities and local community out-reach.

Our stakeholders should adopt an environmental education policy, provide opportunities for staff development and evaluate EE along with the carrier-subjects. Environmental Education teachers who are to teach EE elements incorporated into our school curriculum should be given opportunity for development through training in workshops, conferences, in-services training in educational institutions where EE programmes are obtained for the teacher's role as a stakeholder demands a lot from him. For example, he is to incorporate EE objectives and strategies into the teaching of carrier-subjects, develop the students' skills, values and involve them in the process of protecting and educating others out of school on the environmental conservation education.

Research and training centers such as soil, forest and water conservation and land utilization units should be established and where they exist, should be strengthened by the provision of adequate facilities and funds.

There should be an incentive package for environmental restoration and pollution abatement incorporated into the curriculum and objectives of EE in the country.

Information about the environmental -friendly policies should be improved and made available to the general public. Ignorance is a serious impediment to finding solutions to environmental problems. There is a great need to overcome grave - lack of knowledge in soil depletion, land productivity etc.

To live up to these reforms must be the task that our stakeholders should embark on. In other words, these postulations should be immediately incorporated into the curricula for Environmental Education in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Although great strides have been made in the development of Environmental Education, curricula and institutional buildings like FEPA, National Resources Conservation council (NRCC) put in place, rapid population growth, the quest for industrialization and mechanization of agriculture will continue to pose significant challenges to the protection of the environment and natural resources. This calls for a quick response to the need for effective Environmental Education. EE should therefore, be given proper attention for, it is through it that future environmental advocates and problem -solvers are created. To generate new leaders in the management of environment, EE should recognize and respond to the needs of involving the general public in the planning and implementation of EE programmes, develop and strengthen research units, train staff on EE, create effective communication of environmental issues to the public and to establish a strong partnership between the government, private individuals and NGOS in the formulation and implementation of Environmental Conservation Policies,

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