

THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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This paper appraises the role of government in the management and conservation of natural resource in Nigeria with particular reference to biodiversity degradation and environmental pollution. The paper also examines some causes of these degradation and pollution.

Nigeria is a nation endowed with large and diverse natural resources which has considerable potential with respect to economic development. This is because these resources are abundantly available to be utilized. Natural resources are material source of wealth made up of biotic and abiotic resources which in summary include forest and its product, water and the marine organisms, air, land, material deposit that occur in a natural state which has economic value and are useful and necessary to human being. Biodiversity degradation, environmental pollution and depletion of natural resources have been issues of growing concern in Nigeria hence these resources are the main source of economic growth and sustainability.

BIODIVERSITY: Biodiversity otherwise known as biological diversity encompasses the variability of all organisms from all sources and the ecological complex of which they are part of. The term includes not only living organisms and their interactions but also interactions with the biotic (non living) aspect of their environment. It is the totality of the environmental resources and all the processes that sustain it. Some notable threats to biodiversity in Nigeria include: 1. Population Pressure. Nigeria has a population estimate of about 150 million people. This invariably means increase demand of natural resources. The resultant effect is the destruction of natural habitat for shelter, plantation, livestock production, grazing, food and other personal purposes. 2. Genetic Erosion. A substantial loss of species diversity in Nigeria has been as a result of land clearance for various uses, forest exploitation, oil spillage, desertification, drought etc. 3. Shifting cultivation farming system. This farming system remains the most common among peasant farmer who produce over 80% of the total food supply in Nigeria. This system however poses threat to biodiversity in that it is characterized by vegetation destruction, short fallow period, logging and felling of trees.

POLLUTION: Pollution is the introduction of substance into the environment that alters its physical, chemical and biological properties in such a way that it is harmful to living organisms. In this circumstance, the substances are termed as pollutants. There are two sources of pollution. The point source pollution, - pollution that result from definite source that is identifiable, and the non point source, - diffused pollution source that are not identifiable such as run offs. Pollution could be air, water or land. Air pollution: Main cause of air pollution in Nigeria and many other parts of the world include gaseous discharge from industries, indiscriminate open burning of waste, gas flaring, emission from automobile engines etc. Apart from constituting health hazards, air pollution threatens the existence of natural resources. Water pollution: Could be under ground or surface water pollution. Main causes include, partially treated industrial effluent discharges, indiscriminate dumping of sewages agricultural runoff (pesticide, residues fertilizer etc.), acid deposition on water channels, oil and grease, nitrogen, contaminated land etc. Water pollution reduces the aquatic life and significantly affects the society. Land pollution: Causes include indiscriminate dumping of industrial, municipal and hazardous solid waste, industrial effluent and domestic sewage discharge, tailings from mining and mineral processing industry. Land pollution militates against natural resources and cause problems such like land scalping, desertification, deforestation, erosion and extinction of wild life.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT: The federal government of Nigeria in an effort to conserve biodiversity and minimize environmental degradation passed a legislation which provides the legal framework for the implementation of polices on environmental protection, natural resource conservation and sustainable development. Some of these policies include the command-and-control approach. This involves direct regulation with monitoring and enforcement system that makes use of regulatory instruments such as standard permits, licenses and capital punishment. The

government also established reserves in different parts of the country. In this arrangement, large portions of land were set apart by the government with the objective of conserving biotic resources like wild plants and animals from extinction and to produce timber on sustainable basis. The natives were paid royalties on the reserved areas and were allowed some portions for burial purposes and worshipping of their gods. (Adeyoju, 1975). Similarly, the government welcomed partnership with stakeholders towards establishing and developing game reserves and national parks where biological diversities were kept and reared. This effort saw the emergence of some large game reserves in Nigeria like the Yankari Game Reserve, Nekede Zoo, Oyo National Park etc. Taxes were waved off for individuals in this venture. Again, indiscriminate burning of bush, vegetation destruction and pollution of water was made a capital offence by the Nigerian government. All these were geared towards safeguarding biological diversity and natural resources.

Pollution is a threat not only to natural resources but also to human being and the society at large. Thus, the Nigerian government through the established agencies had made frantic efforts towards the management of pollution in the country. For example, the government introduced measures to reduce, if not eliminate air pollution from gas flaring. Combustion devices as a matter of necessity were required to be installed by industrial companies. This device would prevent methane from reaching the atmosphere. After burning, gas is converted to heat, water and CO_2 which reduces pollution effects. Other industrial companies were demanded to install pollution abatement and waste regulation facilities in such a manner as may be determined by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency of Nigeria (FEPA). These facilities will take care of gaseous particles, liquid or solid untreated discharge. There were also tax policies aimed at averting pollution. For example, value added tax (VAT) exemption is granted by the federal government to Oil and Gas companies in respect of plants and equipments that are capable of re-injecting gas into the reservoirs. Again machinery, equipment or spare parts imported into Nigeria in connection with the processing and conversion of gas into electric power is exempted from custom duties. There were also emission charges for industrial companies. The higher level pollution attracts higher financial penalty and zero pollution level receives financial rewards. These were aimed at minimizing industrial pollution.

The government of Nigeria has made frantic effort to manage and protect their natural resources from degradation and pollution, yet 'much is left to be desired'. The federal government should embrace the idea of exchange of information, assistance and experience in natural resource management with advance countries of same ecological conditions. The outcome of this would be good policies and ideas that would make for effective management of natural resources in the country. Furthermore, management and conservation of natural resources is not only a government business. Therefore, the authorities and departments concerned should engage in extensive mass awareness and training for the people and resource users. This agrees with the UN conference on environmental development (UNCED) held in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil where the role of indigenous knowledge and local people were recognized as being vital and indispensable in the management and conservation of natural resources. Also, the use of integrated resource management should be adopted. This means that in altering one element in the system for the purpose of deriving advantage, care should be taken to assess the impact of that alteration upon the remaining components of the system. In this way, other natural resources could be conserved. Finally corruption should be checked among government institutions and personnel. Often, good government policies and efforts are thwarted due to corrupt personnel running for the government.