

URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS (NIGERIA)

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While there is now widespread agreement that urban environmental issues are important, there is little coherence in how international agencies and others define the urban environment and identify its critical problems. This is not just a semantic question, as it is intimately related to how and where funds are allocated and to who can expect to benefit from the resulting environmental improvements. Most of the confusion arises from the qualifier 'environmental' and what it should mean in an urban context.

If urban environmental problems are defined and pursued too broadly, then almost all urban development initiatives can be labeled environmental. For example, Einstein's oft-cited definition of the environment as 'everything that is not me', could be used to designate anything from better shopping facilities to better televisions as urban environmental improvement. There is no doubt that technological advances in agriculture, industry, and transportation greatly improved man's way of life. However, these activities, while providing the raw materials for production of goods and services have also resulted in pollution of land, atmosphere, vegetation and rivers (Okojie, 1991). The Nigerian environment today presents a grim litany of woes. Every state of the federation suffers from one form of environmental problem or the other in varying degrees. The northern part of the country is being literally "blown away" by wind erosion while the southern part is being washed away into the ocean. Between 1976 and 1988, a total of 2,000 reports of oil spillages were recorded with the discharge of two million barrels of oil into the environment (Ikporukpo, 1988). Urban cities and town in Nigeria are increasingly threatened by pollution of air and water and improper disposal of solid wastes while the rural areas are plagued by soil erosion, deforestation, and bush.

Over 2 million tons of soil are lost annually in south-central Nigeria, and this has cause great decline in agricultural yield (Dike, 1995). According to the NNPC (2010), a large proportion (about 63%) of the gas produced in Nigeria is being flared. By 2002 and 2003, gas flared remained as high as 45.4% and 42.7% while gas used was 54.6% and 57.3%, respectively. The economic costs in terms of lost incomes and reduction in the standard of living can therefore, be expected to be staggering. Nigeria's Niger Delta covers 20,000 square kilometers within wetlands of 70,000 square kilometers formed primarily by sediment deposition. The Niger Delta environment can be broken down into four ecological zones: coastal barrier islands, mangrove swamp forests, freshwater swamps, and lowland rainforests. This incredibly well-endowed ecosystem contains one of the highest concentrations of biodiversity on the planet, in addition to supporting copious flora and fauna, arable terrain that can sustain a wide variety of crops, lumber or agricultural trees, and more species of freshwater fish than any ecosystem in West Africa. The region could experience a loss of 40% of its inhabitable terrain in the

next thirty years due to extensive dam construction in the region. The carelessness in the oil industry has also precipitated this situation, which was perhaps best described in a 1983 report issued by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) stating that: “we witnessed the slow poisoning of the waters of this country and the destruction of vegetation and agricultural land by oil spills which occur during petroleum operations. But since the inception of the oil industry in Nigeria more than twenty five years ago, there has been no concerned and effective effort on the part of the government, let alone the oil operators, to control environmental problems associated with the industry”.

The rapid urbanization and increase in the population resulted in the depletion and degradation of natural resources. Industrial expansion led to the increase in the job potential and trade prospects in large cities, which attracted the rural population to migrate to cities and this, further converted the cities into a major slum and concrete jungles. According to a study by the United Nations, the level of urbanization has been estimated to cross 50% in 2005 and 60% by 2025. It has projected the world urban population by 2025 to be 5.2 billion, of which 77% would be living in developing countries (United Nations, World Urbanization Project, New York, 1993). Rapid urbanization is expected to continue. Projections show Countries of the Asia-Pacific region are no exception, given their very high population growth rates. Nine out of the world's thirteen mega-cities, with populations exceeding 10 million, are in Asia. The population in the region is expected to reach 4.8 billion by the year 2025 and 5.3 billion by the year 2050.

However, we shall expect the unsafe side of the environment which could be, increased traffic congestion in the cities. Lack of adequate sewerage treatment facilities, drinking water, encroachment of open spaces, littered garbage in the streets, polluted coastal seawaters are some of the evils of modern urban environment. The water in the rivers became unfit for human consumption due to the constant flow of untreated sewerage and effluents.

The management of urban environment problems is a complex one, there has been an effective effort to resolve the problems which in particular concerns the dynamic society and indeed has improved the understanding of the people in it to a certain level and they include: capability, technologies, financing options, parks and greeneries, increase co-operation and partnership. Rivers and seas should also be protected and dumping of waste into the river and sea should be prohibited. There is a need to monitor carefully these new initiatives, and detailed studies are required to examine the factors influencing the Success and failures of the partnership approach.

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