

Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract. The existence of man, apparently, is a function of the environment. This paper examined the efficacy of Environmental Policy in protecting the environment for the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper argues that inadequate implementation of these Environmental Policies which finds expression in the behavior of the political elites negates the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper notes that effective population growth management can facilitate sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper is set to achieve the following objectives; to show that Nigerian political elites are responsible for the inadequate implementation of Environmental Policies, to evince that effective population growth management can lead to sustainable development. The focus of this paper is guided by democratic elitism and relies on secondary sources of data. In line with the theory of democratic elitism the paper contends that the few who rule must rule with the interest of the people at heart which must be rooted in democratic values. One of the findings is that the anti democratic behaviour of the political elites hinders the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper recommended inter alia that Nigerian political elites must uphold democratic values and promote good governance in order to achieve sustainable development.

Key words: Environmental Policy, Sustainable Development Democratic Elitism, Population Growth Management Political Elites, Good Governance

Introduction

Man's survival on earth is supported by the environment. As man produces to satisfy his material needs, he impacts on the environment. But the more he impacts on the environment, the more the natural resources associated with the environment are depleted, leading to the disruption of the ecosystem which finds expression in the degradation of the environment. A degraded environment arising from man's activities constitutes a serious threat to human existence. In order to conserve natural resources for the present and future generations and protect the environment from being degraded, there is the need to formulate well-articulated and implementable Environmental Policies. Environmental Policy is any course of action deliberately taken by government to manage human activities with a view to preventing, reducing or mitigating their harmful effects on the environment. A well formulated and implemented Environmental Policy can lead to sustainable development. This can be achieved by protecting the environment and the natural resources from degradation and excessive exploitation beyond the carrying capacity of the earth.

Theoretical Framework

This paper anchors on democratic elitism as the analytical construct. Democratic elitism is a precipitate of the reconciliation between the theories of democracy and elitism. The theory of elitism is of the view that in every society, the few rules over the masses, thus dividing society into two groups - the rulers and the ruled. Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Mitchell are the leading exponents of the theory of elitism. The theory of elitism emphasizes the fact that the elites make decisions on behalf of the ruled and the elites can be found in any

organization (Ikpe 2000). On the other hand, democracy emphasizes the need for majority rule. That is the participation of the people in the process of decision making. It means that decision making or formulation of public policy should not be seen as the exclusive preserve of few individuals. The essence of the people's participation in decision making, which is the cardinal objective of democracy, is to reflect the interests of the people in the decisions and public policies. The effect is that it will enhance the formulation and implementation of people oriented public policies. However, the view of the democratic theory seem to be more tenable in the administration of the Old Greek City States which was an exercise in direct democracy. But with the exponential rise in population, it is no longer feasible for everybody to directly participate in the process of decision-making. Thus, there is the need for representative democracy which legitimizes the authority of elected representatives to make decision on behalf of the people. In making decisions or formulating policies for the people, the elected representatives must not only have the interest of the people at heart, but must also be transparent and accountable to the people. This appears to be the reconciliation point between the theories of elitism and democracy which has led to the theory of democratic elitism. The theory of democratic elitism expressly states that society is ruled by few persons, but the few persons who rule must rule in tandem with democratic tenets.

In support of the theory of democratic elitism, Karl Mannheim argued that society did not cease to be democratic by entrusting the actual shaping of policy to the elites. According to Mannheim, the people cannot directly participate in government, but they can make their aspirations felt at certain intervals and this is sufficient for democracy. He went further to say that in a democracy, the governed can always act to remove their leaders or force them to take decisions in the interests of the many. He also insists on selection by merit and shortening of distance between the elite and the masses in order to ensure compatibility between elite rule and democratic government (Guaba 1981).

It follows that democratic elitism presupposes the entrenchment of democratic institutions as well as the attendant democratic culture. In other words, it is not just enough to have democratic institutions such as political parties, independent electoral body, independent judiciary etc. but more importantly is the internalization and demonstration of democratic culture by both the elites and the governed. The relevance of the theory of democratic elitism stems from the fact that the formulation and implementation of Environmental Policy and in indeed any other public policies should be in concert with the people in order to reflect the yearnings and aspirations of the people.

The Efficacy of Environmental Policy in Nigeria

Considering the need to protect the environment for the achievement of sustainable development, Nigeria made efforts in this regard. At the international level, Nigeria was among the 80 nations present at the historic United Nations 1972 Stockholm conference on "problems of the Human environment" which addressed the need for greater environmental awareness and concern (Imevbore and Okondudu-Fubara 1991). At the national level, institutional arrangement was made to enhance effective decision-making and implementation.

In this regard, Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) was established to facilitate and coordinate sound environmental management practices. As a corollary to this effect, Federal Ministry of Environment alongside state Ministries of Environment were created. It should be noted that the national policy on environment aims to provide a rational, practicable, coherent and comprehensive approach to the pursuit of economic and social development in a way that minimizes contradictions and duplications while enhancing cooperation and effectiveness at all levels (FEPA 1989). Sequel to the establishment of these institutional frameworks, Environmental Policies were formulated. It should be reiterated that Environmental Policies were formulated to act as a guard against excessive depletion of natural

resources and also protect the environment from degradation. A degraded environment cannot meet the needs of present and future generations. The Environmental Policies formulated in Nigeria include the decree No. 42-The Harmful Waste (Special Criminal Provisions), Clean Water Act, Flood and Erosion Control policy etc.

However, inspite of these and other Environmental Policies and the attendant institutional arrangements at the state, national and international levels. The Nigerian environment, especially that of the Niger Delta Area is still under serious threat. This threat becomes more worrisome when one considers the fact that even in the face of the Environmental Policies; gas is still being flared in Nigeria. To corroborate this fact, Wami (2006), Okowa (2007) as cited in Alapiki (2008) noted that up till 1997, Nigeria was still flaring gas at 73.0 percent of its gas production, which was the highest in the world. The comparative figure for other OPEC countries were: Algeria 4.8 percent; Indonesia 5.5 percent, Qatar 0.0 percent and Saudi Arabia 15.6 percent. Surprisingly, even with the huge investment in the Nigerian liquefied natural gas, gas is still flared in Nigeria up till this moment.

The flaring of gas, particularly in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria freely pollutes the environment. The unrestrained discharge of chlorofluorocarbon, methane gas and nitrogen oxides into the atmosphere pollutes the air. Gas flaring and seismic activities have caused acid rain, soil degradation and depletion of wild life thus threatening the traditional means of livelihood like hunting and farming (Alapiki 2008). Pollution arising from oil spillage destroys marine life and crops, makes water unsuitable for fishing and renders farm lands unsuitable.

Environmental pollution such as the dumping of toxic, non-biodegradable bye-products of oil refining activities into streams and rivers poses threat to the environment. In Ogoniland, it has been recorded that 30 million barrels of crude oil were spilled Ibeanu as cited in Alapiki (2008). Akpan (2006) as cited in Alapiki (2008) reports that cases of on-shore and off shore oil spillage were recorded. Between 1976 and 1970, oil spill cases stood at 2,676 and by 1998 the figure had gone up to 5,744 with a total of 2.6 million barrels of crude oil released into the host communities.

The dismal report on the environment in Ogoniland by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) wich was submitted to the Federal Government of Nigeria is a confirmation of polluted and degraded environment in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Owugah (2006) as cited in Alapiki (2008) reports cases whereby oil companies brazenly discharge untreated toxic waste into adjoining rivers and creeks, some of which serve as the only source of drinking water for the people. In the absence of any alternative sources, the people are compelled to drink and bathe in the polluted water and eat the poisoned fish from it. No wonder the people of many oil producing communities suffer from certain strange ailments and diseases, and common sickness such as respiratory tracks infections, cholera, dysentery, virginal infections and skin rashes.

Another test of the efficiency of Environmental Policy in Nigeria is the ravaging desert encroachments in the North. The menace of erosion in the South-East part of the country, particularly Anambra and Enugu States is also an environmental problem that has made life uncomfortable for the people. Again, is the 2012 unprecedented flood across the length and breadth of Nigeria which rendered thousands of Nigerians homeless, destroyed property worth millions of Naira and even led to loss of lives. The above facts prove the fact that environmental policy in Nigeria is not adequately implemented for the protection of the environment.

The State, Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

According to the Liberal view, the state is the machinery for decision-making and implementation. It harmonizes the different conflicting interest of man. Alapiki (2009) sees the state as a symbol of authority. However, the Marxian perspective sees the state as an instrument of domination, exploitation and subjugation of the masses. Thus, the Marxian perspective

considers the state not necessary if society must know justice. But the state must exist given the criticism against Marxists on the effect of a stateless society which naturally plunges man into a Hobbesian state of nature. This is driven by the self preservation instinct in man which naturally sets him on collision course with his fellow man, thereby leading to “war of one against all”. Given the necessity of a state, it is also important that the state must not only reflect the yearnings and aspirations of the people but must also be seen taking conscious, pragmatic and realizable steps towards meeting the felt need of the people. In order to actualize this, a safe and clean environment that guarantees sustainable development must be the priority of the state.

Chakravarty (1991), while maintaining the need for appropriate policies to prevent further ecological damage through institutional reforms, noted that public policies must be addressed to the needs of the local people. However, the state and its institutions do not exist in a vacuum. The actors of the state man the institutions and personify them to the extent that the behavior of the actors of the state will go a long way to determine the efficacy of the institutions in formulating and implementing Environmental Policy. The actors of Nigerian State exhibit negative attitudes such as lack of economic incentives and professional monitoring of facilities, few and poorly trained implementing officers. There is gross under funding of the environmental sector by the Nigerian state (Adilije, 2011:93). There is also management deficiency in terms of utilizing scarce resources to achieve environmental objectives (Edoho and Dibia, n.d.).

Another fact is that the actors of Nigerian state see the state and its apparatuses/institutions as means of amassing wealth and personal aggrandizement. This makes politics a zero-sum game and ascendancy to power becomes a “do-or-die affair. This has led to electoral fraud such as rigging or falsification of electoral results, undue influence of the electorates mostly through money, and thuggery (Oddih 2007). The implication is that the leaders that emerge from such elections characterized by electoral frauds are not the popular choice of the people. The concepts of “god fatherism” and “loyalty” deny the people of their political sovereignty as the few influential persons-the so called godfathers in the political system determine who become the leaders of the people. The corrupt practices of Nigerian state actors are the bane of environmental management in Nigeria (Okafor 2011). Consequently, rather than formulate and implement Environmental Policy for the protection of the environment, Environmental Policy is not adequately implemented. The continuous flaring of gas with the attendant pollution of the environment coupled with the massive erosion and flood in Nigeria explain the extent to which Environmental Policy has failed in Nigeria.

Environmental Policy failure is the inability of the Environmental Policy to regulate and curb the unfriendly environmental practices for the protection of the environment. An unprotected or degraded environment cannot guarantee sustainable development. According to the report of World conference on environment and development (WCED) in 1987 entitled “Our common future” sustainable development is that which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (see OECD 2007 and Moro 2008). For the efficacy of Environmental Policy in achieving sustainable development, the people should participate in the formulation and implementation of Environmental Policy. On the contrary, the non-involvement of the local community in the formulation and implementation of Environmental Policy has obviously given rise to Environmental Policy failure. For instance, Kio and Ogrigiri (1990) observed that soil conservation and erosion control efforts at Udi were successful because of the full cooperation of the local community. The same scheme failed and was abandoned at Agulu because of the unwillingness of local farmers to adopt the new farming methods introduced.

It follows that development programmes must be rooted in democracy. One of the cardinal tenets of democracy is that the people must participate in the decision-making process.

It is only when people participate in the process of decision-making that their felt needs can be imputed into the decision, thereby reflecting their overall interests and development. The participation of the people in decision-making can only be guaranteed in a people oriented electoral system which keeps intact the political mandate of the people and ensures free and fair elections. It is only by so doing that accountability, transparency and rule of law can be upheld as necessary ingredients of democracy for the achievement of sustainable development.

Ferrani (1991) noted that the natural resources base is now facing environmental bankruptcy and if it is expected to support Africa's rapidly increasing population, government must make the necessary policy interventions to deal with issues relating to environment, resources and population. There is therefore the need for new and innovative policies that are guided by the goal of managing population growth in order to ensure an appropriate balance between population and the natural resources base. The point is that population in Nigeria is rapidly on the increase. The Population Institute as contained in the National Human Development Report (2009) notes that as at mid-2009, the population of Nigeria was 152.600 (PRB). It also projected that in mid-2050, the Population of Nigeria will be 285, 100,000 with a projected increase of 87% from 2009 levels (PRB) and the population growth rate will be 2.6%. This population growth rate, according to Population Institute may make it more difficult for failing states to provide adequate schooling, nutrition, immunization and other essential services. It also notes that population pressure can also lead to environmental degradation, food insecurity and even conflict. This poses a threat to the natural resources and the environment.

The Way Forward

In order to achieve sustainable development in Nigeria, the electoral system must be reformed in such a way that can restore the political mandate of the people. This will enable the people vote into public offices credible leaders who will be responsive and responsible to the felt needs of the people, particularly as it concerns the formulation and implementation of Environmental Policy for the protection of the environment. In the true spirit of democracy, the people who are the beneficiaries of Environmental Policy and Programmes should be part of the formulation and implementation of environmental policies and programmes. There is also the need for awareness campaign to educate the people especially at the local community on the dangers of unfriendly environmental practices.

The institutional framework must be restructured, and reactivated in other to enhance effective environmental management. The right personnel must be placed in the right position in these institutions. This will enable the institution to monitor weather conditions and act fast on early warning signals.

There is also the need to ensure population growth management. The people need to be educated on the need to control birth considering the adverse effects of overpopulation vis-à-vis the available resources. Again more funds should be made available and corruption should be eradicated.

Concluding Remarks

It is obvious that environmental policy when well-articulated and implemented can protect the environment for the achievement of sustainable development. Unfortunately in Nigeria, there is Environmental Policy failure which hinders the achievement of sustainable development. In other to achieve sustainable development, the environment need to be protected, from unfriendly environmental practices such as overgrazing, deforestation, gas flaring, oil spillage, bush burning indiscriminate dumping of refuse and toxic materials and blocking of water ways etc. There is the need to ensure "development without destruction". Good governance rooted in democracy and effective population growth management can

guarantee the efficacy of Environmental Policy for the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria.

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