

ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND THE NIGERIAN STATE

Joannes Asikogu PhD
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu.

Abstract

Environmental pollution as a global challenge also poses a significant threat to the Nigerian state, impacting the nation's ecological integrity, public health and overall well-being of our country. This study will critically examine the causes, consequences and the government action and initiative in curbing these pressing problems. This study provides an overview of the key sources and types of environmental pollution in Nigeria, which includes air pollution, water contamination, noise pollution and soil degradation. Therefore, this study provides analysis on the regulatory framework and policies put in place to combat environmental pollution in Nigeria. It also emphasizes the role of international agreements and collaborations in mitigating trans-boundary pollution challenges. It is the position of this study, that the government should bring all these environmental challenges to a final full stop , by strengthening its environmental governance, enhancing enforcement of environmental laws, educates the local communities and equally promotes sustainable development practices.

Keywords: Environment, pollution, Environmental problem, Nigeria state, Ecology,

Introduction

Environmental pollution is a pressing challenge globally and Nigeria as a nation is not exempted from its adverse effects. Environmental pollution we can say is an undesirable or harmful substance which affects the natural environment. The Wikipedia encyclopedia defines pollution as “introduction of harmful substances defiling or making impure, especially contamination by noxious substances or contamination of the environment as a result of human activities”¹ These harmful substances can be in the form of pollutants such as chemicals, particles, noise, or energy and they can equally disrupt the normal functioning of ecosystems, harm human health or damage the environment. The committee on pollution of the United States National Research Council (1965) defined pollution as “an undesirable change in physical, chemical or biological characteristics of air, land and water that may or will harmfully affect human life or that of other desirable species, our industrial processes, living conditions cultural assets that may or will waste or deteriorate our raw material resources.”² These environmental issues have actually become a source of concern for all categories of people. Nigeria as a developing country is facing a lot of challenges which geared toward the fast deteriorating of the environment due to environmental pollution which threatens both its natural beauty, the health and well-being of its citizens. This source of worry has reached all categories of persons-scientists, academics, leaders and the general public in our country. Since we are integral part of nature, Nigerians must reflect on how their actions and inactions impact the delicate balance of our ecosystems and work towards sustainable practices that support and promote biodiversity and ecological health. For Miller; “environment is the aggregate of external conditions that influence the life of individual or population, specifically the life of man and other living organism on the earth’s surface.”³ Nigeria as the most populous country in West Africa is well known for its natural resources, diverse ecosystem and vibrant culture. Since we are not the sole owner of the earth, but share it with other living creatures. It becomes necessary that we know the danger of continuous depletions or reduction of resources of the environment.

Many efforts has been made over the years to clean up the environment in Nigeria, but pollution remains a major problem and equally possess continuing risks to the wellbeing of the people. These

problems are undoubtedly greatest in developing nations, especially Nigeria where traditional sources of pollution like industrial and household waste; acid rain; climate change, oil pollution, industrial emissions, poor sanitation, poor waste management, contaminated water supplies and desertification are other of the day.

These environmental issues have taken a toll on our environment and we've already started seeing some disastrous effects in the form of poor health on humans; a rise in sea level; depletion of non-renewable resources; melting of glaciers; extinction of species; polluted landfills; toxic dust; decreasing soil fertility; a rise in air and water pollution; and many more.

Human beings are considered to be the most intelligent species living on earth. This could be why it is the only species on earth that has civilized itself over the decades to a large extent. Today, human beings boast of being superior to all other animals, but what is the use of such great intelligence when environmental ethics are not followed? In Nigeria for instance, cutting down trees is something that many humans do for their own benefit and pleasure without any concern for the animals that are dependent on trees for survival. Just because we are in possession of all these natural resources does not mean that we can use them in any manner we choose without keeping anything for future generations.

Causes of Environmental pollution

It was Socrates who said that “unexamined life is not worth living” but I can say that ‘a polluted environment is not worth habiting’. In Nigeria, we experience all forms of pollution daily and it has become a part of us because the masses have no option but to live with it. The government and the relevant stakeholders on their own part are not in a hurry to totally eradicate it. To effectively and efficiently address this great challenge of environmental pollution in our country, it becomes crucial to delve into the root causes of this environmental pollution.

Pollution is the unfavorable alteration of our surroundings, wholly or partly as a result of man's actions or inactions through direct or indirect in energy patterns, radiation levels, chemical constitution and abundance of organisms. Generally, environmental pollution occurs as a result of

negative activities of human beings in the environment, that is, abusing the environment through the acts of disobeying the laws enacted relating to the protection of the environment. They do this equally for their own selfish interest without putting other habitats of the environment into consideration. This is the reason why man is called to embrace the ethics of the environment which deals with the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its nonhuman contents. According to George; “this effort reminds man that for too long he had: forgotten that the earth was given to him for usufruct alone, not for consumption nor for destruction, still less for profligate use.”⁴ There are different forms of pollution, which includes Air pollution, Water pollution, Noise pollution and Soil pollution

Noise pollution

It is excessive or disturbing noise that interferes with normal activities causing discomforts, annoyance or harm to living beings. It can come from various sources such as traffic, industrial machinery, construction activities and even loud music

Noise pollution is also at its worst in densely populated areas. Unwanted sound, or noise, such that produced by air planes, traffic or industrial machinery, or radio repairing shops is considered a form of pollution. It can cause hearing loss, stress, high blood pressure, sleep loss, distraction and low productivity. Sounds are produced by objects that vibrate at a rate that the ear can detect. Most humans can hear sound between 20 and 20,000 hertz, while dogs can hear high pitched sounds up to 50,000 hertz. Noise pollution is related to the intensity of the sound or the amount of energy it has measured in decibels; noise intensity can range from zero, the quietest sound the human ear can detect, to over 160 decibels. Solution to noise pollution include adding insulation and sound proofing to doors, wall and ceiling using ear protection; particularly in industrial working areas, planting vegetation to absorb and screen out noise pollution and zoning urban areas to maintain a separation between residential areas and zones of excessive noise. Violent noise may cause temporary or permanent impairment of hearing. Noise is also of the major causes of stress and many of the other human afflictions associated with tension, anxiety, accident proneness, high blood pressure and other diseases. The noise produces in urban area due to industrial activities, increases in traffic etc., cause tension and stress.

Air Pollution

Air pollution is a very serious environmental hazard that affects millions of people all over the world. It is actually caused by the release of harmful substances into the atmosphere, mainly from human activities such as fossil fuels, industrial processes and vehicle emissions. It can have a range of negative effects on human health, the environment and the economy. We experience air pollution in Nigeria daily due to poor electricity supply. Nigerians are facing a great deal of electricity challenges which compelled people to make use of alternative source of power supply which includes the use of generators. In Nigeria, generators are use for different purposes which include commercial and domestic and can equally be use for a whole day. The air is highly polluted due to the level of smoke released by these generators and it is also very harmful to human health.

Urbanization is also one of the major factors that affect the Nigerian environment. Nigeria cities are experiencing a high rate of environmental degradation as a result of rural-urban migration, which is a constant influx of people from the rural areas to urban centers. The reason for this mass migration is to seek “greener pastures’ as development is mainly situated in urban areas and Nigeria as a nation is faced with the challenge of high level of unemployment. This has resulted to increase in the number of people in the urban areas with limited social services and infrastructure to meet the need of this growth, thereby leading to accumulation of wastes in the cities. Authorities in the cities face a lot of challenges with improper disposal of domestic and human wastes which are littered all over the city. For Ajavi and Okporokoo; “this has lead to the accumulation of waste heaps in several areas, blocking motorways and making passage along alleys and pavements difficult.”⁵ These waste eventually ends up clogging the underground drains and water channels which aids flooding. There is also a high level of clustering vehicles which emits smoke and gases that form smog which contributes to air pollution. In order to live in the cities, people goes to the extent of building houses in the water right of ways which now causes flooding in Nigeria. According to George; “In 2012, NEMA said that a whopping seven million Nigerians were

affected by the worst floods ever since in the past 40 years, the cost of material damage was estimated at 2.29 trillion Naira. This does not take into account the amount of lives lost or persons injured during the flood.”⁶ Environmental problems are as a result of developmental process of the economic and technological man and this makes urban environment filthy and unhealthy.

Oil is another major pollution in Nigeria especially in the Niger Delta Area. Oil exploration, production and refinement has resulted to diverse environmental problems which includes flaring of gas at different oil flow stations in the Niger Delta area, oil spills, acid rain, oil refining, transportation via pine-lines, road tankers or ocean-going vessels, habitat destruction, air and water pollution and land degradation. The enormous petroleum industry activities contribute a great amount of oil pollution of the marine and water environment. Other causes of oil pollution in Nigeria are from burning of toxic wastes, dumping of waste into streams and rivers. This is affecting and threatening the lives of the people in those communities.

Consequences of Environmental pollution in Nigeria

Environmental pollution have a far reaching consequences in the contemporary societies of Africa and Nigeria in particular. Our analysis of the negative impact of environment pollution in contemporary Nigeria society will focus on the following:

Health Risks: Pollution from industries , oil spills, gas flaring, and improper waste disposal causes air, water and soil contamination, which in turn leads to respiratory illness, skin diseases, and other health issues among peoples.

Climate change: Some forms of pollution contribute to climate change, exacerbating environmental challenges such as extreme weather events and rising sea.

Water contamination: Oil spills and improper waste disposal contaminate water sources, leading to water borne diseases and effecting human health and aquatic ecosystems. For instance, oil exploration activities going on in the Niger Delta areas of Nigeria could be said to have succeeded in destroying the human and entire aquatic lives of the region. By these activities, mining

companies operating in the region recklessly discharge unwanted and hazardous biological, chemical, and physical waste materials into public streams and rivers. Accordingly, Isife: claims that the unprofessional disposal of those dangerous products into rivers and streams by the mining companies destroy aquatic life, contaminate the waters, increase diseases spread, as well as make the waters unhealthy for consumption by man, animals, and plants.”⁷ The implication of this ugly trend is that such contaminated waters spread so fast and wide, beyond the immediate environments of the affected host communities. Within a short space of time, other water channels, streams, and rivers connected with those of the Niger Delta get contaminated and hazardous for life too.

Again, oil exploration and production results in various problems such as oil spills, habitat destruction, air and water pollution, land degradation and gas flaring. All these have a lot of negative impact in the Nigerian environment in numerous ways. Oil spillage destroys farms land, vegetation, affects soil fertility and renders it barren and unproductive. Oil spillage is also capable of killing plants and animals and can also destroy aquatic life. For Aigbedion and Iyayi; “since the discovery of oil in Nigeria, the country has suffered negative environmental consequences of the exploitation.”⁸

In Nigeria, the amount of oil entering into sea bodies has raised a great concern over the sustainability of coastal and marine life. The Niger Delta Region are mostly affected by this spills as it is believed to be one of the main causes of militancy in the Region. Apart from the health implications of the oil spills, it also has economic and social impact in the economy. The economic consequence includes cost of clean-up and compensation, damage to agricultural lands, fishery and wide life, while social impact includes community conflicts, death, frustration and violence which eventually leads to militancy, reduction in tourism and hospitality industries. Sometimes, due to economic hardship in the country, members of the affected communities eat the fish killed by the spill and made to bear the full cost of any health implications alone. Nigeria as a nation has suffered the consequences of the destruction of its mangrove ecosystem as a result of oil spillage. The impacts of this oil spills appears more devastating because of the fact that Nigeria is a developing country faced with so many challenges.

Conclusion

Pollution in Nigeria has become a daily occurrence and usual event. It is very important to note that the mere fact that they are accustomed to it because they do not have a choice does not limit its effect on their health generally. The citizens should be enlightened continuously on the danger of polluted environment because most of the pollution that occurs in Nigeria are manmade. The effect of pollution in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. The government should enact new laws that will meet the current situation of things in Nigeria. The enforcement mechanism must also be strengthened to make sure that these laws are obeyed to the last letter. Those who disobeyed these laws must be properly sanctioned for their actions so as to serve as a form of deterrence to prevent future occurrences. In keeping with the objectives of the National Policy on the Environment, they should establish a national environmental monitoring and information management network. Regular assessment of environmental conditions and trends in rural areas and identification of programmes and actions needed to reduce or avoid further environmental degradation and pollution should be encouraged.

References

1. En.m.wikipedia.org
2. N. Alfred, Explosive and Accessories for exports, Key Noch, Birmingham
3. G. J. Miller, Living in the Environment: Concepts, Problems and Alternatives. California, Wad South Publishing Company Inc.
4. Barcelow, E. *Moral Philosophy: Theory and Issues*. {California: Wadsworth publishing Company}, P.360
5. A. Ajayi, & D. Iporokpor, *International Environment Law*, (Ardley Son; Transnational Publishers 2002)
6. O. George (2014), *The Guardian* www.ngrguardiannews.com "Managing the Port
Harcourt blacksoof-Vanguard News <https://www.vanguardngr.com>
7. Isife, C.T. (2012). "Environmental problems in Nigeria: A review" in *Sustainable Human Development Review*, 4 (1 & 2), 21-38.
8. Aigbedion, I. & Iyayi, S. E.(2007) "Environmental Effect of Mineral Exploitation in Nigeria". *International Journal of Physical Sciences*, 2(2). 33-38.

