

# Environmental Sustainability and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects.

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**Abstract:** Environmental sustainability which is an indispensable factor towards achieving sustainable development has been truncated and daunted by the activities of oil producing firms in Nigeria. Environment itself is the source of all the resources needed by an organization to accomplish its objectives. But its negligence has triggered environmental degradation caused by oil spills and host of other factors. In view of the foregoing, this paper concentrated on highlighting the challenges militating against environmental sustainability and sustainable development in Nigeria and thus proffering key strategies for achieving environmental sustainability and sustainable development in Nigeria. Exploratory Research Design was adopted. Data were generated via secondary sources. The secondary sources of data include materials from the government ministries and agencies, library, journal publications etc. System theory was utilized to portray the need for interdependence between the environment and organizations geared towards achieving environmental sustainability. The findings revealed that Environmental degradation, corruption, poverty, youth restiveness, political instability, Boko Haram insurgencies are the major challenges confronting environmental sustainability and sustainable development in Nigeria. It was concluded that oil producing firms need to subject themselves to the fair requirements of the society through discharging their social responsibilities and also ensuring that the environment is adequately protected and sustained. This is because they raise huge capital from their operations and activities in the society. This conclusion is in sync with the system theory which this work is anchored upon that advocates the need for interdependence. We, therefore, recommended that environmental sustainability and sustainable development are only achievable when environmental issues become the key priority of all individuals, corporate organizations; government at all levels in particular and oil producing firms in Nigeria in general.

**Keywords:** Environmental sustainability, sustainable development, Environmental degradation, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Nigeria is a giant of Africa endowed with human, material and natural resources. Despite the huge natural and human resource base, the Nigerian potential for environmental sustainability and sustainable development remains unfulfilled and its future is being hampered by environmental degradation and deteriorating economic conditions. Environmental degradation signifies damage inflicted on the biosphere as a whole owing to precarious and nefarious activities of human elements. This transpires when nature's resources are being consumed faster than nature can replenish them, when pollution results in irreparable damage inflicted on the environment, or when human beings destroy the ecosystem in the process of development, (Ugochukwu; Ertel; & Schmidt,2008). Environmental degradation occurs as a result of oil spillage, gas flares, oil exploration and exploitation etc. Oil spillage in Nigeria occurs because of sabotage, unsustainable extraction of natural resources, corrosion of pipes and storage tanks, recklessness during oil production operations and oil tankers incessant accidents. In Nigeria, fifty percent (50 %) of oil spills is due to corrosion, twenty eight percent (28 %) to sabotage by restive youths and twenty one percent (21 %) to oil production operations (DPR, 1999). One percent (1 %) of oil spills emanate from engineering drills, inability to adequately control oil wells, incapacitation and inefficiency of machines, and carelessness in loading and unloading oil vessels (Nwilo and Badejo, 2005).Sabotage is perceived as one of the major causes of oil spillage in Nigeria. This is because inhabitants of oil producing States in Nigeria like Niger Delta region have been allegedly accused of being instrumental in causing oil spillages through their nefarious and precarious activities such as damaging of the oil pipelines.

Nigeria as one of the largest oil producing countries in the world has really felt the impacts of environmental degradation since the inception of oil in 1954 at Oloibiri in Niger-Delta. Naturally, the extraction of oil has its negative impact on the environment. The exploration and exploitation of oil have caused a lot of havoc because farmlands, fishes, food production are severely affected as a result of oil spills and gas flares which are not

economically viable, sustainable, healthy and palatable to humans. Oil spillage and gas flares have been a source of nuisance to our environment. In the same vein, modern mining operations have been disastrous. The removal of a non-renewable resource such as crude oil usually causes some environmental damage which results in environmental degradation.

Gas flaring in Nigeria has significantly contributed more greenhouse gas emissions than all other sources in Sub-Saharan Africa put together. The UNDP/World Bank figure of 70 million tonnes of carbon dioxide would have made Nigeria the world's 42<sup>nd</sup> biggest emitter of carbon dioxide from fossil fuel and cement manufacture in 2000, ahead of Portugal, Switzerland, Sweden and Norway (WRI, 2007). Report indicated that the annual financial loss to Nigeria from gas flared in the Niger Delta has been put at about US \$ 2.5 billion, World Bank (2003). Also, World Bank (2005) suggests that gas flaring from just one part of the Niger Delta (Bayelsa State) would likely cause 49 premature deaths, 4,960 respiratory illnesses among children, and 120 asthma attacks annually. Based on this backdrop, this study sets out to identify challenges militating against environmental sustainability in Nigeria and also highlights the key strategies for achieving environmental sustainability and sustainability development in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Sustainability in all ramifications demands that current economic activity need not disproportionately burden future generations. Oil is indisputably the economic mainstay in Nigeria and has contributed over 80% of our income. But its extraction has generated a lot of dust which culminates in myriads of damages as the environment is adversely affected. Environmental degradation which is an aftermath of oil spillage and gas flares has been a source of nuisance to our environment. It seems not to be palatable as it leads to declining standards of living, the extinctions of large numbers of species, health problems in the human population conflicts, sometimes violent, between groups fighting for a dwindling resource.

Irrespective of the huge natural and human resource base, Nigerian potential for sustainable development remains unfulfilled and its future is being threatened by environmental degradation and deteriorating economic conditions which are not being addressed by present policies and actions. Over Fifty years of oil incursion into the country have not brought any significant benefits to the Nigeria as we still scramble and gamble for oil. Notwithstanding these malaises, oil producing firms in Nigeria have also perpetrated heinous activities such as pollution of the environment, violation of human rights, blunt refusal to discharge their social responsibilities, gas flaring which destroys wildlife, seafood's and farmland especially in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria without adequate compensation to the host communities.

### **Objectives of the study**

Specifically, this study focuses on these objectives:

1. To identify challenges militating against environmental sustainability and sustainable development in Nigeria'
2. To highlight the key strategies for achieving environmental sustainability and sustainability development in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Meaning of environmental sustainability and sustainability development**

Sustainable development is perceived as development that meets the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations General Assembly, 1987) cited in (Oyeshola, 2008). This implies that sustainable development aims at maintaining economic advancement, sustainability and progress while protecting the long-term value of the environment; it also provides a platform for the integration of environmental policies and development strategies. There is the need to preserve both human and material resources in the pursuit of development. Therefore, it becomes onus on individuals and corporate organizations to engage in socio-economic activities which are compatible with the needs of man and the environment. The main thrust of sustainable development (SD) is the long-term sustainability of the economy and environment. This is only achievable via the integration and recognition of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision making process.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study relied on system theory. A system is conceived as a set of interrelated and interdependent parts organized in a manner that yields a united whole, Nwachukwu (2006). The system theory proposes that an organization is a

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system that needs to work harmoniously not only within itself but also within its environment to ensure its sustainability. This implies that a system needs to work also in unison with the other systems around it. What happens in the larger system is capable of affecting the organization either positively or negatively. System approach to the study of the organization sees the business organization as a system which is an interrelated element that acquires input from the environment, transforms the inputs which yields output to the environment. The interrelated elements depict that people, departments, organization and environment depend on one another. The organization and its subsystems are correlated and interdependent to their environment. Therefore, the organization must achieve its objective within the threat, weakness, and turbulence that form an integral part of its political environment. The General Systems theory aims at looking at the entire world as a composite of co-existing, interacting and interrelating elements. It is in this collaboration that organizations benefit from the environment and the environment as well benefit from the organization. The policy implication is that system theory encourages togetherness, oneness and peaceful co-existence that trigger sustainable development which is an offshoot of environmental sustainability.

### **Methodology**

Exploratory research design was utilized in this study. The choice of the design was precipitated by the conceptual nature of the study aimed at exposing the challenges militating against environmental . Materials for the study were gathered through secondary data.

### **Challenges Militating Against Environmental Sustainability and Sustainable Development in Nigeria.**

#### **• Environmental Degradation**

It is explicitly obvious that modern mining operations have been very disastrous and destructive as far as our environment is concerned. This has manifested itself in the magnitude of environmental degradation we witness on daily basis in Nigeria. The removal of a non-renewable resource such as crude oil usually causes some environmental damage. For aboriginal (indigenous) people the effects on native fauna and flora, on which the subsistence component of their economy hinges on, are of concern (Ebeku, 2005).

The extraction of oil is bound to have some negative impacts on the environment especially in the Niger Delta and its environs. Many communities in the Niger Delta believe that local gas flares causes acidic rain, which corrode the metal sheets used for roofing. The toxic substances which have been emitted in the flares for over 40 years, including benzene and particulates, have exposed Niger Delta communities to health risks and property damage, in violation of their human rights. The flares affect their livelihood, destroy aquatic lives and expose them to an increased risk of premature deaths, noise pollution, child respiratory illnesses, asthma and cancer, etc. For example, conservative assumptions using World Bank information on the adverse effect of particulates, suggests that gas flaring from just one part of the Niger Delta (Bayelsa State) would likely cause 49 premature deaths, 4,960 respiratory illnesses among children, and 120 asthma attacks annually (World bank, 1995).

It is evident that modern mining operations have been very disastrous and destructive. The removal of a non-renewable resource such as crude oil usually causes some environmental damage. For aboriginal people the effects on native fauna and flora, on which the subsistence component of their economy depends on, are of concern (EBEKU, 2005). The extraction of oil is bound to have some negative impacts on the Niger Delta environment and its environs. Many communities in the Niger Delta believe that local gas flares cause acid rain, which corrode the metal sheets used for roofing. The toxic substances which have been emitted in the flares for over 40 years, including benzene and particulates, have exposed Niger Delta communities to health risks and property damage, in violation of their fundamental human rights. The flares affect their livelihood and expose them to an increased risk of premature deaths, child respiratory illnesses, asthma and cancer, as well as acid rain. For example, conservative assumptions using World Bank information on the adverse effect of particulates, suggests that gas flaring from just one part of the Niger Delta (Bayelsa State) would likely cause 49 premature deaths, 4,960 respiratory illnesses among children, and 120 asthma attacks annually (WORLD BANK, 1995). According to the WORLD BANK (2003), gas flaring in Nigeria “has contributed more greenhouse gas emissions than all other sources in sub-Saharan Africa combined”. The UNDP/World Bank figure of 70 million tonnes of carbon dioxide would have made Nigeria the world’s 42<sup>nd</sup> biggest emitter of carbon dioxide from fossil fuel and cement manufacture in 2000, ahead of Portugal, Switzerland, Sweden and Norway (WRI, 2007). Economically speaking, the annual financial loss to Nigeria from gas flared in the Niger Delta has been put at about US \$ 2.5 billion. Flaring represents a significant economic loss (lost opportunity value estimated at some US \$ 2.5 billion, based on LNG values (UNDP/WORLD BANK, 2004). This has maimed creatures and tremendously impacted negatively on the economy of Nigeria.

- **Corruption:** This is a cankerworm that has ravaged and truncated the economy of Africa especially Nigeria. It is unequivocally a developmental issue. This is because it impedes development and minimizes the capability of government to reduce poverty. In Nigeria, corruption has been at the centre of development and it is an impediment to true and authentic development in our society. Corruption has automatically ravaged the entire Nigerian System thereby making other nations of the world to perceive us as the most corrupt country in the World.
- **Poverty:** Extreme poverty strikes when household resources prove insufficient to secure the essentials of dignified living. The consequences of persistent poverty include insufficient food, children out of school, diminution of household back-up resources and exclusion from valuable social networks (Kaplinsky R, 2001). Expressing poverty as a percentage yields more favorable results due to rising population. Poverty is a huge threat to humanity in particular and Africa economy in general. It is a bane to economic growth and development and has simultaneously frustrated and undermined the dreams and aspirations of great champions/giants owing to its obvious negative consequences. Poverty is conceptualized as the inability of an individual or a family to command sufficient resources to satisfy basic needs. Poverty is also a condition of being extremely poor. This poor state succinctly describes the situation of most Africa countries especially Nigeria where the pervasive effect of poverty has reduced men of integrity and repute to a perpetual state of infancy. Poverty is epilepsy manifesting itself in high level of illiteracy, over-reliance on foreign counterparts, insecurity and poor governance. Sokoto State for instance is plagued with 81.2% poverty rate. Also, the terrorist attacks of Boko Haram scents in the northern parts of the country lately have further exacerbated the poverty menace in the area as both human and economic resources are wantonly destroyed. The quest for sustainable economy is not feasible. At the same time, we must acknowledge that progress has been uneven and insufficient. Environmental sustainability is under threat, with accelerating growth in global greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss. More than a billion people still live in extreme poverty. Nearly all of them suffer from hunger. Eradicating poverty must remain central to the international development agenda.
- **Political Instability:** Because these corporations require a stable host government, which of course is sympathetic to capitalism, they try as much as possible to directly protect the existing government whenever a reactionary leader or group seems to take over the government. The MNC dependent development which encourages the emergence of authoritarian regimes in the host country and go ahead to create alliances between international capitalist and domestic capitalist elite. This exploitative alliance is sustained by the intervention of the corporations' home governments in the internal affairs of the less developed countries. In this fashion, foreign investment tends to make the host country politically dependent upon the metropolitan country, Gilpin (1987). It is on record that the MNCs kept President Mobutu of Zaire in power for so long because he was tutelage to them and with MNCs they sucked dry the economy of Zaire. The MNCs equally were responsible for the early exit and assassination of Patrice Lumumba because he would not allow their exploitative activities. The same story is true of Captain Thomas Sankara of Burkina Fasso and so many others. So the multinationals in the third world in particular and Africa at large have gained much from the political instability that exists here and there. Africa now has the greatest number of countries experiencing one kind of political crisis. Nigeria at present is the epicenter of political instability in Africa.
- **Boko Haram Insurgencies:** This is depicted by incessant onslaught by the Fulani Herds Men. These attacks have caused lots of havoc to lives and properties. The menace of these evil acts have slowed down economic development and reduced drastically the productivity of numerous communities as fear grip them thereby barring them from being productive economically.

### **Strategies for Achieving Environmental Sustainability and Sustainable Development in Nigeria.**

Sustainability is a feature of a dynamic system that maintains itself over time. Environmental Sustainability refers to the long-term maintenance of valued environmental resources in an evolving human context. The best approach to define and measure sustainability in the environmental perspective is to focus on natural resource depletion and whether the current rates of resource use can be sustained into the distant future.(Goldemberg, 2000). The over

arching importance of sustainable development is geared towards the improvement of the quality of life in all its ramifications, provided that environmentally sound policies are vigorously pursued and adhered to by society.

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED,1987) defines sustainable development as “a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Theoretically, the long-term result of environmental degradation would result in local environments that are no longer able to sustain human populations to any degree. Such degradation on a global scale would, if not addressed, of course mean extinction for humanity. In the short-term, environmental degradation leads to declining standards of living, the extinctions of large numbers of species, health problems in the human population, conflicts, sometimes violent, between groups fighting for a dwindling resource, water scarcity and many other major problems, all these are evident in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The issue of sustainable development in Nigeria is still far fetch, although most of the foundations have been laid by government, for example: the formation of local Agenda 21 committees at the federal and state levels; inauguration of Environmental Action Plan Committees at all levels of government; being a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol and other international Treaties involved in environmental management; upgrading an ENVIRONMENTAL agency (Federal Environmental Protection Agency – FEPA) into a full fledged ministry (Federal Ministry of Environment– FMENV); introduction of poverty eradication programs; and the commitment of the government to investing in environmental management strategies.

Nigeria will start reaping the dividends of sustainable development only when the above programs and strategies are fully implemented. The interdependencies of the economic, environmental, and social elements of our world require new ways of thinking critically and strategically about things and taking action that will truly create a future where human society and nature co-exist with mutual benefits, and where the suffering caused by poverty and natural resource abuse is eliminated. Sustainable development calls for improving the quality of life for all of the world's people without increasing the use of our natural resources beyond the Earth's carrying capacity.

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

- Individuals and corporate organizations need to engage in socio-economic activities which are compatible with the needs and aspirations of man and his environment.
- Eradicating extreme poverty, promoting sustainable consumption and production, and managing the planet's natural resource base for the benefit of all are the overarching challenges of sustainable development.
- Oil producing firms are part and parcel of the society, they need to subject themselves to the fair requirements of the society through discharging their social responsibilities and also ensuring that the environment is adequately protected and sustained. This is because they raise huge capital from their operations and activities in the society.

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