

Chapter 16

The Politics of Environmental Pollution in Nigeria: Emerging Trends, Issues, and Challenges

Godwin Solomon Mmaduabuchi Okeke
University of Lagos, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Pioneer efforts and early scientific and popular writings on the environment support genuine ecological concerns on the need for a clean and healthy environment. A clean environment supports good health, and good health is very important for vibrant workforce, which is necessary for a productive economy. This logical connection, in the final analysis, seems to encourage a healthy and vibrant political atmosphere. In Nigeria, the oil boom in the early 1970s led to a major boost in industrialization and the subsequent environmental pollution and the attendant undercurrent political implications. In the light of the above, the chapter investigates the environmental problems in Nigeria and the inherent political dynamics that propel and shape the calls for a cleaner environment. The authors rely on archival materials and other secondary sources of data including the library documentations and internet to query and theoretically explain the extant issues. The relevant recommendations are made on the urgent need to ameliorate the unpalatable condition and for cleaner environment.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental pollution is a matter of global concern today because of what the environment is to human survival and indeed, the survival of the earth itself. Virtually everywhere discussions focus on environment around the world. “If it is not greenhouse effect”, “it is global warming”. Both point to the fact that the earth is polluted. Williams (2006:88) affirms that it is well recognized that the environment constitutes one of the major challenges to health. He however points out that Nigeria suffers from both primary and secondary environmental problems resulting from under-development and growth in industrialization. As a result, human idea and activities are endangered on a daily basis. In view of the threats to the human existence, environmental pollution is one of the current Phenomena that have gained international attention, including the Nigeria. This pollution comes in different ways.

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Environmental protection implies safeguarding all the surrounding conditions which influence growth and development (air, water, land, atmosphere and space) against pollution (Udoudo 2006). Furthermore, Udoudo (2006) observes that in some localities in Nigeria, especially among the riverine communities of the Niger Delta region, one can hardly find modern toilet facilities. In some communities land pollution is the degradation of the earth's land surface through misuse of the soil by poor agricultural practices, mineral exploitation, industrial waste dumping and indiscriminate disposal of urine waters.

Air pollution is the accumulation in the atmosphere of substances that in sufficient concentrations endanger human health or produce other measured effects on living matter and other materials. Among the major sources of air pollution are powered heat generation, the burning of solid wastes, industrial processes of air pollutants like carbon monoxide from incomplete combustion engine and others, such as hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide and photochemical oxidants.

Again, noise pollution is a composite of sounds generated by human activities ranging from blasting stereo system to the roar of transport vehicles. The most readily measurable physiological effect of noise pollution is damage of hearing, which may be either temporary or permanent and may cause distraction of normal activities or general annoyance. Environmental pollution has threatened human existence in diverse ways. This is because life is dependent on the environment. Environmental pollution can occur from petroleum production activities, as noted by Ugochukwu (2003) that: Since 1905, petroleum operations have caused great devastation to the Niger Delta. These have impacted negatively on fishing and farming which are no longer productive enough to the area. In Ogoniland food is now imported in an area once known as the food basket. Oil spills destroy bulk farmlands and crop. They also destroy aquatic life. When a situation like this occurs, economic activities are grossly reduced and good social life hampered. Damage to farm lands and aquatic life by oil spills cannot be overstated.

The efforts of the federal, state and local governments in Nigeria at ensuring sustainable development through numerous environmental legislations, fiscal incentives and grants to environmental ministries and agencies remain elusive, as Nigeria continues to experience complex environmental problems of atmospheric, noise and water pollution, oil pollution, climate change including flooding, coastal erosion and perennial oceanic surge and municipal solid waste management (Ajani, 2012). The reasons for such regulatory failure are many. Foremost among these reasons is the problem of designing best practices to secure effective and efficient enforcement and compliance with international and municipal environmental laws. A necessary conclusion that could be drawn from this analysis is that environmental benefits arising from existing legal and institutional frameworks are minimal and sub-optimal resulting in social and environmental welfare losses. The question that should engage the mind of many Nigerians is, why is environmental issues handled with little care? Why has the government made so much policies but little is done to effectuate it? Why is environmental pollution politicized in Nigeria? What changes in policy formulation and enforcement strategies are necessary to produce optimal environmental results? Providing answers to these puzzling questions is the main objective of this paper. The paper seeks to interrogate the politics of environmental pollution in Nigeria, and focuses on the emerging issues, trends and challenges of environmental pollution. Its general objectives are to examine the impact of policies on environmental sustainability on the Nigerian environment, investigate emerging environmental challenges in Nigeria such as flooding, erosion, bombing, gas flaring, Environmental Impact Assessment, among others.

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