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PERSPECTIVES ON THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN NIGERIA

MORDAKAI SULE DANSONKA^{1*}

¹Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State - Nigeria

YARO, KPENDWA DAUDU²

²Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State-Nigeria

***Corresponding Author: Mordakai Sule Dansonka**

ABSTRACT.

Man's biological and technological strives have to a large extent been determined by environment. It is pertinent to note that environment influences a peoples' economic activities and even their relationship. The paper examines Nigeria's environment and its governance over the years with the objective of identifying the governmental policies put in place to protect it. The paper used historical research method by referring to published texts and interview with selected individuals. The findings reveal that the substantial reason for the peopling of particular area was environmental conditions prevailing at that particular time. Most of the destructions on the environment were human inflicted however nature itself caused ecological issues as well. During the colonial era, protection of environment was not a priority of the government and the few environments related laws criminalized activities that could degrade the environment and matters relating to the environment were dealt with as tort of nuisance and viewed as public matters warranting state intervention. In the 1990s, more drastic and systematic development of environmental law was witnessed in Nigeria with the establishment Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) and in 2007 the National Environmental Standard and Regulation Enforcement Agency (NESREA) was established and charged with the responsibility for the protection and development of the environment, biodiversity, conservation and sustainable development of Nigeria's natural resources as well as environmental technology. The paper concludes that to ensure a safe environment all development plans must contain plan for environmental protection and control.

Keywords: Political economy, environment, land degradation, ecological, over grazing

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INTRODUCTION

History has been variously defined by many scholars but the common denominator in all the definitions is that history connotes the entire human activities in the past as it actually happened the attempt to describe or interpret the past or an inquiry of the essential facet of human experiences (Marwick, 1976). From the above definition, it is important to stress that history is concern with the study of the sum-total of human activities and these activities did not occur in a vacuum but in a specific geographical environment. This therefore, means that there is interplay between human being and the environment.

The geographical environment simply refers to land, water, animal, plants, air or atmosphere, and objects within man's living surrounding. Dada and Orie (2014) define environment "as the totality of things, conditions or circumstances that affect the existence and development of an organism, an individual or a population group on earth surface". Putting it succinctly, environment consists of all flora and fauna, soil, water, air, cultural heritage, climate, landscape including material assets and cultural heritage (Dada and Orie, 2014). Human existence and every other activity is in the confine of a particular environment. The air, food, water, the house the man and live in as well as man's relationship with one another has been greatly shaped by the environment. However, a point of agreement in all science of human knowledge is on the issue of change, the society changes. As society is dynamic, the political and economy interaction undergoes modifications and innovations against the background of time and space which in turns affect the way human relates with the environment.

The paper is anchor on the importance of the environment and how human economic activities caused destructions on the environment. It is stating the obvious to say that "The environment is man first right, without a safe environment, man cannot exist to claim other rights, be they political, social or economic" (Maathai, 2009). At this juncture, it is germane to raise two fundamental and basic questions about environmental protection in Nigeria. First, what were the viability or otherwise of the various agencies set up by the government in curbing emerging environmental issues? Second, due to the fact that the teeming populations of Nigerian have their sources of livelihood tie to land as they struggle to survive, how can they be environmental friendly yet achieve their economic objectives? Before we attempt to answer these questions and address other related issues, it is important to have a glance at the Nigerian area.

The Nigeria Region

Nigeria by its location lies between Latitude 4° N and 14° N. it is bounded in the North by Sahara Desert and in the South by the Gulf of Guinea at the Atlantic Ocean (Udo, 1984). The region extend from the Atlantic Ocean in the South to the Sahara Desert in the Northern end, to the West and North by the Republics of Benin and Niger respectively, to the northeast by the Lake Chad and Cameroun Republic to the East. Ranging from North to South, about four physical regions can be identified. Along the coastline there is a densely belt of swamp and mangrove forest, next to this, is a fairly range of rain forest intersected by rivers and stream, this is followed by 300 mile-wide belt of open woodland known as the guinea savannah. Then the latter shade off into a vast undulating plateau with occasional hills to the southern reach of the southern part of the Sahara desert (Coleman, 1986).

Within this geographical location, there are many physical features that have played and are still playing profound role in the history of Nigeria area. The most prominent among these features are the Niger and Benue rivers, the plateaus and the scattered hills and some ranges of mountains along the border of Cross River and Cameroun through to the Adamawa Mountains. In addition to these features, the Nigerian region is blessed with two distinguishable climatic weathers which also play significant roles in the history of the country. For instance, Southern Nigeria is largely under the rain bearing Monsoon wind for most of the years and has a long rainy season of not less than seven Months, has a long bearing on the occupation, economic activities, and the types of technological development of the area. On the contrary, the Northern Region which is under the influence of the north-east trade wind which is much drier often dry and hot for most part of the day, has a lesser rainfall that only support the savanna vegetation.

For many years the attention of geographers and the historians are drawn to understand the objective changes in the Nigerian area. The enterprise was taken due to continuous changes taking place in the physical environment in the Nigerian area. The findings reveal that certain environmental factors such as famine, flood and rainfall bring about disturbances and sometimes complete change in human relations. Historical phenomenal such as migration, state formation, agriculture and human relations have been influenced and mold in one way or the other by these factors. For us to understand how these factors had influence and continue to shape the history of the people of Nigeria the better as it was a strong factor in determining the nature of the relations between the various people of Nigeria.

The Environment and Peopling of Nigeria

The little that is known about human habitation of Nigeria area is about 1000 A.D. with evidence of human activities in some part of the country. In 1000 A.D. several waves of migration and intermingling of people in Nigeria were more palpable. The intermingling of the different people led to the formation of various ethnic groups. More substantial reason for the peopling of the area was the ability of man to adapt to certain geographical and environmental conditions prevailing at that particular time. In addition, was the skill and knowledge of stool making that enabled man adapt to a particular environment. It was argued that the area around the Niger –Delta was not heavily populated until recently during the desiccation in the northern area and the expansion of the Sahara desert.

Smith (1987) showed that due to climatic change many centuries before now, the Lake Chad basin underwent sensational changes which in turn affected human habitation in the area. Changes in the climate brought not only a substantial alteration in the distribution of water surface caused modification in the flora and fauna and led to the upset of population and subsequent movement out of the area with more impact of the desiccation to more wetter region

Prothero (1969) states that geographical environment around the Nile for many millennia permitted the establishment of hydraulic civilization in the main river valley downstream from Egypt to Khartoum. This shows that the remotely geographical environment factors like the physiography, geology, geomorphology and the mountains do constitute part of the history of a particular place as well as its peopling. In addition, the development of trade which came about as a result of items available which became possible by the geographical factor also go a long way to determine the human habitation of the area. As noted the environment greatly influenced human activities, however in an attempt to attain the basic needs man tamper with the natural environment which produced devastated results which led to change in the condition of the environment as we shall proceed to see.

The Condition of the Environment

There are constant changes in the Nigeria environment. In 2008, the National Meteorological Agency reported that over the preceding thirty years the annual rainy season dropped. The report further states that in the last six decades, over 350,000 square kilometers of the arid region turned to desert or desert-like conditions and progressing southward at the rate of 0.6km per year. The Nigeria far north States were worst hit with this environment change, with 50 – 70 percent of land area becoming desert (Ahmad-Gamgum, 2018). The environmental condition which is the deteriorating condition of the land led to desertification which is the word used to describe waterless, treeless, uninhabited or sparsely inhabited land. The amount of arable land lost to desertification annually is at the rate of ten kilometers. Yusuf Dingyadi (2022) says the desert encroaches with about 20 to 30 kilometers annually or more than compared to ten years back. The Nigeria far north experienced long dry season from October to May and low rainfall (600 to 900mm) from June to September. The desertification is believed to be responsible for altered weather patterns and increase frequency of the extreme weather (Koroma, 2020).

The changes in the environment had adverse effect on the population whose sources of livelihood were tied to land resources. The non-stop environmental degradation in the far-north caused many herders to migrate in search of pasture. The movement took them to the central Nigeria area and their presence in large number compounded the overcrowded space. The climates induce degradation of the pasture of the far-north made survival difficult for the herders. In searching for suitable pasture and water, herders moved their cattle mostly on foot across cultivated and not cultivated lands. The movements of the cattle en masse and repeatedly caused degradation to the land. The herders when make camps usually temporary as they seldom have permanent home transverse particular portion of land in search of grazing pasture which were also usually scarce. As ruminant animal, cattle need large amount of grass to adequately feed on

The overgrazing of the land particularly in Central Nigeria area led to harsh ecological disruption thereby depleting the fertility of the land. An environment that suffered overgrazing experiences shortage of adequate pasture growth and this has a multiplier effects on both the farmers and herders. On the one hand, as the land lost its fertility, farmers tend to increase their farmland which in turn threatened the survival of the herds which made them veer into farmlands and destroyed crops (Tari, 2018).

It is instructive to note that the herds grazed everywhere they like. The movement of herds from place to place in search of water and pasture was only more suitable in the far north because of relatively large land and pasture with sparse population. The partially drier nature of the environment of the far north due to short duration of rainfall makes it suitable to cultivate different types of crops that might not require enough rain. At

the end of the short period of the rain and crops harvested, the herders were encouraged to freely move around in search of pasture and water. The expansion of farm space to meet up with their poor yield which was caused by overgrazing of the farmland was adopted by farmers to address the environmental failure. The shortage in the amount of the annual rainfall drastically affected crop production. Therefore, the river flood plains usually called *fadama* were put under intensive cultivation during the dry season. In other words, the dry season farming was adopted by the farmers to cushion the inadequacy of the rain during the wet season. As the farmers desire the water bodies in the dry season to cultivate crops to augment what they could not achieve due to short period of rain fall, the herders on the other hand need the pasture around the streams and river for their cattle.

The ecological effect or degradation of the land is created by consolidation of an effectively substantial and expanding human populace. The depletion of resources such as air, water and soil cause the deteriorating of the environment. The constant tempering or destruction of the ecosystems, habitats and the extinction of wildlife by humans and animals result to environmental degradation. This occurs when the earth's natural resources are depleted. Rapid growth in population of humans and animals especially the economic activities of man resulted in the destruction of the environment.

The Economy and Environmental Degradation

No doubt about it, most of the environmental degradation happened as a result of economic activities of man. Environmental degradation is the deterioration of the environment which are done through the consumption of assets, for example, air, water and soil. Degradation of soil and land occurred as a result of poor farming practices, excessive use of fertilizer and pesticides. The application of fertilizer in excess by farmer is because the land has lost its natural fertility which was due to not only human activities because the increase frequency of extreme weather also had direct effect on the soil.

It should be noted that although most of the destructions on the environment were human inflicted, however, nature itself caused ecological issues as well. In other words, while environmental degradations were always connected with the action of people, the environment itself changes. With or without the effect of human activities, a few biological systems degraded to the point that they could not adequately sustain the population whose livelihood depended on the natural resources. Human degrade soils when they compact it, disrupt its organic and inorganic structure. Desertification, urbanization, mining, overgrazing and alteration of soil moisture all damage or destroy soil. Soil constitute the foundation of human agriculture, yet agriculture, including livestock salting and saturation of poorly managed irrigated lands, compaction by heavy machinery and the hooves of livestock, pollution from excessive fertilizers, animal waste and pesticides.

Water degradation is the pollution of water from trash dumped in ocean, illegal dumping or disposal of large amounts of industrial waste into nearby river or lake. People spent energy, money and time trying to control the movement and availability of water than to manage any other natural resources. In the process water got contaminated, move water across and out of natural basins, deplete surface and ground water and alter natural flood pattern. In doing so, the wetlands, lakes and inland sea got dry up.

Deforestation is also common in Nigeria area and had adverse effect on the environment. The use of forest land for agriculture and animal grazing caused harm to the environment as decrease forest size put carbon back into the environment. According to Karr and Chu (1995) by over harvesting fish, over cutting forest, overgrazing grassland we are killing other organisms outright or eliminating their habitats, thereby driving species to extinction and impoverishing the diversity of life. In addition, biotic impoverishment also encompasses the categories of human impacts on the biosphere which are direct depletion of living system through alteration in physical and chemical environments, direct depletion of human life.

At this juncture it should be clear that in Nigeria farmers were the producers of arable crops. Krupa (2010) asserts that estimates in 2006 suggested that 75 percent of food comes from 12 arable crops and five animal species. Only three arable crops namely rice, maize and wheat account for about 60 percent of the calories and proteins obtained from plants. The production of these crops forms the basis of subsistence as food and sources of income. The rural- base small scale arable crop producers account for about 80 percent of total food supply. The average farm size is about 4.58 hectares. In Nigeria millions of hectares of arable crops were cultivated annually which were mostly rain-fed, with farming activities normally beginning at the onset of rains. The crops apart from being veritable source of income for farmers, it was also processed into other useful items at industrial and household levels. Indeed, the need for the suitable soil for the cultivation arable crop is indispensable. Adequate arable land is needed by the farmers for their survival and material need. On the other hand, the produce of the herds is the main source of meat, the most available and cheap source of animal proteins consumed by Nigerians. It is clear from the preceding discussion that the major destruction caused on

the environment was done by man in an attempt to carry out his economic activities for survival and the question that readily comes to mind is what were the measures put in place by the government to protect the environment? In the next section we shall attempt to provide answer to this question.

Government Policies on the Environment

During the colonial era, protection of environment was not a priority in Nigeria as the colonial administrators did not put in place any policy to protect the environment. Matters relating to the environment were dealt with as tort of nuisance and viewed as public matters warranting state intervention. The few environments related laws criminalized activities that could degrade the environment. These laws included the Criminal Code Act of 1916, which prohibited water pollution and air pollution and created the offence of nuisance (Ladan, 2018).

In 1917, the Public Health Act was enacted. Although somewhat broad in scope, this Act contained provision relevance to the regulation of land, air and water pollution. The Act made provision for matters relating to the environment to be dealt with in a rudimentary manner, from the perspective of environmental sanitation.

In Nigeria, crude oil was first discovered in 1950 and its production started in 1958 with 6,000 barrels per day. During the decades following independence, the government criminalized polluting activities, particularly those relating to the discharge of oil in navigable waters and environmental degradation as a result of petroleum activities. In the 1970s, in response to the industrial growth associated with the oil boom, environmental units were established in some government ministries however it was a typical spontaneous responses to emergency situation (Ladan, 2018).

In the 1980s and 1990s, more drastic and systematic development of environmental law was witnessed in Nigeria, partly due to the country's accession to a number of International instruments. Consequently, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) was established and charged with the administration and enforcement of the environmental law. Prior to the establishment of the agency, a toxic waste was dumped by an Italian ship in Koko a remote village town of the then Bendel State now Delta State in June 1988. The attention the toxic incidence garnered by the Nigerian media and public outcry prompted the Federal Government to act swiftly (Ajibola, 1997). Through diplomatic channels, the Nigerian government succeeded in getting the Italian government and the Italian chemical company that was the culprit to lift the toxic waste out of the country. The Nigerian government woke up to confront the problem of environmental abuse and degradation when Nigerian students studying in Italy alerted the International media that an Italian chemical company was exporting its toxic to a village in Nigeria, the discovery of that Italian ship containing some imported toxic chemical waste made up principally of polychlorobiphenyls (PCBS) and the hostile media reaction that accompanied the discovery hasten the creation of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA).

In December, 1988, as part of emerging coordinated approach to environmental issues, the agency was established by Degree. The establishment of FEPA represents a mile stone in environmental management effort in Nigeria (Ogbodo, 2009). The major function of FEPA is the establishment of national environmental, guidelines, standards and criteria most especially in the area of water quality, air and atmospheric quality and including the protection of the ozone layer. Others include noise control, hazardous substance discharge control and the removal of wastes and ascertaining spiller's liability. The agency also had power to formulate policy in relation to environmental research and technology in formulating and implementing policies related to environmental management. In addition, FEPA was given some enforcement power including the right to inspect facilities and premises, search locations, seize items and arrest people contravening any law on environment standard and prosecute them. The agency has power to initiate specific programme of environmental protection and any establish monitoring stations or network to locate sources of and dangers associated with pollution. Furthermore, it has power to conduct public investigation or inquiries into aspects of pollution (Nwufo, 2010).

Following the establishment of FEPA, the State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) was set up by the State governments and the Local Government Environmental Protection Agency was equally set up at the Local government level. FEPA Act and Regulation was more of industrial pollution control guidelines and standards with few notes or actual regulatory and enforcement body to cater for emerging environmental issues. In 2007, FEPA was repealed and in its place, a new body known as the National Environmental Standard and Regulation Enforcement Agency (NESREA) was established.

NESREA was established on 30th July, 2007 and charged with the responsible for the enforcement of environmental standard regulations, rules, laws, policies and guidelines. The agency is charged with the responsibility for the protection and development of the environment, biodiversity, conservation and sustainable

development of Nigeria's natural resources as well as environmental technology. The NESREA Act and Regulations constituted a new dawn in purpose and content because they aim at addressing the preponderance of obsolete environmental regulations, standards and enforcement mechanisms, which resulted over the year in the high rates of non-compliance with environmental laws, regulations and standards (Apeku, 2021). The agency was required to enforce compliance with regulation on importation, exportation, production, distribution, storage, sale, use, handling and disposal of hazardous chemicals and wastes. It also to enforce compliance with legislation on sound, chemical management, safer use of pesticide and disposal of used packages. NESREA possesses enforcement powers for the purpose of enforcing the Act. An officer of the agency with a warrant issued by a court may at any time enter and search vessels, and floating craft, inland water and other structure which he reasonably believe carries activities or stores goods which contravene environmental standard or legislation for the purpose of conducting inspection, searching and taking samples for analysis. The enforcement power of NESREA was to help prevent destructive environmental practices in Nigeria.

It is also obvious that some of the government agencies which have focused on the environment protection and sanitation are worth commendation because according to Ntagu and Promise (2021) in 2015, World Health Organization estimated that four billion cases of diseases related to poor sanitation and hygiene were recovered. It is also expedient that the deterioration of the arable land be given deserve attention, in order to increase food production and ensure availability of meat for human consumption. In addition, it will also mitigate the violent conflicts between farmers and herders which have been adjudge as a threat to our national unity. Undoubtedly, we must have an environment that is completely safe before we tackle our socio-economic and engage in political gerrymandering.

To save the environment from land contamination, portion of land should be carefully selected and mapped for refuse disposal. There is need for awareness in protecting our environment from degradation since the quality of what we eat and drink on this planet is a function of it. Generally, engineered crops do confer some economic and environmental benefits for farmers as its result to higher yields, lower cost, saving in management time and gains in flexibility for the environment, indirect benefit from using fewer pesticides and herbicides. But it is still an open question whether such benefit out weight potential ecological risks or whether the public will embrace having genetically modified foods as dietary staple. It is clear that biotechnologists focus on the potential of the new millennium green revolution to feed the growing population, but other scientists worry about unknown human and ecological health risks.

In 2000, World Leaders supported by the United Nations Development Programme, define a set of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be attained by 2015 which combine poverty, education, employment and environmental sustainability. The agency reported in 2015 that global poverty has been reduced by halved, about 91% of the world's population had access to improved drinking water sources, and remarkable progress had been made in fighting malaria and tuberculosis, but environmental sustainability remains under severe threat, as global carbon emissions escalate and forest are felled. Practically, MDGs did little or nothing to sustain the environment.

Some States in Nigeria came up with a policy that ban open grazing with a view to curbing the effects of overgrazing on the environment. For instance Taraba State Gazette (2017) on Open Gazing prohibition and ranches establishment law, in one of its objectives unequivocally states in section 3 (e) "to regulate and support the growth of livestock farming and prevent the environmental impact of open livestock grazing." The general perception and the public and particularly the herders saw the law as meant to cause hardship to them. Although it is true that the law was aim at preventing recurrent violent clash between the farmers and herders, however, one of its salient objectives was to prevent the effects of overgrazing on the environment. The law in section 17 states as follows: "It shall be unlawful for any person to engage in the rearing of livestock by openly grazing on farm land or any other land except within the confines of a ranch."

Ecologically, Nigeria's environment had failed due to human, animal and natural causes. The case was not like this in the past decades, this is because the green colour in Nigeria's national flag depicts the preponderance of green pasture of the country's environment and Michael Taiwo Akinkunmi who designed the National flag was correct to describe the environment as green, unfortunately the beautiful environment have degraded just before the announcement of his demise on Wednesday 30th August, 2023. Apparently, the environment has tremendous impact on human development resulting in orchestrated fight for group rights like resource control by the people of the oil producing areas a situation that calls for a well-articulated policy that encourage rational development with proper environmental considerations.

As mentioned above, following the Koko incidence, the Nigeria Government led the fight against hazardous waste dumping until the signing of the Basal Convention against trans-boundary transportation of hazardous, toxic and radioactive waste in 1989. A replica of this action is needed in the fight against human and animal activities that deteriorate the arable land. NESREA should as a matter of urgency take serious measures to address activities leading to gradual degradation of the cultivable land.

The decision to control the indiscriminate movements of cattle was a right step toward preserving the environment. When the environment is free from too many human and animal disturbances, it will regain its fertility and serve the purpose of the population whose livelihood depended on it. The open grazing prohibition law as passed by some States in Central Nigeria received condemnation from larger population without taking the benefit of the law to the environment into consideration. The open grazing prohibition law was to say the least pro-environment.

Conclusion

It has been stressed in this paper that over exploitation of the environment alters the ecosystem, destroys the beauty of nature, leaving man with problems such as over grazing, erosion, deforestation, surface water pollution, with accompanying serious health and social problems. It is therefore necessary to suggest ways by which over exploitation of the environment can be reduced. To this end the paper submit that environmental protection measures must be pursued in paripassu with the development of our natural resources. To ensure a safe environment all development plans must contain plan for environmental protection and control. This should be backed by a comprehensive environmental protection law enacted by legislatures to provide framework for all forms of environmental regulation. There should be a well-articulated national contingency plan to arrest incidence of environmental devastation and degradation especially as it pertain to oil spills. There is need for inter-disciplinary studies on the socio-economic and health aspects of natural resources exploitation, there should be a systematic education enlightenment of the populace and aspects of environmental protection should be incorporated in the school curriculum, as part of citizenship education.

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