OVERVIEW OF SOME COGENT ENVIRONMENT ISSUES AND PROGRAMMES AT LOCAL AND GLOBAL LEVELS

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ABSTRACT

Since the dawn of time, man has been faced with the challenges arising out of the forces and processes of the natural environment. Strategies have thus always been adopted, and elaborate rules and regulations enacted, for a harmonious existence and creative solutions to the problems of the natural environment. This paper reviews the history and activities of various environment-related Organisations and Movements that have emerged to draw attention to the need to care for our environment and need for practical Programmes and less destructive but more environment-friendly production patterns. It highlights the key Conferences, Conventions, Reports and Initiatives involved in the management of the environment, both at local Nigerian level, and at the global level. Overall, the view of close observers is that as a result of an unsustainable production and consumption pattern, together with inadequate attention to other environmental challenges, the state of the world environment is being pushed towards its "biophysical limits." Indeed in some situations that limit has been exceeded. This development is resulting in tremendous negative impact not just on the environment but on human health as reflected in increasing cases of cancer and other diseases. The paper also describes the nexus between the environment and health in Nigeria, the resulting key environmental challenges, and the progress being made in addressing these. It concludes with specific recommendations to further address the issues highlighted.

Keywords: Environmental Movements. Environmental Programmes. History.

INTRODUCTION

Environment in Early Times, and Spiritual Ecology

Since the dawn of time, man has always been faced with the challenges arising from his natural environment. Consequently, strategies have always been adopted with elaborate rules and regulations to prevent or cope with fallout of environmental disasters. There were records in the early times of Hammurabi about codes on taking care of the environment (White, 2005). Indeed there is the belief and argument in some quarters that today's environmental movement has its roots in spirituality (Coleman 2012, Kah 2002); hence, the concept of Spiritual Ecology**.** There truly is the spiritual dimension of issues of the environment because the scriptural texts of the

three Abrahamic faith, Judaism and its daughter religions Christianity and Islam, (and indeed other religions), refer to our earth as a trust by God for humanity to take care of. Thus faith-based groups in the course of negotiations of major environment documents have developed a corps of coherent policies on major environmental issues of our time.

THE GLOBAL SCOPE

First, we briefly examine how environment issues evolved and became global in scope. The term 'environment' assumed significant importance at national and international levels as a result of the awareness of the possible effects of wide-ranging environmental problems on the human health, and a possible threat to the survival of the Earth and various species of life on it - including the human species. Previously, environmental problems, such as air or water pollution, soil erosion, desertification, and de-forestation were viewed from the narrow confines of a localized perspective. However the increasing cases of new trans-border environmental problems such as acid rain and trans-frontier pollution, use of common border resources; and addition of global environmental problems such as depletion of the ozone layer, the green-house effect and global warming up and climatic change, added a new global dimension.

The Environment Movement in the 1960s-1970s

The International environment movement, also sometimes referred to as the Ecological or the Green movement, grew in recent times progressively, in leaps, as scientific revelations unveiled the damage to the earth particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. The first Earth Day was celebrated in 1970, and today June 6th of every year is observed as World's Environment Day (Wiki 2017). Along with them also grew the Green political parties, non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Greenpeace, and various other institutions. A huge environment movement thus emerged, cutting across professions, religions, politicians, scientists, and NGOs.

The 1972 Stockholm Conference and Birth of UNEP

The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment was a very important event for the United Nations (UN) and its agencies. In the publication "UNEP The first 40 years, A Narrative" (Clayton 2012), the Stockholm Conference was described as a "transforming event not just for the United Nations and its various Agencies, but for the world". It truly was the beginning of a new narrative on the issues of the Environment. The Conference on 22nd June 1972, gave birth to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the organization rapidly evolved to be the leading global environmental authority. UNEP within the UN System has the mandate to set the global environmental agenda, and promote the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development (Clayton 2012). UNEP has therefore played and continues to play a very significant and coordinating role in the protection of the environment and environmental sustainability. It also gave a boost to global environmental diplomacy and the expansion of the frontiers of International Environment Law and International Environmental Governance. This eventually led to the demand for a specialized Agency of the UN, the United Nations Environment Organization (UNEO) which is to serve as a lead Agency within the UN System and indeed in the international arena to handle issues of the environment. At the height

of the push for the UNEO, the argument was that it should be similar to the World Health Organization (WHO) or the International Labour Organization (ILO) in its functions and operations, but focused on the entire spectrum of environment issues. Suffice to say that the idea of a UNEO is however still hanging in the balance, but simmering in the background (Ohlendorf, 2006).

Stockholm was a watershed which laid the foundation for the work of another major International initiative: The World Commission on Environment and Development which issued its report titled "Our Common Future."

The Brundtland Report: "Our Common Future"

The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, (WCED, 1987) titled "Our Common Future" was another milestone in the trajectory and rise of the environment to the top of the agenda of the international community. (I strongly recommend that Report to our young people and any other person interested on environment issues). It is also commonly referred to as "The Brundtland Report", named after Mrs Harlem Gro Brundtland, a former Prime Minister of Norway who was the Chair of that Commission. The Commission met for the first time in October 1984 and published its Report 900 days later in April 1987. The core message of Our Common Future was the urgent need for a paradigm shift towards Sustainable Development by humanity to prevent a catastrophic damage to planet earth.

"Our Common Future" drew attention to the fact that in the middle of the 20th Century we saw our planet from space for the first time. From space, we saw a small and fragile ball dominated not by human activities and edifices but by a pattern of clouds, oceans, greenery, and soils. However, humanity's inability to fit activities into that pattern is changing planetary systems fundamentally. Many of these changes are accompanied by life threatening hazards. The Brundtland Report spoke of interlocking crises arising from human activities within nations and broad areas of concern including environment, economics, and social. It cited major environment crises of immense proportion which occurred in that period. These included:

- The drought in Africa which reached its zenith, putting 36 million people at risk (Ethiopia and the Sahel) and with over a million mortality;

- The Bhopal Factory leak in India which killed more than 2,000 people and blinded over 200,000;

- The liquid gas tanks explosion in Mexico which killed 1,000 people;

- The Chernobyl nuclear explosion which sent nuclear fall-out across Europe and increased the risks of future cases of cancer

- Agricultural chemicals, solvents, and mercury which flowed into the Rhine during a warehouse fire in Switzerland killing millions of fish and threatening drinking water in Germany and Netherlands.

- An estimated 60 million people died of diarrhea diseases related to unsafe drinking water and malnutrition. Most of the victims were children**.**

Against the backdrop of these environmental disasters the Commission thus underscored a new reality from which there was no escape. The Commission affirmed that people could build a future more just and more secure, one that promotes a new era of economic growth, and one that is based on policies that can sustain and expand environmental resource base to relieve great poverty. It therefore strongly argued that humanity must make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Hence the recommendation for new sustainable pattern of development which the Commission aptly described as Sustainable Development.

Sustainable Development: A Paradigm Shift

Acceptance of the Report of the Brundtland Commission and its recommendations by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) through Resolution A/RES 42/187 at its 42nd Session on December 11th 1987 was a big political push not just for the concept of Sustainable Development. That Resolution drew attention to the global character of major environmental problems and argued that it was in the common interest of all countries to pursue policies aimed at sustainable and environmentally-sound development. In other words, that session of the UNGA and the adoption of "Our Common Future" was the beginning of a new narrative on problems of the environment. It was also the beginning of the journey to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. But things were not that smooth. As an officer on the second committee at the UN, I recalled that the G77, the powerful negotiating Group within the UN, was up in arms raising objections to the way and manner issues of the environment were being "forced down our throat" - to use the expression of one of our colleagues during the negotiations of A/RES/42/187. The argument of the G77 was that after destroying the environment, the rich nations of the world were now raising environment issues to slow down the growth and development of developing countries. Indeed, "environment" was now being added as a new conditionality for development aid to developing countries. The rest, like the saying goes, is history. The world headed for Rio for the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio 1992)

At Rio, Agenda 21 was adopted as a comprehensive Plan of Action identifying environmental problems of our time, and actions to be taken at global level, at national level, as well as by Civil and Community Groups against the background of Sustainable Development (UNCED 1992). Agenda 21 focused attention on Social and Economic Dimensions of Environmental problems and with particular attention to combating poverty, conservation and management of resources for development, strengthening the role of major groups, and means of implementation covering financial resources and mechanism, transfer of environmentally sound technology, public education and awareness campaigns. The thematic focus of Agenda 21 and related Conventions included:

- Climate Change: this led to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol;
- Combating Desertification: informed the UN Convention to Combat Desertification UNCCD;
- Loss of Biodiversity: inspired the Convention on Biodiversity;
- Air Pollution;
- Marine Pollution by Dumping: gave birth to the London Dumping Convention and the Regional Seas Programme;
- Solid Wastes: led to the 3 R principles – Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle;
- Erosion and land degradation;
- Depletion of the Ozone layer: inspired what we refer to as Ozone Diplomacy and the Vienna Convention on the protection of the Ozone Layer as well as the Montreal Protocol;
- Hazardous and Electronic Wastes: paved way for the Basel Convention on Control and Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal adopted in 1988 The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade adopted in 1998; and The Stockholm Conventions on Persistence Organic Pollutants (the Pops Convention adopted in 2001).
- Chemical Safety: led to the adoption in 2006 of The Strategic Approach to International Management of Chemicals (SAICM)

In addition to the foregoing we have since had the World Summit on Sustainable Development WSSD in 2002 (Rio Plus 10), and Rio Plus 20 in 2012, all pushing and helping to expand the frontiers to include issues such as Mercury in the environment and food chain.

The Global Environment Outlook (GEO)

The GEOs are also worthy of mentioning in the desire to inspire global dimension of environmental issues. It is a publication by UNEP at intervals to draw attention to the global dimension of contemporary environmental issues and encourage action at local and regional levels. First published in 1995 five GEOs have since been released. The next is GEO 6 and it is due for release in 2017 (UNEP 2017). The various GEOs have helped to draw attention to the scientifically credible assessment of the state of the global environment with policy recommendations and actions at global and local levels by all stakeholders. It is a publication worth having in our libraries.

The Global Environment Facility (GEF)

It is also worthy to note the Global Environment Facility the (GEF), established by the World Bank in 1991 on the eve of the Rio Earth Summit as a concessional funding to help the implementation of the various initiatives and programmes; and to fund projects of benefit to global environment. It started with about $1billion. It was restructured after Rio and has evolved to become a partnership involving about 183 countries (UNDP 2017). It has provided about $14.5 billion in grants for over 4,000 projects across the world. Of course there is lot of criticism

against the GEF. But the fact that it was set up is a clear indication of the need for action at the global level on the critical issue of financing projects of great value to the environment.

NIGERIA'S NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AGENDA: A NEW NARRATIVE

The fundamental shift and new narratives and consequential action on global issues of environment certainly influenced the development of Nigeria's national environment agenda and our forays into the international arena. From a small little and innocuous Department in the then Federal Ministry of Works and Housing, the Federal Environment Protection Agency (FEPA) was created in 1988 (FEPA, 1988; FEPA, 1992). But we did not do it willingly. It took the dumping of hazardous waste in our backyard in the town of Koko to wake us up. Prior to this time we reacted to environmental problems in fits and starts, in an *ad hoc* manner. Let us quickly review the Koko wastes story: An Italian vessel dumped toxic wastes in Koko. Thanks to the Greenpeace movement which was on the trail of wastes merchants across the world, the government of Nigeria was tipped off, and the media ripped off the veil over the incident. Following attendant public outcry, the government rose up to the occasion. The vessels and its crew were arrested and it led to a diplomatic row between Nigeria and Italy. It was resolved when the culprit company and the Italian government arranged to lift the wastes out of the country. This incident led to the formulation of a National Policy on Environment, creation of the FEPA, and enactment of the Harmful Waste Act of 1988. It also spurred our participation at the UN working Group which was drafting the Basel Convention on Transboundary Movement and Control of Hazardous Wastes. I was privileged to be part of that process which took us to Geneva, Luxembourg, and finally Basel where that convention was adopted at the Plenipotentiary Conference.

Even though we should have done so after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, Nigeria did not establish a Ministry of Environment until 1999 after return to civil rule. Needless to say we eventually did; and the mandate of the Ministry as contained in its website is to ensure that environmental matters are adequately mainstreamed into development activities. The Ministry helped to create a comprehensive National Environment Policy as a framework for governance and management, and the protection of the environment and conservation of our natural resources including the procedures for environmental impact assessments. The policy covered the following: Water, Air, Soil Biodiversity and Natural Resources, Bio-safety, Land Use and Soil Conservation, Flood and Erosion Management, Drought and Desertification Management, Sanitation and Wastes Management; Noise and Radioactive Substances, and Climate Change (Eneh and Agbazue 2011).

Sectoral strategies of the Policy covered the following: Human Population; Housing and Human Settlement; Mining Solid Minerals and Oil and Gas resources; Health and Safety; Education, Trade and Industry; Ecotourism, Agriculture and Forestry Wildlife Protection; Marine and Coastal resources; Science and Technology; Transport and Communication; Partnership and Participatory Involvement.

For effective prosecution of its mandate on the various environmental issues identified above the Ministry has the following: the technical Departments, service Departments and parastatals such

as the National Environmental Standards and Regulatory and Enforcement Agency (NESREA), Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria (FRIN), the National Parks, the National Oil Spill and Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA). There are also other Units like the Climate Change Unit.

How have we fared?

Progress Made So Far

Since the creation of the Ministry and our attention to the environment, how have we fared? Certainly we have come a long way and made some progress:

- We have been able to create a general awareness and consciousness of the problems of environment within the populace.

- A number of Non-Governmental Organizations have also emerged and joined the struggle for environmental sustainability. A prominent example in recent times is FADE, the organization to which I belong. The founder is Dr Newton Jibunoh who has done three Trans-Saharan Expeditions in the quest to raise awareness on the need to combat desertification. FADE also has practical programme at Makuda in Kano State as an example of best practice.

- Existence of institutions at the Federal and State Levels to handle these issues though they still require capacity building.

- Improved capacity to harness the opportunities in the international environment tapping into funding available such as the GEF, the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support on environment issues; the NEPAD environment initiative.

- Another example is the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) (WHO 2015). Primarily sponsored by the United Nations and adopted at the UN-convened International Conference on Chemicals Management on 6th February in 2006, in Dubai, the SAICM initiative represents a milestone in the quest for Chemicals safety across the world. And The SAICM QSP project in Nigeria is an example of what we can achieve if properly pursued. The project is aimed at establishing an institutional framework and strengthening national capacity within an integrated national programme for the sound management of chemicals and implementation of the Strategic Approach in Nigeria. It was for the period 2008-2011. The Programme comes under the QSP; and funding is $230,000 while the in-kind contributions from Nigeria is $60,000. The Executing Agency is the Federal Ministry of Environment.

- Participation in the international environment circuit has improved our participation on the multilateral forum within ECOWAS, the AU, African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), and at the international levels such UNEP meetings.

Short Comings and What Need to be Done

Despite what seem to be our awareness on our environmental problems it is my considered view that we are still a long way off and this is evidenced by our inability in the following areas:

- Management of our Solid Wastes: This is the most visible aspect of failure of our environmental crisis. We must pay more attention to this by using the 3 R principles: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle.

- Land Degradation and Erosion**:** This is a pervasive problem across the country and requires immediate attention. Indeed some areas deserve special intervention and emergency action.

- Air Pollution: Population growth, urbanization and the crisis of the energy sector, our generators, *okadas* and other two stroke engines, are huge sources of air pollution; and we must take necessary action. The poor air quality is impacting negatively on our health and environment and we need to do something about them. Our laws including those on noise pollution should be effectively implemented.

- Hazardous and Electronic Wastes: Despite our spirited efforts due to the crisis of the Koko wastes, Nigeria still remains a digital dump. Our *tokunbo* cars, *tokunbo* fridge, *tokunbo* phones, and *tokunbo* computers, are huge sources of hazardous and electronic wastes; and our Ministry of Environment needs to ensure that the National E-Waste Policy is given the required backing. The Digital Dump is a revealing and riveting documentary on the crisis of electronic wastes in Nigeria which ripped the corporate veil off the over 500 containers of electronic wastes *viz* used computers, TV, refrigerators mobile handsets, microwave ovens and other second-hand materials dumped in Nigeria almost on a monthly basis (Greenpeace 2009).

- Chemicals: The Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) represents a milestone in the quest for Chemicals safety across the world. We must pay more attention to it and implement its recommendations to reduce negative impact of chemicals on our health and environment.

  Inclusion of the SAICM in the curriculum of students of Chemistry in our Universities; This is to broaden the scope of the next generation of Chemists on whose shoulder will rest the responsibility of continuing with chemical safety as envisioned under the SAICM.

  Identification of abandoned factories and chemical dump sites across the countries for possible remediation work possibly within the framework of the SAICM.

- Strengthening of the Institutional arrangements: There is need to strengthen our institutions at Federal and State levels. Many State Environment Ministries do no more than supervising the clearing of gutters.

- Drawing up Environment Action Plan at State levels: It is necessary for each State of the Federation to develop its own environment policy taking due cognizance of its peculiar environmental problems.

- Establishment and strengthening of Environmental Studies Departments in our Universities and linkage with the Ministries of Environment at State and Federal levels.

- Creation of a corps of young professionals in the field of Environment who would become the pool of experts required for sustainable management of the field in Nigeria.

The foregoing are certainly not exhaustive but an indication of some of the things we need to pay attention to in our quest for sustainable development in the environment sector.

CONCLUSION

That there is a close link between our environment and health needs no saying. The various UN Conventions which have been concluded and are actively in operations today are clear indications of the gravity of the situation we are all in today. It is clear that in the face of unsustainable production and consumption patterns, and inadequate attention to adhere to a sustainable development, the world environment is being pushed to its biophysical limits. Indeed, in some cases these have been exceeded with dire consequences for our environment and human health. The increasing cases of cancer is a good example. Such was the situation that the 54th Session of the International Atomic Energy agency devoted its Scientific Forum to meeting the challenges of the spread of Cancer in developing countries.

Today Nigeria is described as a Digital Dump. This is as a result of monthly dumping of about 500 containers of electronic wastes consisting of used computers, TVs, Refrigerators, Hi Fi sets, mobile phones, etc. These junks are not disposed of in environmentally-sound manners, and alongside expired chemicals, they end up on dump sites where burnt, they pollute the environment including the air, water, and ecosystem, with negative consequences for our health.

Certainly with all these, we are faced with a looming public health crisis and we have been witnesses to some example not too long ago. I am of the firm view that the initiative by the LivingScience Foundation in organizing the National Conference on Environment and Health (May 17-18, 2016), presents a unique opportunity for all relevant agencies of government, the Federal Ministries of Environment and of Health, the NESREA, including Environmental Health Officers, *etc*. to develop a Comprehensive Environment Health Action Plan which will include a more aggressive public education and awareness for implementation. The WHO among other UN Agencies can be worthy partners and it can be done in the context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals designed to transform our world.

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