



## Environmentalism and Social Studies Curriculum for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Environment, Environmentalism, Social studies curriculum, sustainable development.

### ABSTRACT:

The prevailing environmental problems in Nigeria indicate that the curricula contents of social studies is not capable of solving the problems. The paper examine the various environmental problems caused as a result of man's interaction with the environment. It looked at the serious implications of all these problems on the health, social and the natural environment. The study emphasised the inclusion of environmental topics into social studies curriculum for effective environmental awareness and participation in solving the problems as they emerge. The paper suggested that environmentalising social studies curriculum will improve and protect the quality of the natural environment through attitudinal change, ethical awareness, skills, values and behaviour consistent with sustainable development. It therefore recommends a reform in the structure and contents of Social studies in order to cater for programme that brings reality to everyday societal living of the learner by making individual acquire knowledge needed to be responsible and disciplined members of the society.

### 1. Introduction

Environment in Social Studies refers to the immediate surrounding where living and non-living things co-exist. It is the ultimate determinant of nature and form of human survival. It influences how people and society develop, thus linking human progress and economic development together (Bakare, 2020).

Environmental problems are social problems that affect the pattern of social organization, thought and intelligence. It is a condition where order and law of the ecosystem collapsed. It symbolises conflict between human and nature (Asaju & Arome, 2015). Man's activities on the physical environment such as indiscriminate cutting of trees, poor farming techniques, uncontrolled dumping of refuse, excessive use of chemicals and fertilizers, gas flaring, over exploitation of the natural resources, unhealthy life style and poor sewage disposal have depleted the quality of the environment giving birth to different kind of problems like pollution, deforestation, desertification, erosion, climate change, global warming, flooding etc. (Shivang, 2016).

Social studies focus more on the environment and the relationship between man and his environment. It is

interested in creating awareness and providing knowledge on how man survive the multifarious problems encountered in the environment. Social studies attempt to fuse scientific knowledge with ethical, philosophical, religious and social conditions. Social studies is not only expected to impact recalling factual knowledge but the development of attitude, values and skills needed to solve environmental problems as they emerge (Edinyang, Eneji, Tijani & Dunnamah, 2013). Environmental education is a response to the resolutions of the world summits on Rio de Jenerio 1992. It's re-emergence is as a result of wide spread concern about serious environmental problems confronting all nations of the world both developed and developing countries. Studies have shown that no nation can ever attain the goal of development and well being of its citizens without adequate education. Environment, education and sustainable development are inseparable component in the evolution of ecological society characterized with environmental problems, this according to Bakare (2014) can only be resolved through a reform in the structure and contents of the educational system. The need to "environmentalise" the curriculum thus becomes necessary. It emphasises the critical role of education in promoting sustainable development in order to improve



the capacity of human in addressing environmental and developmental issues.

## 2. Overview of Environmental Problems in Nigeria

Environmental problems occur whenever and wherever natural resources are exhausted, natural features damaged and human health is in jeopardy. Studies have shown that over exploitation of the natural resources or system undermine the earth carrying capacity for use now and in the future. Evelyn and Tyva (2013) opined that the utilization of the natural resources by man for survival have direct and indirect impact which has brought several problems into the environment. Securing a healthy life and clean environment for all is one of the cardinal objective agreed upon by member states at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable development goals. This objective can only be achieved through reduction in mortality rate and diseases arising from the use of harmful chemicals and contamination of air, water and land. Environmental problems signal a great threat and an impending doom for man's survival if conscious effort to protect the natural resources are not taken seriously. Causes of environmental problems are numerous. They include acute poverty, poor farming techniques, production and consumption pattern, poor unsustainable agricultural practices and a host of others (Nongo, 2020). Pollution is seen as one of the biggest problem threatening the earth surface, most especially Nigeria. Pollution is defined by Agboola (2018) as the introduction of harmful materials or substance into the environment. Its harmful effect on land, air and water cannot be over emphasized. The state mostly affected are those along the coastal area such as Lagos, Bayelsa, Port-Harcourt and eastern part of north and south. Pollution occur in different forms, air, water and land. Emission from industries and vehicles, burning of fossil fuel and solid waste, construction and agricultural activities. Excessive quantity of harmful gases from automobile, nitrogen oxide, sulphur oxides are all hazardous to human health and causes reduction in the quality of the environment (Atakpo, Ayolabi, 2009). Reckless dumping of waste destroy the fertility of the soil, Shivang (2016) explained that indiscriminate use of fertilizers, herbicides, deforestation, mining, industrial and agricultural activities not only degrade the soil but are major causes of land pollution. Esther and Victor (2015) listed excessive noise emanating from loudspeaker, microphone, music and noise from construction site as

examples of noise pollution. Studies have shown that most of the states along the coastline are vulnerable to flood or erosion. Erosion is the gradual destruction of the land surface through the action of wind and rain. Abdulfatai (2014) described it as a general decrease in soil fertility. South eastern regions are mostly affected due to heavy rainfall leading to flood. The driving force of coastal erosion include reduction in the ability of the soil to store water and nutrients, increase rate of run-off needed for crop growth, loss of newly planted crops and most times deposit of silt in the low-lying areas.

Environmental problems mostly associated with eastern and western parts of Northern Nigeria is desertification (Audu and Adie, 2018). Article 1 of the UN Convention describe desertification as the degradation of land in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid. It is a process where the terrestrial ecosystem are depleted due to harsh weather condition and through the activities of man. Report showed that Nigeria is currently losing 350,000 sqkm of its land mass to desert condition (Babanyara, Usman and Saleh 2010). Desertification reduces productivity and fertility of the land (Mequdu, 2009). It constitutes one of the major socio-economic impact on the yields, food production and people's income. It is a serious environmental issue that affect the livelihood of the people that depend on land for survival Dada & Muhammad (2014) explained that desertification is global in causes while its consequences are more felt in the developing countries such as Nigeria. Audu and Adie (2018) listed the following as the main cause of desertification; over exploitation and inappropriate use of the land such as over grazing, over cultivation, deforestation, excessive use of herbicides/pesticides and massive irrigation.

Onah, Alphonsus & Ekenedilichukwu (2016) described climate change as the most significant problem facing the world presently. Global warming is increasing on daily basis, this has caused concerns both nationally and internationally in the last few decades. Wikipedia explained that indices of climate change become evident when the planet is getting hotter, rain forests are increasingly drying, oceans are losing oxygen, ice are melting at a faster rate than expected while the sea levels are rising. Equally, Akpomi and Vipene (2016) wrote that climate change occur when there is rise in sea level and temperature, rainfall variability, drought, flooding, desertification, extreme weather condition, land



degradation, loss of biodiversity and contaminated fresh water resources. All these greatly affect human survival while many species of plants and animals have gone into extinction. Udenyi (2010) simply put climate change as a change in the climate condition of the world with its attendant negative effect. Olaniyi, Ojekunle and Amujo (2019) posited that the challenges arising from climate change varies across all geographical locations. In Nigeria for example aridity, desertification and drought are prevalent in the north while erosion and flooding were visible in the southern region of the country. Edo state has the most tree cover loss. (Ataro, 2021) attributed human activities as part of the major cause of increase in global temperature.

Ogboru and Aneja (2015) noted that environmental problem have serious implication on the health, social and the environment. They further explained that population growth and urbanization will put unnecessary pressure on the available land space for food production, infrastructure, housing and industrialization. This increases demand on basic infrastructure which are overused. Rise in population should be equal to growth in the socio-economic development. The overall effect of environmental problems in the environment calls for serious attention. The intensification of urban land use has caused deforestation while the ecological consequences are seen in erosion and floods. Socially, environmental problems has the thinking processes of the citizens as a result of urban poverty ravaging Nigerian nation. Social vices such as prostitutions, drug abuse, crimes, youth restiveness and all sorts of deviant behaviours, loss of cultural heritage, unemployment and increase poverty index are all consequences of environmental problems.

Environmentalism, Social Studies and Sustainable development

The philosophy of Social Studies and environmentalism focus on man in his total environment. They both seek to improve and protect the quality of the natural environment through changes to environmentally harmful human activities. The incorporation of environmental topics into Social Studies curriculum will not only aimed at solving the social problems embedded in environmental issues but rather evolve a new environmentally sustainable society. It will equally create awareness and understanding of the social and

physical environment as a whole together with the inculcation of right attitude and values for rational use of the natural resources and sustainable environment. Restructuring the Social Studies curriculum will assist in accommodating the goals of environmentalism and inclusion of more environmental concepts that are not found in the present curriculum. Doing this will make the discipline to be more responsive to environmental problems that bedevils the nation. Sustainable development imbibes the ideals of progress and improvement be it cultural, social as well as economic dimension. It calls for the eradication of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, exploitation of natural resources (World Bank, 1994). Sustainable development is a change in thinking linking environment to development as a basis to form a new, just and equitable society as stipulated in the Nigeria national policy on education (2004).

### 3. Objectives

1. To create awareness about the environment and environmental problems
2. To highlight consequences of human impacts on the environment
3. To advocate curtailing activities of human that are harmful to the environment.
4. To develop positive attitude and skills needed in solving environmental problems

### 4. Methodology

Descriptive qualitative research design was adopted for the study.

### 5. Data Analysis

Secondary data was used to collect data from reviewed literature, journals and official publications. Since the focus of the paper is on human generated environmental problems, context analytical approach was used to analyze the data.

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